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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 14 May 2019

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

*The Secretary of State was asked—
Security Situation in Sri Lanka*

1. **Mr Virendra Sharma** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the security situation in Sri Lanka. [910866]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Jeremy Hunt): We remember the appalling terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday with enormous sadness and continue to assess the security situation. Operations are ongoing, and we assess that it is very likely that terrorists will try to mount further attacks.

Mr Sharma: What steps would the Secretary of State like to see the British media take to report more responsibly on terrorist attacks, especially following the decision by *The Sun*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror* to publish edited footage of the Christchurch murders despite a public request from the New Zealand police authorities not to do so?

Mr Hunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. All Members of this House are proud that the media in this country are among the freest and most vibrant in the world, but it is important that they exercise that freedom with responsibility when reporting terrorist incidents. The broadcasting of the Christchurch footage was regrettable, and I very much support the comment by the Prime Minister of New Zealand that we should not use the name of the perpetrator of the attacks to give him the glory that he was seeking.

Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): One way to improve the security situation is to raise prosperity through trade. What discussions has my right hon. Friend had with the Secretary of State for International Trade on improving our trading relationship with Sri Lanka after Brexit?

Mr Hunt: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question. I have discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade on trade issues nearly every day, and Sri Lanka is one of the many countries where we want to be able to continue with tariff-free and quota-free trade. We look forward to pursuing those opportunities post Brexit.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Is the Secretary of State able to say anything about the security arrangements for those members of various Sri Lankan communities who have had to go into camps for their own protection as a result of the attacks?

Mr Hunt: If the right hon. Gentleman is talking about people with security concerns in this country, they should obviously talk to their local police force about their concerns. In terms of what we are doing in Sri Lanka, we have sent a team from the Metropolitan police counter-terrorism command to help families affected by the atrocity, and we have also sent the Foreign Office's rapid deployment team to help families who wish to cut short their holidays.

Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): The unity we saw after the Easter Sunday bombings has sadly been threatened by reprisal attacks against ordinary Sri Lankan Muslims and refugee communities from Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Will the Secretary of State do everything possible to encourage the Sri Lankan Government to provide those innocent people with the shelter and protection they need?

Mr Hunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that important point. We all have to recognise that the purpose of that attack—and, indeed, the attack in Christchurch—was to stir up hatred between people of different faiths. That is why it is important for all leaders, both political and religious, to promote a message of tolerance. I thank the hon. Gentleman for doing that, but he is absolutely right to say that the Sri Lankan authorities need to do it as well.

Cyprus

2. **Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): What recent diplomatic steps he has taken to help to pursue a resolution to the division of Cyprus. [910867]

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): I had a productive meeting with the United Nations Cyprus consultant Jane Holl Lute on 8 January this year, and my officials are in regular contact with her. I welcome the meeting of the two Cypriot leaders on 26 February, and we are supporting those efforts. In March, the Prime Minister met the Cypriot President, and the Foreign Secretary met Cypriot Foreign Minister Christodoulides to discuss how the UK can further support any future settlement.

Bambos Charalambous: Will the Minister join me in condemning the decision of the Turkish Government to begin drilling for oil and gas in the territorial waters of Cyprus, which not only jeopardises the chances of a successful resumption of the peace talks but risks a return to open conflict? Will he call on Turkey to immediately withdraw its drill ships from Cyprus's exclusive economic zone?

Sir Alan Duncan: Yesterday, I met the Turkish ambassador and had very constructive discussions with him. The position of the UK is that, in line with the UN convention on the law of the sea, exploratory drilling should not proceed in any area where sovereignty is under dispute.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Does the Minister agree that it will be impossible for talks between the two sides to restart with a view to getting reconciliation and a settlement while the Turkish incursion into Cyprus's EEZ continues?

Sir Alan Duncan: We would obviously like to see the de-escalation of any tensions and constructive talks to resume. We are doing our utmost as a guarantor power to play our role in that, and I hope that all the participants can get together and talk seriously once again about how some kind of settlement can be reached.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Did the Minister have any discussions with the Turkish ambassador about the re-run of the elections in Istanbul? Is there a possibility that we may be sending election observers?

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes, I did have such discussions, and I sought assurances from the ambassador that an invitation to election observers would soon be forthcoming, so that the election in Istanbul can be seen by the world to be free, fair and transparent. I believe that we have made good progress on securing such an invitation.

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): There has been serious speculation that we may be willing to hand over some land from our British sovereign bases in the event of an agreement in Cyprus. Has the amount of land been agreed?

Sir Alan Duncan: It has been the case for many years that we have been prepared to part with some of the sovereign base land. In that sense, our position remains unchanged.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I have a constituent who was assaulted by bouncers at a club in Cyprus and is now in the regional neurological centre with severe injuries. The authorities in Cyprus have dragged their feet during the investigation, but they have suggested that the perpetrators may have melted away across the border into northern Cyprus, where they are out of touch. Does the Minister agree that the continued division poses a threat to British tourists in Cyprus?

Sir Alan Duncan: I extend my sympathy and concern following that assault. It is not the first such case in which people who are believed to have perpetrated a violent crime have fled to the north in order to exclude themselves from Cyprus's jurisdiction. I hope that we are offering sufficient consular support, where appropriate, and we will of course follow up any other diplomatic efforts that we can make to pursue those who committed the crime.

Chagos Islands: International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion

3. **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with counterparts at the UN on the International Court of Justice advisory opinion on the Chagos Islands. [910868]

The Minister for Africa (Harriett Baldwin): The Foreign Secretary spoke to Mauritian Prime Minister Jugnauth about the British Indian Ocean Territory on 27 April. The Prime Minister met Prime Minister Jugnauth and the Mauritian permanent representative to the United Nations in New York in March to discuss a range of issues, including the British Indian Ocean Territory.

Patrick Grady: It must be difficult for Foreign Office Ministers to find the UK's colonial legacy landing inconveniently in their laps, but what is at stake here is not just Chagossian justice, but the UK's standing in the new post-Brexit world order. The UK must get on board and work with, not against, the UN, the ICJ and the rules-based order. It has to recognise that it cannot throw its weight around anymore. Will the Department engage constructively with the UN to determine where sovereignty really lies for the Chagossians and, ultimately, accept that sovereignty should lie with the people?

Harriett Baldwin: As the hon. Gentleman knows, that has never been the UK Government's position. In fact, the Chagos archipelago has been under continuous British sovereignty since 1814. But he can deduce from my earlier answer that conversations are ongoing and that we are making strong representations. The whole world benefits from the security provided by having this base in the Indian ocean.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Whatever the outcome of the sovereignty situation, another issue is that the marine preservation zone has made it possible to protect fish stocks for large parts of the eastern coast of Africa. Wherever we end up, we must preserve the marine preservation zone.

Harriett Baldwin: We are proud of the UK's record in creating not just that zone, but others around the world. They are incredibly important for the world's oceans and demonstrate the importance of working together both globally and through the Commonwealth to preserve oceans and fish stocks.

Oman: Shihuh Tribe

4. **Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): What discussions he has had with his Omani counterpart on the treatment of the minority Shihuh tribe in the Musandam region. [910869]

The Minister for the Middle East (Dr Andrew Murrison): The Government are aware of the concern surrounding the imprisonment of members of the Shihuh tribe in Oman. Her Majesty's ambassador has raised this with the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Muscat. We continue to monitor the matter closely and are exploring the allegations further. Discussions on human rights form part of our bilateral exchanges with our close ally and partner Oman, including at the recent joint working group on 25 April. I look forward to meeting the Omani ambassador for the first time next week to discuss a wide range of issues.

Brendan O'Hara: I welcome the Minister to his place for his first Question Time. I am glad he is aware of the case of the Shihuh tribesmen from Musandam who have been given life sentences for something as trivial as communicating with human rights groups. Amnesty International has said that the convictions are "grossly unfair," with credible claims that torture has been used to extract confessions. Will he undertake to speak to his Omani counterpart about this particular case and make it clear that the UK expects to see all citizens of Oman treated equally and fairly?

Dr Murrison: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. This Government take their obligations in respect of human rights extremely seriously. When speaking to our friends and allies, we make this point and share best practice all the time. As I said, I will be seeing the Omani ambassador shortly and have no doubt that we will discuss a range of issues. I suspect this case may form part of that discussion.

Spanish Parliamentary Election: Gibraltar

5. Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effect of the outcome of the recent parliamentary election in Spain on the (a) prosperity and (b) sovereignty of Gibraltar. [910870]

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): We look forward to working with the next Spanish Government to enhance the prosperity of Gibraltar and, indeed, the neighbouring regions of Spain. Whichever Government are in office in Spain, we will remain steadfast in our support for Gibraltar and will not discuss or agree any proposals that compromise British sovereignty.

Mrs Latham: Given the recent attempts by the Spanish Government, with the backing of others in the EU, to exploit the Brexit negotiations with illegitimate sovereignty claims, can the Minister reassure the House that, whatever the political developments in Spain, the UK or the EU, we will categorically reject any attempt to erode UK sovereignty over the Rock?

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes, I can give that assurance. Indeed, we completely disagree with the language that has been put into recent EU documents describing Gibraltar as a “colony.” Gibraltar is a full part of the UK family and has mature and modern constitutional relationships with the United Kingdom.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Last year I had the opportunity to visit Gibraltar with the armed forces parliamentary scheme, which made me very aware of Spain’s dependence on Gibraltar for job opportunities and economic interactions. Has the Minister had the opportunity to remind Spain of the importance to it of Gibraltar’s economy?

Sir Alan Duncan: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to point out that this is a symbiotic relationship with mutual benefits. If one side tries to do harm to the other, both will find themselves harmed. I hope that the good relationships—economic, tourist access and everything else—can continue harmoniously once we have left the European Union.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: So illustrious is the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) that, in addition to chairing with distinction the Select Committee on Justice, he also chairs the all-party parliamentary group on Gibraltar. His burden is a heavy one, and he should be heard.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I am deeply flattered and touched, Mr Speaker. For completeness, I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

I know that the people and Government of Gibraltar will very much welcome the firm commitment of my right hon. Friend the Minister to our continuing support for British sovereignty. Will he also confirm that, whatever form of government is arranged in Spain after the elections, we will stress that it is in the interests of Spain, Gibraltar and the United Kingdom that we depart from the European Union in an orderly fashion that preserves the free flow of goods and people across the border and our strong economic ties? That will be to the advantage of all sides. A deal is necessary for Gibraltar’s sake, as it is for the sake of Spain and the UK.

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes, indeed. My hon. Friend does an excellent job as chairman of the all-party group. Indeed, we were in Gibraltar together for its national day, thus allowing me to be the second shortest Member of Parliament attending the events. As he rightly says, I hope that the good relationship between Gibraltar and Spain can continue after Brexit, to the advantage of everybody.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Of course, SNP Members very much support the right of the people of Gibraltar to self-determination. Their sovereignty should rest with them—and the sovereignty of the people of the Chagos Islands should rest with them. What conversations is the Minister having with other EU states to ensure that Gibraltar is not left behind in the carving out of any deal?

Sir Alan Duncan: We very strongly defend Gibraltar’s rights—indeed, I work closely and personally with Fabian Picardo, the Chief Minister, and his excellent team. Through the Department for Exiting the European Union, regular meetings take place and we make sure we fully defend Gibraltar’s interests. I can happily and readily give the hon. Lady the assurance she is seeking that we will not let it down.

Saudi Arabia: Diplomatic Relations

6. Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with his Saudi Arabian counterpart on the UK’s diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia. [910871]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Jeremy Hunt): I most recently met Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs al-Jubeir on 25 April and I also visited Saudi Arabia on 2 March. We have a long history of co-operation in support of regional stability, alongside frank conversations on areas of concern, including Khashoggi and human rights.

Alan Brown: According to his Minister, the Saudi Government’s execution of 37 people was simply “a deeply backwards step, which we deplore.”—[*Official Report*, 24 April 2019; Vol. 658, c. 749.]

But that is only one of many of the Saudi regime’s crimes, including responsibility for up to 60% of civilian deaths in Yemen. Does the Foreign Secretary agree with my

concerned constituents that, when it comes to arms sales to Saudi Arabia, the UK should put morality before profit and end these sales?

Mr Hunt: Well, we do, which is why we have some of the strictest arms export restrictions of any country in the EU; last year, 226 export requests were refused. The executions to which the hon. Gentleman referred are barbaric. I referred to them and discussed them at some length with the Saudi Foreign Minister when he came here on 25 April. This remains a human rights priority country and we do raise these issues regularly.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Is there a point where our proper concern for the Realpolitik will be overtaken by alarm at the shocking behaviour of the Kingdom?

Mr Hunt: There are many things that concern us about the human rights record of Saudi Arabia, and we call them out. This year, for the first time, we are hosting a ministerial-level conference on media freedom, which was in part prompted by the appalling murder of Khashoggi. We also have to recognise that we have to work with a number of countries in that region if there is to be peace and stability, and Saudi influence has been very important in the ceasefire that is beginning to take root in Yemen; it started last weekend.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): Ministers repeatedly reassure the House of the representations they make to Saudi Arabia on human rights and, in particular, on the execution of dissidents. Can the Foreign Secretary give us one or two examples of where these representations have been successful: of lives that have been saved?

Mr Hunt: What I can tell the right hon. Gentleman is that in the case of Saudi Arabia there is a big domestic reform agenda, the Vision 2030 process, which has involved, for example, allowing women to drive for the first time and allowing women to travel abroad more freely. There have also been some releases of women's rights activists. Whether that is as a direct result of British pressure or not, I cannot say. But do we make those representations? Yes, we do.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): Perhaps the greatest role for the Foreign Office is to be peacemakers. What discussions has the Foreign Secretary had with Saudi Foreign Ministers, and indeed with the Iranian Government and other Governments in the middle east, to try to encourage ecumenical dialogue between the Shi'a and Sunni traditions within Islam?

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the UK, because of our historical links in the region, can play a positive role in bringing peace to troubled corners. The best example of that is what has happened in Yemen. Despite the fact that the conflict was started by the Houthis four years ago, I was the first western Foreign Minister to meet the Houthis—I met them on both 13 December and 1 March. I was also the first western Foreign Minister to visit Yemen to see the other side, the Government of Yemen. We have played a constructive role in a ceasefire that appears to be taking root.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): Following on from the earlier answer, I am glad that the Foreign Secretary appreciates the Labour Government's achievement in bringing in the strictest rules on arms exports, but my constituents will want to know why, given the human rights abuses in Saudi Arabia and the fact that it is one of the countries of concern for his own office, we are granting any export licences at all.

Mr Hunt: Let me explain to the hon. Lady what those rules are that Robin Cook introduced in 2001. They are stricter than the European guidelines and say that we do not give arms export licences if there is a risk of a breach of international humanitarian law. That judgment is made by someone at arm's length, not by a politician, and the Foreign Secretary and Trade Secretary then take that assessment into account when they make the decisions. That is a better system than one that politicises these decisions. It is a Labour process that we are sticking to and the hon. Lady should be proud of it.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Given the continuing crisis in the Mediterranean sea, with many hundreds still fleeing and making the perilous journey across that seascape, what issues are the Government raising with Saudi Arabia to try to ensure that it offers some practical and sensible help for people in the Mediterranean?

Mr Hunt: We do have discussions on that issue, particularly in respect of Libya. In fact, I met the Libyan Prime Minister at the end of last week, and Saudi Arabia has made generous offers when it comes to financial assistance to try to stabilise the situation in both Libya and Yemen. That is another example of the benefits of having a practical relationship with a country like Saudi Arabia.

Hezbollah

7. **Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the security threat posed by Hezbollah to (a) Israel and (b) the middle east. [910872]

18. **Victoria Prentis** (Banbury) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the security threat posed by Hezbollah to (a) Israel and (b) the middle east. [910883]

The Minister for the Middle East (Dr Andrew Murrison): The UK remains deeply concerned about Hezbollah's actions and behaviour in the region. As the Home Secretary outlined in February, Hezbollah's destabilising role in the middle east led to our proscription of the group in its entirety. We continue to condemn Hezbollah and all armed militia groups for seeking to amass illegal weapons and arms, and for putting the security of Lebanon and Israel at risk, in direct contradiction of UN Security Council resolution 1701.

Robert Halfon: I offer my strong congratulations to the Minister on his new role; he is a good man.

I strongly welcome the Government's decision to proscribe Hezbollah in full earlier this year. Israel recently revealed that it has exposed Hezbollah cells in border villages on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights. Does the Minister share my grave concern and agree that

were the Golan Heights to be under Syrian control, the security risk would be catastrophic, not only for Israel but for the entire region?

Dr Murrison: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his generous words, and I share his concerns about this matter. We condemn Hezbollah—we could not be clearer than that—and have gone further than most countries in doing so. However, we consider the Golan Heights to be occupied territory, which is contrary to international law. We do not believe that the Golan Heights are part of the territory of the state of Israel.

Victoria Prentis: I too congratulate the Minister on his new appointment.

I welcome the Government's recent decision to proscribe the whole of Hezbollah, but will the Minister tell me what more we are doing to confront people in this country who encourage the group's terrorism?

Dr Murrison: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her comments.

We have proscribed Hezbollah, so it will not be able to demonstrate and spread its message of hate, contrary to the interests and values of this country. I do not think we could have done much more, immediately, to make it clear that the organisation is beyond the law and that people who campaign for or show support for it are committing a criminal act.

Dame Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Hezbollah, as a proxy for Iran, promotes terrorism and instability right throughout the middle east. Last year, Hezbollah built six terror tunnels between the border of Lebanon and Israel, for the purpose of promoting terrorism and ruining any chances of peace; why has all that not been taken more seriously?

Dr Murrison: I hope the hon. Lady will understand that it is most definitely being taken seriously. Hezbollah is a clear and present danger: it destabilises the region and also offers instability in this country, which is why we have proscribed it in its entirety. That proscription has now taken effect—it happened in March—and I very much hope not only that it will assist in ensuring that activity in this country is curtailed but, more particularly, that when we are dealing with the region we make it absolutely clear that Hezbollah has no place in the middle east's future.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Change UK): I too welcome the Minister. Will he confirm that Hezbollah is in Syria working as a proxy for the Iranian regime and the Assad Government, and has played a malign role, killing many, many innocent people in the Syrian conflict?

Dr Murrison: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct. Hezbollah is a force for evil in our world today, which is why we have taken the strong action we have against it.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): Hezbollah is arguably the most successful export to come out of revolutionary Iran. Does the Minister share my serious concern that we are talking not just about Hezbollah but about the presence of the Revolutionary Guard of Iran in Syria today? Does he share my serious concerns about the new threat this poses on the northern borders of Israel?

Dr Murrison: We need to understand what is happening in Syria and the fact that so many proxies of one sort or another are active and engaged in it—it is a maelstrom of such activity, and we need to deal with that. I think we know which countries are behind support for this in Syria, and all we can do is do what we can to maintain good relationships, as far as we possibly can, with those countries in the hope that our good counsel will prevail and that we will be able to curtail some of these unpleasant groups.

President Trump: State Visit

8. **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): What his diplomatic priorities are for the upcoming state visit to the UK of President Trump. [910873]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Jeremy Hunt): The Prime Minister and I are delighted that the President of the United States will come to the UK for a state visit in June. It will be an opportunity to celebrate our close and special relationship in areas such as trade, investment, security and defence, and Venezuela.

Daniel Zeichner: Many would say that the President should not be getting a state visit at all. In this country, when a bully elbows their way to the front of the queue, we might remonstrate in a politely British way, but we certainly do not reward that bad behaviour by inviting them back for tea. Could the Government perhaps be tactful and polite about this and say that we are all going to be rather busy in June—especially the Foreign Secretary, perhaps—and say that it might be better to reschedule for a later date, preferably long after the President is slung out?

Mr Hunt: Can we just deal with this ridiculous anti-Americanism on the Opposition Benches? One million jobs in this country depend on US inward investment, more than 400,000 American troops died in the second world war, and the President is coming here to mark the anniversary of D-day. We should honour that relationship, which goes far beyond differences in partisan politics.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): One of the first foreign Heads of State I remember seeing address our Parliament was President Xi, who came here in October 2015, shortly after I was elected. This was an opportunity for us to listen to a Head of State from an important partner in the economic community. Does my right hon. Friend not agree that listening to partners and allies, particularly those with whom we share important intelligence and defence relationships, is how diplomacy is done?

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I just think that as we celebrate 75 years since the end of the second world war, we should remember that we have the freedoms we enjoy in this House, which we exercise on a daily basis, because America was prepared to stand by our side at a critical moment. That eclipses all other short-term considerations.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): Yesterday, three historical allies of the United States—France, Germany and the United Kingdom—made a statement on Syria that was extraordinarily disturbing. Has the Foreign Secretary made it his priority, whatever happens

and whatever kind of visit this is, to seek partners in the US to take on the forces that have seen 120 people killed in Syria in recent days and 180,000 people displaced as this conflict goes on and on and on?

Mr Hunt: I thank the hon. Lady for bringing to the House's attention the extremely concerning situation in Idlib. We had an agreement that we hoped would hold in order to avoid brutal bloodshed there, and we are very concerned—she is absolutely right about what is happening. I met the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo not only when he came to London last week but yesterday in Brussels, and we talk about all the issues concerning the middle east. We must recognise that America is trying to create stability and security in the middle east, and a lot of the malign forces and the problems we have in Syria are caused by the intervention of Russia, which made it difficult to conclude that conflict in the way that I think we would have wanted on both sides of the House.

Alistair Burt (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) on assuming the role of Minister for the Middle East. I wish him well, and I hope that he has rather more success than I had in solving some of the problems in the region.

In his assessment of diplomatic priorities with the United States, will my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary ask that at all levels the US gives rather more support to the UK's efforts at the UN to bring an end to the crisis in Libya? Would he welcome greater support through the Inter-Parliamentary Union from parliamentarians around the world, including friends in Canada, who are seeking to help? We could do with more support from United States friends.

Mr Hunt: My right hon. Friend is very modest about his time in the Foreign Office, as he did an enormous amount of patient diplomacy behind the scenes to try to solve these intractable problems, not least in Libya. I discussed the Libyan situation with Mike Pompeo yesterday, and I agree that this is an area where we all need to work together closely at the UN.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): This House supports and values our relationship with the American people, but that does not equate to a free pass for President Trump's unacceptable behaviour. When the Secretary of State puts together the agenda for this state visit, may I suggest that he begins with a training course on bullying and harassment, follows up with a science lecture on the climate emergency, and finishes off with a crash course in diplomacy?

Mr Hunt: I just point out to the hon. Lady that the person who is coming to this country for a state visit is the Head of State of the United States of America. There is no free pass for policies on which we disagree with the Trump Administration—climate change is one, and the Iran nuclear deal is another. We discuss all of them the whole time, but that does not mean that we should not respect the office or the country.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): My right hon. Friend is precisely right, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison)

on his new ministerial post, which he will fulfil very well. May I perhaps gently remind those who do not accept this that America remains, and is likely to remain, our most important ally in the world? We may not agree with everything that it does or everything that it says, but this invitation is from our Head of State to its Head of State. We should accept that—we should not be condescending—and these barbed comments, driven by anti-Americanism, are extremely embarrassing.

Mr Hunt: I agree with my right hon. Friend. It is very important to recognise that even today, even under this Administration—we are very open; we do not agree with them on everything—about a third of the cost of defending Europe is met by American taxpayers. We should recognise that contribution, and recognise that the security blanket that the United States has provided for the world over the past 70 years or so has been absolutely fundamental to our prosperity.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): I too congratulate the Minister for the Middle East on his appointment.

This Parliament has followed the lead of Scotland's First Minister in declaring a climate emergency. That was the right thing to do and should be a diplomatic priority for this visit, so will the Foreign Secretary express our concerns about US actions at the recent Arctic Council that meant that an accord could not be signed because the US wanted to water down the commitment?

Mr Hunt: As so many Members have congratulated my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) on taking up his new post, I need to do the same. He is an outstanding colleague, and we are delighted to have him with us on the Front Bench.

We share the concerns of the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) about what happened at the Arctic Council. This is an area where we have a number of disagreements with the approach taken by the US Administration. That is one reason why we think it is important that the UK win its bid to host COP 26—the big climate change conference that is due to take place next year—to demonstrate European unity on this issue.

Stephen Gethins: In areas like climate change, trade and defending the NHS, we must continue to work with our European partners in the European Parliament and other institutions to counter the damaging policies pursued by the Trump Administration. Will the Foreign Secretary tell the President that those are backward steps, not the forward-thinking steps that we should pursue in Europe?

Mr Hunt: I think that the hon. Gentleman needs to look at the whole picture of America's contribution to peace and security around the world. There is enormously destructive behaviour by states such as North Korea, Iran and Russia. America has led the charge in expelling more diplomats post Salisbury than any other country in the world; it is trying to create a peaceful accord with North Korea; and it is taking action against some of Iran's activities. That is immensely important. We enjoy the benefits of that security, and we should not take it for granted.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Last month we saw the Trump Administration threatening to veto a UN resolution against the use of rape as a weapon of war unless all references to the reproductive rights of women were removed. Even more disgracefully, we saw the UN accept their demands. Can the Secretary of State explain why a President like that deserves the honour of a state visit?

Mr Hunt: With the greatest respect to the hon. Lady, who makes excellent contributions to debates in this House, I just wish that Labour got its priorities right. This is a party whose leader says that Hamas and Hezbollah are friends and refuses to go to a state banquet with the President of the United States. The resolution she talked about actually passed. The United Kingdom supported it. We do not agree with America on everything, but we do think we should show respect for its enormous contribution to world peace.

Persecution of Christians Overseas

9. **Luke Hall** (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to help tackle the persecution of Christians overseas. [910874]

13. **Sir David Evennett** (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to help tackle the persecution of Christians overseas. [910878]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Jeremy Hunt): I think that today the whole House will want to remember the six people killed on Sunday at mass in a Catholic church in Burkina Faso when a gunman arrived, stormed the church, killed the priest and then set fire to the church. That shows why this is such an important issue to address.

Luke Hall: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer and associate myself with his comments. I further thank him for the work that he has done by personally raising on his recent travels abroad the appalling persecution of Christians abroad, especially in countries like Nigeria. What has he learned from those trips about what more we can do, as a Government, to tackle the appalling persecution of Christians in the region?

Mr Hunt: I had a roundtable of faith leaders at the British high commissioner's residence in Nigeria, and we had a very good discussion on this issue. The main thing that I took away from that discussion is the immensely important role that politicians have in developing countries in not fanning populism and hatred between religions in election campaigns, which is a very easy route to go down but can have immensely damaging consequences.

Sir David Evennett: I welcome the recent publication of the Bishop of Truro's interim report on the persecution of Christians. Does my right hon. Friend feel that there is now a strong case, based on the bishop's early findings, for the Government to be even more public and more forceful in calling out persecution where it is identified?

Mr Hunt: I think there is. We will obviously await the bishop's final report. The concern we had, and the reason that we commissioned the report, was a sense that while we have, rightly, called out persecution of people of

other religions—the Rohingya in Burma, for example—we have been more reticent in doing that when it is Christians, yet 80% of all the religious persecution in the world happens to Christians.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Foreign Secretary pay tribute to the work that Christian Churches do in helping, across Africa and across the world, countries that need help? This is Christian Aid Week. Christian Aid does wonderful things, working in clinics and so on. Perhaps we could use our soft power to widen the perception of that work.

Mr Hunt: I had the privilege, the week before last, of seeing the work done by a Catholic charity in the slums of Kenya. I know that former Prime Minister Gordon Brown was incredibly moved by the work of the Churches when he did his big trip to Africa, so in Christian Aid Week, along with everyone in this House, I salute the tremendous work of the Churches in poorer countries.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): According to the recent report by Open Doors UK, 3,731 Christians were killed in Nigeria last year—the highest number in any country. This is a matter of huge concern for all of us, and it has an impact on community relations within the UK as well. What specific steps is the Secretary of State taking to ensure that there are not negative consequences for community relations—for example, within the Nigerian diaspora? What steps is he taking with the Home Office to ensure that it is aware of this when considering applications for asylum from Nigerian Christians?

Mr Hunt: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. The best the UK can do is to try to address that problem at source. I visited Maiduguri in north-east Nigeria the week before last. There is a big security issue and a big poverty issue, and because of organisations such as Islamic State West Africa and Boko Haram, there is an enormous amount of fear in local populations. We are working with the Nigerian Government and have offered them more help to try to resolve those problems, so that we do not face problems back here.

UK Soft Power

10. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What steps he is taking to enhance UK soft power (a) in the EU27 after the UK leaves the EU and (b) throughout the world; and if he will make a statement. [910875]

11. **Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): What steps he is taking to enhance UK soft power overseas. [910876]

14. **Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to promote and enhance UK soft power overseas. [910879]

15. **Paul Masterton** (East Renfrewshire) (Con): What steps he is taking to enhance UK soft power overseas. [910880]

19. **Mr Marcus Fysh** (Yeovil) (Con): What steps he is taking to enhance UK soft power overseas. [910884]

The Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer Questions 10, 11, 14, 15 and 19 together. *[Interruption.]* What a terrible bunch they are on the Opposition Benches!

Needless to say, our engagement with Europe goes well beyond EU membership. To ensure that the UK's soft power potential is maximised after Brexit, we have already strengthened our diplomatic network, increased programme funding and produced bilateral strategies for each and every EU country. Globally, the FCO continues to support funding for, among others, the BBC World Service, the British Council and Chevening scholarships. We regard that as a key part of post-Brexit diplomacy.

Michael Fabricant: With around 350 million people each week tuning into BBC radio and television programmes worldwide, and with the British Council, which my right hon. Friend mentioned, we no doubt have far greater soft power than other countries of our size—perhaps the biggest in the world—but is there more, even more, that the Government could be doing?

Mark Field: We could always be doing much more. From our tradition of democracy and our internationally acclaimed justice system, to our inclusive values of free speech, freedom of religion and gender equality, many of which have been raised in questions today, we hope that we are promoting our values globally through the influence and reach of our diplomatic network.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am keen to accommodate colleagues with very important inquiries. I hope they can help each other by being extremely brief.

Kevin Hollinrake: What representations has my right hon. Friend made to his counterparts about tackling the growing and potentially devastating problem of antimicrobial resistance?

Mark Field: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning that. We believe the UK is at the forefront of international efforts to tackle antimicrobial resistance through a variety of UN agencies. We were instrumental in drafting a UN political declaration on AMR, agreed by no fewer than 193 member states at the General Assembly in September 2016.

Mr Baron: The British Council all-party group, which I chair, is conducting a wide-ranging inquiry into our future soft power relationship with our European partners. Does the Minister agree with our early finding that we could better co-ordinate our efforts, and will he meet the all-party group as part of our inquiry?

Mark Field: We have strengthened our diplomatic network, increased programme funding and produced bilateral strategies for each and every EU country, as I mentioned. I am happy to engage with the British Council APPG, which my hon. Friend so skilfully chairs—or at least, that is what it says here. *[Laughter.]* I am being a little unfair to my hon. Friend. He is a fantastic chair of the group, and of course I will co-operate with the inquiry in every way he wishes.

Paul Masterton: With China creating more emissions than the EU and USA combined, how can the UK use its soft power and influence as a global leader in reducing carbon emissions to encourage other nations to follow our example?

Mark Field: Our soft power influence globally on climate change is extremely strong and—I think we all would recognise—extremely important. The Climate Change Act 2008 has inspired numerous other countries, not least New Zealand, which is promoting its own legislation in this area along those lines. We are working with Canada and have launched the Powering Past Coal Alliance, and the UK has hosted international zero-emissions vehicles and carbon capture, utilisation and storage summits in recent months.

Mr Fysh: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Somerset on reaching the final of the one-day cup? With the cricket world cup here in the UK just a fortnight away, does he agree that sport is one way in which we can promote British values and strengthen relationships around the world?

Mr Speaker: That is a classic piece of shoehorning of a very high quality, upon which the hon. Gentleman is to be congratulated.

Mark Field: I congratulate Somerset on reaching the Royal London cup final. Obviously, that comes alongside commiserations to my hon. Friend's local football club. Those of us who follow league two will realise that Yeovil Town have gone down this season, but I hope they will bounce back very shortly. That will make the headlines in the *Yeovil Express*, I am afraid.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right: sport is a major soft power asset. We believe it does help to project and connect the UK internationally, not least with the cricket world cup that is imminently upon us.

23. [910889] **Mr Adrian Bailey** (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): The UK-EU sanctions regime has largely been shaped by the UK's pre-eminence in the European financial services market. Post Brexit, both will have separate policies. How does the Minister think we can sustain our influence, particularly given the flight of the financial services industry to either Frankfurt or Paris?

Mark Field: The hon. Gentleman talks about the flight, and it is worth pointing out, as I have said—I am the City of London MP—that some jobs have of course been lost, but not to one particular place; they have actually gone to places such as Amsterdam, Luxembourg, Dublin and others. The truth of the matter is that financial services will work very closely together and there will be a mutuality of interests and an equivalence, not least because of the importance of London as Europe's capital market, regardless of Brexit.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): The British Council is a key agency of the Foreign Office. My constituent Aras Amiri was yesterday given a 10-year sentence on trumped-up charges by Iran. Will the Foreign Secretary meet me urgently this week, and will he update the House in a statement on what can be done in this terrible situation?

Mark Field: I thank the hon. Lady for raising that point. I know this matter is very close to her heart, not least because of a constituency interest. The Foreign Secretary will meet the family during the course of this week. I personally believe, as I am sure everyone does, that the sentencing of any individual purely on the basis of their employment with an entirely legitimate institution is entirely unacceptable. We deeply regret Iran's attitude towards entirely legitimate organisations such as the British Council.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): Will the UK use its soft power with India in particular to raise the case of a group of Christians who were beaten during a prayer meeting on 3 May? What are the Government going to do to raise the escalating number of cases of Christians being persecuted, particularly in India?

Mark Field: I thank the hon. Gentleman for what he says. The earlier exchanges made it very clear how seriously we take the issue of the persecution of Christians. India is one of many countries where there has been an increased worsening in recent years, and we will obviously take up at consular level all the cases to which he refers.

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): May I ask the Minister of State to use all his soft power and diplomatic skills with the French Government over the next three weeks, and urge them to ensure that the 71 veterans of la Libération who are still waiting to receive the Légion d'Honneur to which they are entitled get those honours before the 75th anniversary of D-day on 6 June?

Mark Field: I must confess that I will travel to Paris next week for the OECD ministerial meeting, and I will endeavour to have a line—those from my private office are waiting in the wings here—to make sure that we speak to counterparts about this injustice.

Middle East

12. **Nigel Dodds** (Belfast North) (DUP): What recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on the middle east peace process. [910877]

16. **Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): What recent representations he has made to his Israeli counterpart on the annexation of land in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. [910881]

20. **Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the likelihood of a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine. [910885]

21. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): What assessment he has made of the (a) sources of funding and supply for, (b) size of the arsenal behind and (c) political implications for an Israeli-Palestinian peace process of continued rocket fire into Israel from the Gaza strip. [910886]

The Minister for the Middle East (Dr Andrew Murrison): The UK remains committed to a two-state solution to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and we maintain a regular dialogue with our international counterparts about the peace process. My right hon. Friend the Minister

for Asia and the Pacific met Israeli Ambassador Mark Regev on 30 April, and raised our concerns about recent Israeli comments on west bank annexation. We wholly condemn rocket fire by Hamas and other militants. We urge the parties to make progress towards a long-term agreement, and we look forward to the details of Mr Jared Kushner's proposals.

Nigel Dodds: The successful conclusion of peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians is absolutely key to peace in the region; we accept that. Does the Minister not agree that the continued rejection of peace talks by Hamas and its continued commitment to the destruction of the state of Israel are real problems, and that until that is addressed it is very difficult for Israel to sit down and negotiate with Hamas?

Dr Murrison: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct. I strongly urge Hamas to desist from its activities. There is no way we can proceed towards a two-state solution until we have revocation of violence. Particularly from his position of strength as a Northern Ireland Member of Parliament and somebody who is well used to these matters, he speaks extremely wisely.

Tommy Sheppard: I welcome the Minister's condemnation of any proposals to annex Occupied Palestinian Territories, but we know that President Trump will announce the "deal of the century" shortly after he visits this country next month. It might include proposals that support the Netanyahu Administration's idea of going ahead with annexation, so what will the Minister do to prevent that, and what will he do if they do?

Dr Murrison: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the question, but I am certainly not going to speculate on the matter he raises. Apropos the Foreign Secretary's remarks a few moments ago, we are America's closest friend and ally, but that does not prevent us from criticising it from time to time; that is what being friends is all about. *[Interruption.]* The shadow Foreign Secretary is chuntering from a sedentary position, but I gently point out that on 26 March officials in our embassy in Washington raised concerns directly with US counterparts regarding the United States's decision to recognise the Golan Heights as part of the state of Israel, which is unacceptable.

Andrew Selous *rose—*

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman does not chunter, because he is a very well behaved young man.

Andrew Selous: A perception that the west applies the rule of law partially undermines our ability to broker peace, so what steps are the Government taking to ensure that the international rule of law is applied equally to the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements and to terrorist elements within Palestine?

Dr Murrison: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He is right that we need to be fair and equitable, and nowhere more so than in the middle east. I point to the postponed demolition of Khan al-Ahmar in area C of the west bank as an example of a positive intervention. We urge Israel to convert that postponement into something permanent. Although we are clearly friends with Israel,

and indeed equally, I hope, with the Palestinians, that enables us from time to time to give a word to the wise, and that is what we will continue to do on both sides.

Mr Hollobone: While unemployment in Gaza is at 50% and two thirds of Gazans live in poverty, over half of Hamas's budget goes on military expenditure. Would not the lives of civilians in Gaza be improved, and the prospects for the peace process enhanced, were Hamas to spend its money, time and effort on the civilian population, rather than on building up its rocket arsenal?

Dr Morrison: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Good governance means doing the things he describes. If Hamas aspires to run its territory as a good Government, it must address the concerns of its population. I will just point out that we have supported Gazans recently by addressing critical water and sanitation needs through a £2 million grant to UNICEF, and we have announced £2 million for the International Committee of the Red Cross for medicines and surgical supplies, so we are doing our bit.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I join colleagues in welcoming the new Minister for the Middle East to his post. Although I applaud the sterling work that other Foreign Office Ministers have been doing to cover the absence, it really is a disgrace that, at a time like this, we should have 50 days without a dedicated Minister for such a critical region. Does he agree that it is also a disgrace that Prime Minister Netanyahu is proposing to give the Israeli Government and Parliament the legal authority to ignore rulings from the Israeli Supreme Court and to put himself personally above the law?

Dr Morrison: I have to say to the right hon. Lady that in general we would support the Israeli Government, who are the only democracy in the middle east and a firm friend of this country. Where we find that our friends are doing something that we consider to be edgy or with which we disagree, we will certainly be keen to discuss that with them. I will meet the Israeli ambassador shortly to discuss a range of issues, and that matter might form part of our discussions, given that the right hon. Lady has raised it on the Floor of the House.

Emily Thornberry: We of course support Israel, but we also support the rule of law. We can all see where this is going. Exactly one year on from the slaughter on the Gaza border, Netanyahu is taking a further giant step away from democracy and the rule of law by giving himself immunity against prosecution and complete impunity when it comes to attacking the freedoms of Israeli Arabs, ignoring the human rights of Palestinians in Gaza and completing the annexation of the west bank. Does the Minister agree that now is finally the time for the British Government to take a different step by recognising the state of Palestine while there is still a state left to recognise?

Dr Morrison: The crux of the right hon. Lady's question is whether the British Government would recognise the state of Palestine, and I think she can anticipate my response. We support the two-state solution, when the time is right. That inevitably implies that we will support—recognise—the state of Palestine, but in the meantime

we are engaged in building institutions that are necessary to sustain such a state. As I said earlier, that means building institutions across the piece, and we will continue to do that.

Topical Questions

T1. [910891] **Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Jeremy Hunt): Time is short, so I have three brief one-sentence updates for the House. First, following my trip to Africa, I can announce that the Africa investment summit will happen on 20 January 2020.

Secondly, I know that the whole House was greatly relieved by the pardoning of the Reuters journalists, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, and I thank the Burmese Government for listening to representations made by us and many others.

Thirdly, I think the whole House will want to congratulate and thank United Nations envoy, Martin Griffiths, and the head of the UN monitors, General Michael Lollesgaard, for their extraordinary efforts in Yemen, which have led to the Houthis redeploying out of Hodeidah, which is the first real ray of sunlight since the Stockholm talks.

Helen Whately: I welcome the decision by the Sultan of Brunei not to sentence LGBT people to death by stoning, but it is still a crime to be gay in Brunei. Will my right hon. Friend use his influence to urge the Kingdom to repeal that law?

Mr Hunt: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. That is a very good example of some important lobbying by both me and the Minister of State for Asia, because that law is totally repugnant to us and our values. We recognise Brunei is a sovereign state, and it is for it to make its own laws, but that is contrary to British values.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Last year, the Foreign Office provided rent-free accommodation in a £20 million mansion to the Foreign Secretary's predecessor and bought a £12 million luxury penthouse flat in New York, but in April failed to pay the cleaners at King Charles Street on time. When they did get the money, it was at the wrong rate. How can the Foreign Office claim, as it does on its website, that it supports "our citizens...around the globe", if it cannot even pay them at home?

Mr Hunt: If we failed to pay any of our staff on time, I take full responsibility. It is the first I have heard of that issue and I will look into it rapidly. But I do think it is important that Britain has residences around the world, where we entertain foreign Governments and do our diplomacy, that we can be proud of and that reflect our role in the world.

T5. [910895] **Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Detention without trial for many years is a feature of several countries, in Africa and elsewhere. That does not seem to be core business for DFID. What recommendations does the Foreign Office have on this issue when we engage with other countries?

The Minister for Africa (Harriett Baldwin): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work as the former Minister for prisons, with all-party groups and in raising the issue regularly with me. He is right that we have a range of different programmes. Our new Secretary of State for International Development, having recently been Prisons Minister, is casting a fresh eye on that important issue.

T2. [910892] **Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State may agree that when we ceded Hong Kong to China in 1997 we had a solemn agreement on one nation, two systems. What level of trust can we put in any Chinese Government that locks up protestors in the Umbrella movement, as happened only two weeks ago?

The Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field): The hon. Gentleman is right, and we have noted with great concern the widespread concern in Hong Kong about the proposed changes, including the protests of 28 April and the disorder on the floor of LegCo in relation to the extradition laws that are currently going through. We are considering the potential implications, including how they may affect UK citizens, and will push to ensure that one country, two systems remains intact.

T6. [910896] **Mr Marcus Fysh** (Yeovil) (Con): Has any Foreign Office official involved in the EU negotiations sought Belgian citizenship? Would it be appropriate to do so?

Mr Hunt: Shall I say diplomatically that I was as intrigued by those media reports as my hon. Friend was?

T3. [910893] **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What representations have Ministers made regarding the persecution and mistreatment of members of the Baha'i faith by the Iran-backed Houthi authorities in Yemen, in particular on getting Hamed bin Haydara's death sentence from January 2018 overturned and getting him and other detainees released?

Mr Hunt: We have not had good relations with the Houthis since the start of the Yemen conflict. I have met them twice, most recently on 1 March and before that on 13 December, and we are establishing a sort of relationship. We can start to raise that issue.

T7. [910898] **Sarah Newton** (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): The Foreign Secretary made an important speech last night at the Mansion House, where he rightly said that "Britain at its best has followed a global vocation."

The greatest challenge facing the planet is ecological and climate change, and it is our duty to fulfil that global vocation with redoubled effort to tackle that challenge. What further action will my right hon. Friend take?

Mr Hunt: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. The honest answer to the demonstrations organised by Greta Thunberg and others is that while we have done more than many countries on climate change, we have not done enough. The biggest single thing we can do is to host a really impactful COP 26—the next big climate change conference—in 2020 to demonstrate global leadership on this very important issue.

T4. [910894] **Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall) (Lab): When the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister met the Prime Minister of Libya last week, was there any discussion whatsoever about getting compensation for the victims of Gaddafi-sponsored terrorism?

Mr Hunt: Yes, there was. The hon. Lady has campaigned consistently on this issue, but I must be honest with her. There is a security emergency in Libya, with a very unstable situation on the ground, so that took up the bulk of our time. I did say that when the security issues have been resolved, it is a priority for us to return to that issue.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): Does the Foreign Secretary share concerns that the proposed new arrangements to allow extradition from Hong Kong to mainland China will undermine confidence in Hong Kong as an international financial centre, break the firewall between the two legal systems and significantly contradict the Sino-British declaration?

Mark Field: As my hon. Friend is aware, we are deeply concerned in that regard. We are dealing with and speaking about potential extradition implications, not least with our outstanding consul general, Andy Heyn, out there in Hong Kong. The one country, two systems model needs to work well, and it is in China's interest for that to happen, not least for the reasons she pointed out about the importance of Hong Kong as an international financial capital.

T8. [910899] **Mary Glendon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): I welcome the new Minister and hope that he will visit Baghdad and Irbil. Will he finalise the long-delayed official visit by the Kurdistan Regional Government President and Prime Minister to boost our important bilateral relationship with a strong KRG in a federal Iraq?

The Minister for the Middle East (Dr Andrew Murrison): I thank the hon. Lady. She can be sure that I will visit Iraq again—it is a long time since I was there, in 2003. I support the points she made.

The thing with Iraq at the moment is that we appear to have rolled back Daesh, but there is a lot of work still to be done, particularly in and around Irbil, to ensure that those who perpetrated these dreadful crimes on the Iraqi people are brought to account. Work in that respect is ongoing. I look forward to seeing it on the ground.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): What co-ordination is taking place between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and DFID to ensure that British aid is given in pursuance of defined foreign policy goals?

Harriett Baldwin: I am the living embodiment of that, as is my hon. Friend the Minister for the Middle East.

Mr Speaker: Very well done.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: I call Ms Marie Rimmer. She is not here, but the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) is.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): I congratulate the new Minister and thank him for agreeing to meet me and my constituent this afternoon, so early in his tenure. What assessment has he made of the chances of the ceasefire in Yemen bearing success and opportunities to help people such as my constituent, Luke Symons, who is being held captive there?

Dr Murrison: I look forward to meeting the hon. Gentleman and his constituent later. The news from Hodeidah is good in relation to prosecuting the Stockholm proposal, but it is early days yet and of course we await the UN certification that there has in fact been an improvement in the situation—we expect news later today perhaps. We should welcome the progress made, however, and I look forward to seeing him later.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): While recognising our own challenges here, the Foreign Secretary has rightly championed democratic values all over the world, so will Ministers join me, even as we await the formal results of the winners, in congratulating the 193 million Indonesians who participated, on an 80% turnout, in the presidential and general elections recently?

Mark Field: I would be delighted. They are lucky also to have an excellent trade envoy. I look forward to going to Indonesia later in the year and meeting counterparts in the new Government. We have a tremendous opportunity to do a huge amount of work with that very important country.

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Better late than never. I was genuinely perturbed by the hon. Lady's absence from the Chamber, but she has now beetled into the place and we will hear from her.

T9. [910900] **Ms Marie Rimmer:** I sincerely apologise, Mr Speaker. I will explain later, and I am sure you will accept my explanation. I apologise to the Chamber.

Given the recent comments and actions of President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu during the Israeli elections, when he called for the annexation of part or all of the west bank, and given that present international law prohibits the acquisition of territory by force and that any such move would put under threat a solution for Israel and Palestine, will the Secretary of State or a Minister commit to calling for an international examination of and protection for the human rights of Palestinians?

Dr Murrison: The human rights of Palestinians are quite clearly very close to the top of our list of priorities. The hon. Lady touched on Israel, the annexation of territory and the involvement of the US. Let us be clear. We want to see a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders. I hope that makes our position clear.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): At the start of Christian Aid Week, the focus of the organisation is on its maternal health work in Sierra Leone, where, since the Ebola crisis, 10 women die every day in childbirth and one in nine children die before their fifth birthday. Will the Foreign Secretary put Britain's weight behind the campaign calling on the IMF to write off the loans it made to the African country to fight the Ebola outbreak?

Harriett Baldwin: My hon. Friend was a superb Public Health Minister, and it is good to hear he is still leading by example with his cycling. On maternal health in Sierra Leone, he will be glad to know that our bilateral programme there will deliver health services to 2 million women and children by 2020.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): The ongoing tensions between Iran and the US concern many of my constituents, particularly those who would like to see a world without nuclear weapons. Is the Secretary of State considering making the UK a signatory to the UN treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons?

Mr Hunt: We are strong supporters of nuclear non-proliferation. We think it is one of the biggest and most important things achieved since the nuclear non-proliferation treaty of 1970. In this area, we take a different approach from the US, and I raised those concerns very openly with Mike Pompeo yesterday.

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): There are strong and growing trade links between the midlands and China. May I commend to my right hon. Friend the midlands engine bid to host the next UK-China regional leaders meeting later this year?

Mark Field: It seems an eminently sensible idea, although there are great trade links between much of the UK and many cities in China, and we look forward to the formal bid. I am sure the Department will consider it very seriously.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: We will hear remaining colleagues if they guarantee to use no more than one short sentence each.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): One of the key aspects of the Stockholm agreement was prisoner transfers. What progress has been made on that in Yemen?

Mr Hunt: We have not implemented all elements of the Stockholm agreement—that is one reason why it has taken so long since the meeting on 13 December. The UN special envoy decided that the best way to break the logjam was to identify the most important part of it, which was the redeployment of troops from Hodeidah. Now that is happening, we will seek to implement the rest of the agreement as quickly as possible.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Will the Foreign Secretary update the House on what the Foreign Office is doing to help the British Council employee who was recently sentenced in Iran?

Mr Hunt: We are awaiting details, but I propose to meet relatives of that individual later this week, because we are very concerned about what has happened. Then, obviously, we will do everything we can to support the individual.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Azerbaijan, a country with a terrible human rights record, will soon be welcoming Chelsea and Arsenal football fans.

What advice does the Foreign Office offer on the likelihood of their experiencing racism, homophobia or other hate crimes?

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): I advise all travelling fans to study the published travel advice, which is always very carefully prepared and which is available on the Foreign Office website.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): It is good to hear of the role played by the Churches in establishing the UK's soft power, but could it work the other way round? We have a great many vacancies in the highlands. As and when someone from

overseas applies to become a minister or a priest, may I look to the Foreign Office and the Home Office to assist that applicant in every possible way?

Mr Hunt: I was not aware that priests were on the shortage occupation list, but I shall be happy to look into the matter. My own church has had a vacancy for quite a long while, so this could be the answer.

Mr Speaker: I am extremely grateful to the Foreign Secretary. As ever, we have observed one simple fact today: Foreign Office is box office. The level of interest is great; the number of questions continues to rise; and Ministers can go about their business with an additional glint in their eye and spring in their step.

Hares Preservation

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

12.46 pm

George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to prohibit the killing or taking of hares during the breeding season; to repeal the Hares Preservation Act 1892; and for connected purposes.

One of the things that we all need to learn when we are first elected to the House is that it can be surprisingly difficult to get things done. A Minister who remains in one place for long enough will, slowly but surely, get important issues over the line, but not everything. For me, following my time in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, modernising our rules relating to hare preservation and, in particular, a close season on the shooting of hares remains unfinished business.

Hares are an iconic and much-loved species, famed for their boxing behaviour in March. However, their population has fallen to an estimated 800,000, from what was thought to be about 4 million in the mid to late 19th century. Our hare population is under increasing pressure from disease—including the rabbit haemorrhagic disease virus, which was identified in hares in January this year—and also from illegal hare coursing.

Let me take this opportunity to commend the work that the police are doing to tackle the illegal gangs who are responsible for hare coursing. Yesterday, I spoke to Phil Vickers, the national lead on these issues. We are now seeing far more police co-operation and co-ordination nationally. Police forces in Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, Humberside and North Yorkshire are working together and sharing intelligence. The police estimate that about 150 hardened individuals are responsible for the majority of these illegal hare coursing events. Last year, the police prosecuted 47 individuals in Lincolnshire alone, so progress is being made. The police would welcome some changes in the law, such as a provision to make it easier for them to seize dogs and recover the cost of kennelling them, but that will be a matter for a different piece of legislation on a different day. My Bill addresses the shooting of hares.

The Government estimate that about 300,000 hares are shot each year, mostly during February and March. That figure sounds quite high, so when I first heard it, I felt some scepticism, and I took the liberty of talking to a gamekeeper on the Babworth estate, Jonathan Davis, about how it was possible for it to have become so high.

The figures are broadly as follows. There are 3,900 registered shooting estates in the UK. It is estimated that about 80% of them do not shoot hares, mainly because those in the shooting community increasingly recognise the plight of our hares and want to play their part in protecting them. However, around 20% of shooting estates—that is 780—still run organised hare shoots. They typically run across three days and the average take per day is 100 hares. If we add to that some of the more informal hare shoots that take place on farms, especially in Lincolnshire and East Yorkshire, we quickly realise that an assessment of 300,000 hares killed per year is indeed realistic, and if we set that against the estimated population of just 800,000 hares nationally, we see that that is of great concern.

A key tenet of all game and wildlife conservation is that we should protect species during their breeding season. That is why we have statutory close seasons on everything from ducks and pheasants through to deer, woodcock and geese. There are also animal welfare issues in targeting species during their breeding season. A baby hare—a leveret—will be dependent on its mother for typically four weeks after it is born, and if its mother is killed, the leveret will perish, which is a welfare concern.

As long ago as 1892, our Victorian forebears recognised the need to protect hares during their breeding season. The Hares Preservation Act 1892 introduced what was called a close time during the breeding season and it delivered this close time in those days through implementing a ban on the sale of hares or hare meat during the months of March to July inclusive. This 127-year-old law remains in force today, but it predates the advent of refrigeration and freezer technology, and it was also introduced in an era when hares were hunted predominantly for food, not shot, as now, for sport. As a result, the 1892 Act is hopelessly out of date; it is no longer effective. It is, indeed, no longer even enforced. It also leaves in place a peculiar anomaly and legal uncertainty in some areas that a game pie sold from the freezer by a pub cannot be sold during the months of March to July inclusive even though the hare may have been killed during the winter months.

My Bill would replace the 1892 Act with its ban on sale with a modern-day close season prohibiting the killing or taking of hares during the breeding season. Northern Ireland and Scotland already have such legislation in place; indeed, virtually every other European country that has a brown hare population protects its hares. We in England and Wales are unique so far in failing to do so, and this is an oversight that must be addressed.

In Scotland, the close season runs from the beginning of February, and I am open to discussion about precisely when the close season should be for England and Wales. My starting point is that at the very least it must replicate the provisions of the 1892 Act and cover the months from the beginning of March to the end of July, but there is a very strong case to have protection at least from the beginning of February, possibly even earlier, since we know that hares are capable of breeding during February, and in practice the shooting estates that still run hare shoots do not really shoot hares during the winter months because they are targeting game birds, and there are also safety concerns in shooting hares in a shoot if they are targeting, for instance, pheasants. What they actually do, when the close season for game birds begins at the end of January or beginning of February, is have another month or two when they run hare shoots; that gives them a commercial income during February and March.

I should add that I am also open to making provision to license culling in certain circumstances to prevent severe damage to crops, or to have some kind of limited farmers' defence as provided in other legislation such as the Deer Acts.

Occasionally, this House passes small but important legislation, which can get forgotten or even neglected over time. Despite multiple better regulation initiatives by Governments of all colours over the decades, Ministers and Whitehall have collectively repeatedly decided that now is not the time to take action. This House has chosen

not to repeal this hare legislation because it recognises that its intent and purposes are as valid, or more valid, today than ever before, yet this House and successive Governments have failed to take the action necessary to make this legislation effective in a modern era.

I want to persuade the House that now, finally, is the time to put this right and introduce a modern close season to safeguard our hares, because in January this year the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs identified the rabbit haemorrhagic disease virus 2, which has devastated our rabbit population, in hares for the first time, and estates right across East Anglia are reporting a worrying concern. With the instant die-off of hares and many hare carcasses being found, it is clear that the RHDV2 is having a devastating effect.

As our hare population—what is left of it—faces this threat, it is essential that we act now to reduce the mortality of our hare population and to afford our hares the protection they deserve.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Neil Parish, Jim Fitzpatrick, Norman Lamb, Sir Roger Gale, Henry Smith, Theresa Villiers, Helen Goodman, Simon Hoare, Sir Greg Knight, James Cartledge, Jeremy Lefroy and George Eustice present the Bill.

George Eustice accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 390).

Opposition Day

[UNALLOTTED DAY]

Prisons and Probation

[Relevant document: Ninety-fourth report of the Committee of Public Accounts, Transforming Rehabilitation: Progress Review.]

Mr Speaker: Order. For the avoidance of doubt, I should make it clear that under the Order of the House of yesterday the debate on the two Opposition day motions can last up to six hours; in other words the second of those debates must finish by shortly before 7 pm—my guesstimate is 6.58—not at 7 pm as stated in error on the printed copies of today's Order Paper. A correction has been issued and the online Order Paper is correct.

12.58 pm

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes HM Chief Inspector of Probation's recent conclusion that the privatised probation system is irredeemably flawed and that public ownership is the safer option; recognises that the Public Accounts Committee concluded that probation services are in a worse position than they were in before the Government embarked on its reforms; further notes the Government's decision to return HMP Birmingham to public ownership following repeated failures under G4S; is concerned by the Government's plans for at least two new prisons to be privately run; and calls on the Government to end its plans to sign new private probation contracts and contracts for new privately-run prisons.

Today's debate will address the widespread failures that affect our justice system as a result of privatisation. Over the past 12 months this issue has shot up the justice agenda after two flagship privatisations ran aground. The Government had to cancel the privatised probation contract two years early. The failing probation companies had proved incapable of tackling reoffending and were financially unsustainable despite the Government handing a £500 million bail-out to them. There was also the decision to return HMP Birmingham to the public sector after unprecedented failures by the contractor G4S.

Yet despite the recent high-profile failings in the privatised justice sector the Government are on the verge of signing yet more private prison contracts and yet more probation contracts, throwing more good money after bad. But just how bad does it have to get before the Conservative party ends its obsession with the private sector? Today, Members have a chance to show their rejection of this flawed policy. The Opposition motion has one simple demand: it calls on the Government to scrap their plans to sign new private probation contracts and contracts for new privately run prisons. As usual, the Government will probably claim that we in the Opposition are driven by ideology in our commitment to ridding the justice system of the scourge of privatisation, but the reality is that only one party in this debate is driven by ideology. It is the Conservative party, whose insistence that the market is always best has proved so costly to our railways and our utilities and so dangerous to our justice system.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): My hon. Friend is right to say that these reforms—as the Government call them; I call them destructive measures—are driven

[Kate Green]

by ideology, including the completely misguided idea of splitting the probation service into higher-risk services being covered by the national probation service and lower-risk ones being covered by private companies? Does he agree that, although the Government were warned from the outset that that split would be disastrous, they proceeded with it in any event, in the teeth of all the evidence?

Richard Burgon: My hon. Friend makes an important point very eloquently. As she says, splitting probation into two and part-privatising it has been a disaster. From the outset, the Labour party was among those warning the Government not to take that dangerous road.

If Conservative Members will not listen to the views expressed today on the Opposition Benches, I respectfully encourage them to take seriously the words of Sir Malcolm Rifkind, the former Secretary of State under Margaret Thatcher. Just last month, he wrote in the *Financial Times* that

“contracting out prisons to the private sector has been a serious mistake.”

He also made a point about the incarceration of human beings for profit—which I wholeheartedly share—when he said:

“The physical deprivation of the citizen’s liberty should not be the responsibility of a private company or of its employees.”

Even if Conservative Members do not share those moral principles, the record of privatisation in leaving the public less safe and the taxpayer out of pocket should put an end to this failed experiment. That is why change is needed: privatisation has been proven not to work.

Nowhere has the experiment of justice privatisation been so thoroughly tested as in the United States of America. Members might be surprised to learn that we have a greater proportion of prisoners in private prisons than the United States federal Government prison system does. That is quite astounding. Concern over safety and value for money in private prisons was one of the reasons behind the Obama Administration’s 2016 decision to plan a gradual phase-out of private prisons by letting contracts expire. Sadly, that decision was overturned by Trump. In the memorandum announcing the plans to phase out private prisons, the US Department of Justice said that

“time has shown that they compare poorly to our own Bureau facilities. They simply do not provide the same level of correctional services...and resources; they do not save substantially on costs; and...they do not maintain the same level of safety and security. The rehabilitative services...such as educational programs and job training, have proved difficult to replicate and outsource”.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful argument. He has referred to the United States of America, and I would like to refer briefly to the prison estate in Wales, which presently has 800 more places than necessary for Welsh offenders, many of whom are none the less imprisoned in England. All our female offenders are sent to England. In no way can it be said that the prison estate in Wales has been designed with the rehabilitation needs of Wales as a priority. Will the hon. Gentleman join me and his colleagues in the Welsh Government in calling for the full devolution of criminal justice, and especially of prisons and probation? Join your colleagues in the Welsh Government.

Richard Burgon: The hon. Lady makes an interesting point, and we can of course learn from the experiences in Wales and Scotland. I will touch on probation and wider justice later in my speech.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): The UK Government are looking at creating new women’s centres. Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the priorities in developing policy for women offenders should ideally be the far more practical solution of installing a women’s centre in Wales so that our female offenders do not have to be imprisoned in England? Does he agree that that would be a far better policy response by the UK Government?

Richard Burgon: I tend to agree with my hon. Friend on that point, as on virtually everything else.

There is so much wrong with our prisons and with our wider justice system. It is overcrowded and too reliant on ineffective short prison sentences. It is also too punitive, and insufficiently focused on turning lives around. Slashing hundreds of millions of pounds from prison budgets and axing thousands of staff members have also been key drivers in what we must now call this justice emergency. Across the board, the scale of justice cuts is eye-watering, totalling 40% under the Conservatives. These cuts often go hand in hand with privatisation and, as budgets fall, there is a greater push for the private sector to step in.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): About 20 years ago when I was on the Home Affairs Committee, we visited private prisons in the United States. In those days, boot camps were in vogue; they were going to save a lot of money. They never worked in the United States, however, and that should have been a lesson for the Government here when they privatised the prison service. The same thing has happened in our benefits system. Does my hon. Friend agree that this just does not work in social policy and rehabilitation?

Richard Burgon: I certainly do. I do not think that this Government or our society should see the United States of America as the example to follow in relation to incarceration and justice. People on both sides of the House should take note of the expanding campaign among progressives in the Democratic party in the United States against private prisons.

Under the Conservatives, the driving down of prison staffing levels and prison budgets was an attempt by the current Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling)—who will feature again in this debate, as he does in so many others—to lower the cost of public sector prisons to those in the private sector. That has proven to be a dangerous race to the bottom, and private and public prisons are now far too dangerous.

Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is a really frightening and terrible statistic from the Ministry of Justice that private prisons are 47% more dangerous than public prisons?

Richard Burgon: My hon. Friend makes an important point. That fact should weigh heavily with the Government. It means that they should not dismiss this debate as being ideological driven and that they should instead look at the objective facts and think about what can be done to turn this situation around. Violence is at record levels,

with an assault being recorded every 20 minutes in our prisons. The number of prisons labelled as being of “serious concern” is the highest for years. It is not enough simply to end prison and probation privatisation, but it is a necessary step if we are going to create a justice system that focuses on rehabilitation and public safety—values that are not consistent with maximising private profit.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): We heard earlier about the need for a women’s centre in Wales. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is a tragedy that women, including those who have faced abuse in their lives, are leaving prison today with no accommodation to go to? Too many women are in that position, which is why the network of women’s centres is so important.

Richard Burgon: Women’s centres play a crucial role, and their work needs to be expanded. The female prison estate is a case study in illustrating that short-term custodial sentences do more harm than good to the individual, to wider society and to the public purse. My hon. Friend makes an important and powerful point.

Returning to private prisons, I want to focus on staffing levels, disproportionate violence, overcrowding, the lack of accountability, the extra costs incurred by the taxpayer, and the funds that could go towards public investment that actually go into private profits.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): The hon. Gentleman has been making a case predicated on ideology. To be clear, is it his view that there should be no private involvement in the prison estate whatsoever as a matter of principle, or is he arguing for a mixed economy but merely better management and supervision of private providers to ensure equity of service?

Richard Burgon: We are looking for an evidence-based approach. Given that privatisation in the justice system has been such a failure, it seems rather strange that the Government’s response seems to be to carry on digging while in a hole. As I will say later, even answers to parliamentary questions on private prisons often do not provide statistics and answers about, for example, the necessary staffing levels to sort out the crisis in our prison system.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Could there be a compromise here? For example, the service itself could be provided by the Government, but the voluntary sector could provide some elements of rehabilitation and probation.

Richard Burgon: The voluntary sector plays an important role in our justice system and will continue to do so under a Labour Government.

Eight years ago, HMP Birmingham became the first publicly built, owned and operated UK prison to be transferred to the private sector. That is why its return to the public sector after such catastrophic failings under G4S should be a watershed moment. HMP Birmingham was the most violent prison in the country. When the state stepped in in August 2018 and took back control from G4S, what did it then do? It immediately brought in extra prison officers and moved hundreds of prisoners out—a clear indication of private sector understaffing and of the overcrowding that results from the private sector putting profits first.

The crisis at Birmingham Prison was not localised; G4S has failed across the justice sector. It has been forced to give up youth prisons after abuse allegations. Horrific treatment in its immigration and detention centres has been exposed. The security giant is also still under investigation by the Serious Fraud Office for its role in the electronic tagging scandal, which included charging for dead people. Let me be honest: its role in our justice system should have been suspended there and then, but the Government appear to be in hock to it, which is no wonder given that it has Ministry of Justice contracts worth £5 billion.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government could learn lessons from the public sector HMP Berwyn in Wrexham? A measured approach over a number of years has meant a gradual build-up of the number of men in the prison. In addition, the fact that it is directly accountable to, for example, me as the local Member of Parliament and to others in this House means that we can look closely at the situation and that we can address difficulties when they arise.

Richard Burgon: My hon. Friend makes some important points. No one is saying that the publicly run prison system is without problems, because the crisis extends across public sector prisons, but my hon. Friend explains eloquently that lessons can be learned from the experience at places such as HMP Berwyn. His point about accountability is crucial. With a privatised justice system and private prisons, accountability, which is so important for our democracy and so important to turn the justice crisis around, is sadly deficient.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): On accountability, the previous Prisons Minister, the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), was going to resign if he did not improve the prisons, so I wonder whether we will hear about the current Prisons Minister’s attitude to that. The previous pledge was based on improvements at 10 institutions, including Wormwood Scrubs in my constituency, but of course there are another hundred or so prisons. We want to get away from this ad hoc approach. We need consistency across the Prison Service.

Richard Burgon: My hon. Friend, who makes an important point, has always been a passionate advocate for the improvement of conditions at Wormwood Scrubs. He is right that the former Prisons Minister had pledged to disappear from that role if he did not improve things in those 10 prisons.

Andy Slaughter: He has! [*Laughter.*]

Richard Burgon: He has, but under different circumstances. The key point is that the 10 prisons were cherry-picked and were not the 10 worst. If we are to turn this justice crisis around, we need a serious, measured, objective approach based on the evidence, not on chasing headlines for political promotion.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the statistic that there are 47% more violent incidents in private prisons than in those in the public estate, revealed in *The Guardian* yesterday, is truly shocking? We hope to hear more from Government Members about how they are going to tackle that dreadful new finding.

Richard Burgon: My hon. Friend is completely correct. The statistic she refers to demands a constructive response from the Government in this debate. Given statistics such as those revealed in *The Guardian* yesterday, the Government cannot just dismiss this Opposition motion as an ideological fixation.

Last year, the Sodexo-run Peterborough Prison became the first women's jail in years to be deemed insufficiently safe, showing that the problem goes far beyond the failings of one company—the aforementioned G4S—because this is about the failure of an entire ideology. Serco, where the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), once worked as a spin doctor and which has Ministry of Justice contracts worth £2.5 billion, was forced to repay millions of pounds after scandals involving separate contracts for tagging and for escorting prisoners to court. Despite repeated failures, the 13 private prisons currently managed by G4S, Serco and Sodexo are set to be added to, starting with Wellingborough and then Glen Parva. The new prisons are to be built using the Birmingham model—built with public money and then handed over to the private sector to make profits at public expense.

Who will run the new prisons? Have the Government learned lessons from the failings of G4S and the like? Sadly, in response to my written parliamentary questions, the Government have refused to tell me who is most likely to run them, hiding behind the cloak of commercial sensitivity. However, the Secretary of State has indicated that G4S, Sodexo and Serco are all interested, so I wonder whether he will say today that he will exclude the companies that currently run prisons from bidding, given their record of failure. I have already asked him this question in writing, but why have the Government decided to ban the public sector from even bidding to run new prisons at Wellingborough and Glen Parva? Given that most prisons are in the public sector, it seems strange that the public sector is to be banned from competing in the bidding process. Some may conclude that the system has been stacked in favour of the private sector again.

There is a lack of openness about who will be running the private prisons, something which I have come up against time and again when raising my concerns. Requests for information about a key public service that should be available are denied due to commercial sensitivities, which is surely not right. One method of cost cutting for private prisons is obviously to cut staffing levels, even though understaffing is a key driver of prison violence, and there are real fears that that is happening. However, the Government refuse to reveal how many officers are employed at private prisons, despite numerous parliamentary questions and even requests from members of the Select Committee on Justice.

The prison officers' union has raised concerns that private prisons have higher prisoner-to-officer ratios than public prisons, yet the Justice Secretary recently told me that his Department

“does not mandate staffing numbers in privately operated prisons. It is the responsibility of the contractor to determine and maintain the number of staff necessary to discharge the requirements of the contract”.

It is simply bizarre that state prisons have to publish staffing figures quarterly but private prisons do not. Again, we see how the private sector is allowed to hide in a shroud of secrecy while delivering public services.

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not just about the level of violence as a result of higher prisoner-to-staff ratios but about the lack of rehabilitation services and the inability of staff to help inmates to learn, for instance, how to read and write? That is one of the reasons for reoffending when they come out.

Richard Burgon: That is an important point. Rehabilitation is key to an effective criminal justice system and to turning lives around and keeping communities safer. It is not just about violence; it is also about the failure to offer proper rehabilitation programmes, properly staffed and properly funded.

Opposition Members, experts and staff believe that private firms could be deliberately understaffing prisons to boost their profits. It is clearly in the public interest that staffing levels in private prisons be routinely published, just as they are routinely published for publicly run prisons.

If the Government want to reassure the public that private profit is not being put before the safety of prisoners, staff and wider society, will the Secretary of State today commit to making private companies come clean on staffing levels and publish them on the same terms as public prisons do? That is a very reasonable request.

One set of data that private prisons do have to publish is on assaults, which only adds to fears that privatisation is putting rehabilitation at risk. I put on record the shocking new figures that came to light in *The Guardian* yesterday, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) alluded, on the scale of violence in private prisons. The figures come from an analysis of the Government's answers to my parliamentary questions, so there is no doubt about their accuracy.

Despite comprising just 13% of adult prisons, private prisons are disproportionately represented among the most violent. Three of the 10 most violent adult prisons are private—that is 30%—as are five of the top 20, or 25%. In the most violent category, male local prisons, four of the five private prisons have an above-average level of assaults. That is 80% of all such private prisons. The figures show that private male local prisons are over 40% more violent than their public equivalents.

Labour has made it clear that, in office, we will scrap privately run prisons. The Tories should follow Labour's lead and drop their ideological obsession with privatisation but, if they will not, the very least they should do—in the light of these figures and the other issues of safety, transparency and accountability that I have set out—is halt plans for more private prisons and establish an independent inquiry into whether privatisation is creating a threat to safety in our prison system. Again a very reasonable request, and I look forward to the Secretary of State's answer.

Private prisons are also disproportionately overcrowded, with the 2018 House of Commons Library briefing suggesting that, although just over half of public sector prisons are overcrowded, this rises to 85% in the private sector. The fear is a simple one: more prisoners means more money for private operators, which is one of the many perverse incentives created by running prisons for profit. More analysis is needed on those figures. Again, an independent inquiry could look into whether private prisons are, indeed, more overcrowded.

As I have mentioned, the slash-and-burn approach to prison staffing and budgets was an attempt to drive down public sector costs to those of the private sector. That was done under the tenure at the Ministry of Justice of the current Secretary of State for Transport. Perhaps he should be responding to this debate, as our justice system is full of examples of his dangerous obsession with outsourcing and privatisation. It is not too late for his successor to take a different course.

Prison maintenance, for example, was privatised in 2015, with contracts worth around £500 million handed to Carillion and Amey. The £115 million planned savings to the state never materialised, but our prisons paid the price. Cells were left with smashed windows, while inmates lived in squalor and, in some cases, were unable to access towels and even soap.

Take HMP Liverpool. Inspectors found the prison to be rat-infested, with Dickensian conditions as thousands of basic maintenance jobs had not been completed. After the collapse of Carillion, the Ministry of Justice set up a new public facilities management company to replace the work of Carillion, but it has refused to rule out reprivatise this work, and let us be clear that Amey is still underperforming in too many prisons. Will the Justice Secretary commit today to bringing all maintenance contracts back in-house when they expire?

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech and some excellent points. One of the findings of the Environmental Audit Committee's review of sustainability practices in the Ministry of Justice is that contractors are unaware of their obligations. One site of special scientific interest, an important nature area, was being mown by the contractor with no oversight of the environmental sustainability issues at the prison. Does he agree that any new contracts must be managed in-house in order to have control over the future sustainability of the prisons estate?

Mr Speaker: Order. Notwithstanding colleagues' appetite for interrogation, which is often insatiable, and the natural courtesy of the shadow Secretary of State in wanting to accommodate colleagues, I am cautiously optimistic that he is approaching his peroration simply because of the number of colleagues who wish to contribute to the debate. That is not binding. I am merely expressing my cautious optimism.

Richard Burgon: This House is a place for cautious optimism, which is very appropriate—not perhaps on all sides.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) makes an important point about environmental sustainability. When there is not sufficient accountability, when profit is being pursued, the price is often paid not only by prisoners and wider society but by the environment. I am glad that the public are increasingly mindful of those important issues.

In 2013 the then Justice Secretary announced the break-up and part-privatisation of the award-winning probation service. Can anyone guess who it was? Of course, it was the current Transport Secretary. Probation does not get the attention of the Prison Service, but it should because it manages a quarter of a million offenders in our communities—around 400 in each constituency on average.

After part-privatisation, 21 private sector community rehabilitation companies manage, or rather mismanage, 150,000 offenders. The Conservatives' part-privatisation of probation has been a reckless and costly experiment that has failed to protect the public, fragmenting and damaging an award-winning service. Serious reoffending has soared, supervision is severely overstretched and hundreds of millions of pounds have been wasted on bailing out a broken system. It could well be the current Transport Secretary's most damaging failure—a high bar indeed.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Richard Burgon: I will give way on this last occasion.

Rachael Maskell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. The HMI Prisons report on the CRC in York highlighted the devastating impact on the morale of probation officers, who do fantastic work, particularly due to the change in culture and excessive workloads. Is that not only completely unacceptable but detrimental to those who depend on the probation service for their rehabilitation?

Richard Burgon: My hon. Friend is right to be a passionate advocate of the important work, done in difficult circumstances, by our probation workers. They need to be valued more. Their importance in our justice system needs to be more fully recognised by this Government. Ending the part-privatisation of probation would be one way of doing that. What was an award-winning service is now fragmented and damaged. The level of serious reoffending has soared, supervision is seriously overstretched and hundreds of millions of pounds have been wasted in bailing out a broken system.

The National Audit Office, parliamentary Committees, the chief inspector of probation, trade unions and many more have all condemned this botched probation privatisation programme. Indeed, the chief inspector, in this year's annual report, labelled the system "irredeemably flawed". She flagged a catalogue of deep-rooted problems, including the number of probation professionals being at a critical level, with too much reliance on unqualified or agency staff; eight out of 10 community rehabilitation companies inspected since January last year being rated as inadequate; more needing to be done to keep victims safe and to safeguard children; and the fact that a lack of judicial confidence in probation and community punishments may be leading to more custodial sentences in cases that are borderline. She concluded that public ownership is a safer option for the core work, while improvements are not likely

"while probation remains subject to the pressures of commerce". There is really no need to add to that. The chief inspector has concluded that public ownership is a safer option and said that the fact that probation remains subject to the pressures of commerce means that improvements are not likely.

With private probation contracts now ending two years early, Ministers have the perfect opportunity to listen to the experts, reunify this fractured service and remove the profit motive from probation once and for all. As we have heard, the current Transport Secretary ignored all the warnings from the Labour party and others, including unions, probation trusts and the voluntary sector, of the

[Richard Burgon]

obvious dangers of privatising probation. It is essential that the current Justice Secretary learns from his Government's mistakes, but so far the Government have said that they will be renewing the private sector contracts and in a way that appears mainly designed to help the companies become more financially stable.

Mary Creagh: Wakefield has two prisons—the women's prison, New Hall, and Wakefield, a high-security establishment—so this is of great concern to my constituents. Does my hon. Friend agree that the previous Justice Secretary's decision to abolish local probation trusts and to introduce the profit model into this was one of the worst examples of the reckless, untested and ideology-driven decisions that this Government have made?

Richard Burgon: My hon. Friend hits the nail on the head.

I am now coming to my conclusion, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Conservatives now need to drop this dangerous obsession with running probation for private profit and bring it back in-house, where it can focus on keeping the public safe. We are committed to ending the Conservatives' failed privatisation of probation and returning the service to the public sector. The former chief inspector of prisons, Lord Ramsbotham, is overseeing our important review of how we best return probation to the public sector. I will be publishing Lord Ramsbotham's interim report this week. I hope the Secretary of State will meet me to discuss this important report.

Throughout our justice system, outsourcing has been used to lower costs by cutting the pay and conditions of the lowest-paid workers. The people who clean the Secretary of State's office, for example, and the security guards who keep the Ministry of Justice safe have been demanding a real living wage of £10 an hour, so will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to commit to ensuring that all staff in his Department, including those working under outsourced contracts, actually get the real living wage?

In conclusion, the Conservatives promised that privatisation of our justice system would lead to better services and lower costs. The evidence is now in: it has achieved neither. Instead of savings, we have had bail-outs; instead of improving safety, there is disproportionate violence; and instead of accountability, we have had secrecy. Even in the United States of America this debate on a privatised justice system is moving on—it must move on here, too. The Government must now face the facts: privatisation has failed. When in a hole, stop digging. The Government should scrap plans for yet more private prisons and private probation contracts. For those reasons, I commend this motion to the House.

1.35 pm

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Gauke): There is an important debate to be had about the involvement of the private sector and the voluntary sector in our justice system. It is right that we ask ourselves: how do we provide high-quality public services? How do we encourage innovation in order to raise standards? And how do we deliver the best possible value for money for the taxpayer? In answering these questions, there will always be debates about whether

the private sector or the voluntary sector does too much or too little: do we make use of these sectors in the right way? Do we have the right incentives? And do we have the right supervision? In reaching a fair-minded conclusion, we should approach the evidence in a fair-minded way, looking at good and bad examples, and acknowledging where things work well and where they do not.

I have to say that such a balanced approach was entirely lacking in the speech we have just heard from the shadow Secretary of State. In a fairly lengthy speech, he had time to address this in a proper, balanced way. Instead, what we heard was simplistic, dogmatic and bombastic. The only thing anyone on this side of the House will remember about his speech is his abiding hostility to the private sector. Mind you, at least we will remember something from his speech, which, given his reputation, is more than he will ever do.

On prisons, the hon. Gentleman repeatedly made reference to the difficulties with HMP Birmingham. There is no doubt—I acknowledge this—that Birmingham was a failing prison and the standards at the time of the inspection were unacceptable. Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service had been working closely with G4S to try to resolve the issues, but it became increasingly clear that G4S alone was not able to make the improvements that were so badly needed. That is why we took the decision to step in, doing so at no additional cost to the taxpayer. It was right that we did that. The point I want to make is that where we believe it is right to step in and where we believe the private sector is not the right answer, we will step in.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State just tell the House why it took an inspection by the prisons inspector to discover that G4S was failing in Birmingham and why this did not come from his own Department?

Mr Gauke: HMPPS did have concerns about how Birmingham was operating and the way it was working, and HMPPS was working closely with G4S to try to address this. It became clear, when the inspection was undertaken, that we were required to go further and that the level of intervention we had previously put in was insufficient. That is why we took the steps we did. We stepped in, putting one of our best prison service governors in charge, alongside a strong senior management team and 30 additional experienced staff. I would like to thank all of them for their hard work since we took that decision to turn around a complex and challenging establishment.

Catherine West: Will the Secretary of State admit that this is not just about one prison and that yesterday's figures in *The Guardian* showing 47% more incidents of violence in the private estate than in the public point to something greater than one, one-off prison?

Mr Gauke: When looking at prisons, it is important to compare like with like. Our prison estate contains a range of prisons doing different tasks, with different cohorts of prisoners, which creates different challenges. It is right that we look beyond just one prison, as the hon. Lady rightly says, and that we look beyond HMP Birmingham, where we see that the position is much more complex. The House should not just take my word for it: the chief inspector of prisons has highlighted many examples of excellent performance by private

prisons in his inspection reports. For example, let us take HMP Altcourse, which is run by G4S. Its latest inspection highlighted how

“violence and self-harm were decreasing year on year”,

and said: “Purposeful activity was excellent”. It is worth pointing out that HMP Altcourse is not far from HMP Liverpool. They are in the same city and have the same type of prisoner, but we have had significant difficulties with HMP Liverpool. We hope and believe that it is on the mend, but it was none the less one of our most troubling prisons.

The House could also consider young offenders institutions. At Parc, which is also run by G4S, the inspectorate found that

“the establishment was characterised by good relationships, excellent multidisciplinary work and strong leadership.”

We can also look at HMP Bronzefield, which is run by Sodexo. It was described by HMIP as

“an excellent institution where outcomes for the prisoners held were reasonably good or better against all our tests of a healthy prison.”

If we put ideology to one side, we see it is a fact that privately managed prison providers achieve the majority of their targets, and their performance is closely monitored by the robust contract management processes that HMPPS has in place. Privately managed prisons have also pioneered the use of modern technology to improve the running of establishments and help to promote rehabilitation, including through the development of in-cell telephony to help prisoners to maintain ties with their families; opportunities for interactive story-time activities between prisoners and their children; and the introduction of electronic kiosks, which allow prisoners to have greater control over managing their day-to-day lives.

The public sector is only now catching up, and we are now investing in 50 prisons so that they can have in-cell phones, but private prisons got there first. Instead of ideological arguments about who provides the service, we should focus on what works to reduce reoffending and keep the public safe.

Wera Hobhouse: If we are talking about ideology, or lack of it, does the Secretary of State not accept that it would have been wise for the Government to pilot the privatisation that was considered before it was introduced in the probation service?

Mr Gauke: The hon. Lady brings me to probation, to which I wish to turn—

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Gauke: But before I do, I will give way to my hon. Friend.

Alex Chalk: My right hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. Of course, the picture is complex, because there are good and failing prisons in the private sector and in the public sector. One thing that has struck me is the variation in the calibre of leadership. There are some excellent prison governors and some who are less successful. What can be done to ensure that the requisite high level is seen across the prison estate?

Mr Gauke: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Sometimes, Opposition day debates can be a bit of knockabout, but there is a lot that we ought to debate and discuss in respect of the prison system and how it

operates, and leadership is a really important aspect. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart) and congratulate him on his promotion. He pursued with great vigour the theme of the importance of leadership—of having the right governors and leadership teams in prisons—and it is absolutely key. To be honest, that matters more than whether an institution is run by a private company or by the public sector. The quality of the leadership is a much more important factor. I hope we have an opportunity to debate that issue and others like it in future.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): That is what has struck me during this debate: what matters in prisons are the standards under which people are kept and the results that are shown in stopping people reoffending, not who keeps the prisoners. Does my right hon. Friend agree?

Mr Gauke: That is exactly right. If the private sector is not working, I am prepared to step in—I have no problem with doing that—but the most important thing is that we should look at the outputs and outcomes and base what we do on that, rather than take a simplistic view that the public sector is good and the private sector is bad or, indeed, vice versa. That is the approach that I wish to take.

Sandy Martin *rose—*

Rachael Maskell *rose—*

Mr Gauke: I will give way first to the hon. Member for Ipswich (Sandy Martin), then to the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell).

Sandy Martin: The right hon. Gentleman said earlier that we need to compare like with like; will he give us an example of a brand-new prison in the public sector that can be compared with a brand-new prison in the private sector?

Mr Gauke: The most recent brand-new prison that we did was Berwyn, and it is in the public sector. The next two prisons will be in the private sector because we want to keep a mixed market and to have a range. HMP Berwyn is a public sector prison. That decision was made by the coalition Government. We are pragmatic on that point.

I shall now give way again. I hope the hon. Member for York Central will forgive me for giving way to the hon. Member for Ipswich first; Ipswich is my home town.

Rachael Maskell: Quality is to follow.

On outcomes, which are the most important thing that we look at, will the Secretary of State explain why Askham Grange prison, which has the best outcomes in the country and the lowest reoffending rates and which is, I must say, in the public sector, is constantly under threat of closure? If we are looking at the evidence, surely the Government should keep the prison open.

Mr Gauke: When it comes to any decisions about prison closures, we will of course look at the evidence. We are not proposing any prison closures at this point, but we will always look at the evidence. Several factors

[Mr Gauke]

will determine whether or not a prison closes, but its record on rehabilitation is clearly something that we would very much take into account.

Let me turn to probation. In particular, we have heard much about the transforming rehabilitation reforms that were introduced in 2014. When we consider the reforms, it is important that we recognise the benefits that the private and voluntary sectors have brought to the probation service, even if we accept that there have been challenges—and I accept that there are challenges. We need to acknowledge that with the transforming rehabilitation reforms came the supervision of 40,000 additional offenders being released from short prison sentences. Those were offenders who previously received little or no supervision or support on release, so it is a positive change for public safety. The shadow Secretary of State forgot to mention that reoffending rates for offenders managed by CRCs remain two percentage points lower than the rates for the same group of offenders in 2011. Of course, we want reoffending to be lower still, but it is lower.

Liz Saville Roberts: I congratulate the Secretary of State on his announcement earlier this year that he was bringing all probation services in Wales back into public management following the failure of the Working Links CRC. Will he commit to ensuring that that welcome and common-sense decision is resourced to succeed? Will he consider it as a possible template for bringing probation services in England back into public control, too?

Mr Gauke: First, I am of course determined to ensure that that decision succeeds. In July last year, I set out that Wales was going to go down the unified-model route, and we are accelerating that as a consequence of the failure of Working Links.

Before I turn to the wider points, let me put this debate in context. When we debate CRCs, we sometimes forget some of the good examples of innovative and dedicated work with offenders that CRCs are doing. Hampshire and Isle of Wight CRC was praised last week by the chief inspector of probation for offering a comprehensive range of high-quality rehabilitation programmes and unpaid work placements; London CRC is working closely with the Mayor of London on the safer streets partnership to tackle gangs and knife crime; and Kent, Surrey and Sussex CRC is pioneering the first behavioural intervention targeted at stalking offences.

It is often when the private sector can bring wider experience and expertise to bear that it is best able to deliver value for money—for instance, in sourcing unpaid work placements, for which several of our CRC parent organisations can draw on experience in the employability sector. Dame Glenys Stacey has acknowledged that high-quality delivery is widespread. In fact, three quarters of the providers assessed have been rated as good. I was particularly encouraged to hear about the involvement of London CRC in the Grenfell disaster recovery operation: it arranged unpaid work placements with offenders who were helping local residents affected by the disaster. That is exactly the sort of delivery that we want to see: providers able to move quickly, respond to local needs and provide meaningful rehabilitation activity for offenders and for local communities.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): In Wrexham, my constituent Nicholas Churton was murdered by someone who was subject to the supervision of a community rehabilitation trust that, on the basis of what the Secretary of State's own Department says, was not performing adequately. That is a practical result of an experiment with no additional investment; it led to human tragedy. I know the Secretary of State is a reasonable man, and he needs to look again at this situation.

Mr Gauke: Obviously, that is a tragic case, and, as I have before, I express my sympathies for the family of the hon. Gentleman's constituent. As regards identifying and attributing blame, I am not in a position to comment on that. CRCs manage those who are assessed as low and medium-risk offenders.

If I can return to my comments, I want to make a wider point about the crucial role that can be played by the private sector and, indeed, the voluntary sector in supporting probation work. It is the dedication and commitment of these organisations, many of them small and community-led, that enables offenders to turn their lives around. The work of the voluntary sector, particularly with vulnerable offenders such as those with learning difficulties and other complex needs, is irreplaceable and the Government are committed to supporting it. We have been clear that the public, private and voluntary sectors all have a clear role to play in building a strong probation service. That does not mean that we cannot learn from the experience of transforming rehabilitation.

I have been clear that under CRCs the quality of offender management has too often been disappointing. I am determined to learn from what has gone well and what has not under the current system. That is why the Government have acted decisively to end CRC contracts early, invest an additional £22 million a year in through-the-gate provision, and hold a consultation on the shape of future arrangements. I am grateful to all those who have responded to the public consultation, as well as for the work of Dame Glenys Stacey, the Justice Committee and the Public Accounts Committee in providing helpful scrutiny and challenge as we consider how best to deliver a stronger, more resilient system. It is important to recognise, as those partners have, the role of external factors in creating a challenging operating environment for CRCs, but we have also looked very carefully at their findings about the complexities of contractualising offender management and the challenges of ensuring continuity of supervision and integration among providers.

I look forward to bringing detailed plans for the future of probation to the House in due course. I will be driven by the evidence and what works. This must not be a matter of ideology or dogmatism but one of single-minded focus on delivering the probation system we need.

Victoria Prentis: When?

Mr Gauke: I think the phrase I just used was “in due course”.

Victoria Prentis: Is it?

Mr Gauke: It certainly is “in due course”.

Finally, as we debate these issues we should recognise that the challenges in the current system are not down to the work of probation staff. Their hard work and professionalism, in both the NPS and CRCs, is tremendous

and I pay tribute to them. Probation is a vocational career, and as part of the future arrangements we are looking to establish an independent statutory body so that probation staff have the same professional recognition as their peers in health and education.

In conclusion, as I said at the beginning, the role of the private sector and the voluntary sector in the criminal justice system is an issue for debate. We should constantly examine and re-examine what the right role should be, but the approach from the Labour party is that this is the only issue that matters. We hear nothing from Labour about how to deal with repeat petty offenders and the role of non-custodial sentences. There is nothing about the measures to properly tackle drugs and violence; nothing about offender management in prisons; nothing about how we are recruiting additional prison officers or getting people jobs through our education and employment strategy. The only thing we ever hear is nationalise, nationalise, nationalise. As Sadiq Khan, one of the predecessors of the hon. Member for Leeds East, said in 2011, defending the Labour Government's use of private sector prisons,

"our policy was and is based on what works, rather than dogma."—
[*Official Report*, 31 March 2011; Vol. 526, c. 527.]

That is as it should be. On this side of the House, we will always work to put the public first in reducing reoffending, protecting the public and building a stronger justice system.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. As colleagues can see, we have a good number of contributors to this debate. I do not want to impose a time limit, but I would encourage colleagues to speak for about eight minutes each. In that way, we will be able to get everybody in comfortably.

1.56 pm

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Listening to the Justice Secretary is always a pleasure. He was calm and reflective and is committed to trying to improve services, but he knows that that calmness and reflectiveness hide the shambles of the past six and a half years since his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), took the decision to split the probation service, separating serious offenders and low-level offenders, and to ensure that contracts were given to organisations that evidently—as found by the National Audit Office, HM inspectorate of probation, the Secretary of State's own Department, the Justice Committee and everybody who has looked at the issue—have not performed to the standards that the Secretary of State would expect or in the way he would expect to protect the public at large.

Let us forget the Secretary of State's calm demeanour. He knows that his Government have presided over a complete shambles and he will now do his best to make the best of that bad job and to repair the damage.

My points are reflected in what has been said by the National Audit Office and the chief inspector of probation. We know that in 2013 the Ministry of Justice embarked on a reform of probation services and split serious offenders from the national probation service while establishing community rehabilitation companies, which,

halfway through their term of office, proved to be costing the taxpayer resources because of their inefficiencies, to be increasing the overall percentage of reoffences per offender by 22%, and to be underperforming. Yes, there was an overall 2.5 percentage point reduction in the proportion of reoffenders compared with 2011; the Government had a target of 3.5%, so the CRCs underperformed against the Government's own targets.

The National Audit Office has had the opportunity to consider this matter and has said quite clearly that there was "patchy" involvement with the third sector, one of the Government's major objectives. There was "limited innovation and a lack of progress transforming probation services",

another of the Government's key objectives. There were "significant increases in the number of people being recalled to prison",

because supervision in the community was failing them. My constituents and others were being impacted by that through higher offences in their area. The NAO found

"ineffective Through the Gate...services to support transition from prison to the community".

That was a key element for the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell, who should really be answering the debate today to be held accountable for the position in which he has put the Justice Secretary. The objectives set by the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell have not been met.

My colleagues from the Justice Committee—including my friend the Chair of the Committee, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), and others—are in the Chamber today. We did a full report on the state of affairs with CRCs and probation, and we—not Labour Members of Parliament, not former Ministers such as me, but a cross-party Committee—have come to the conclusion that it was a mistake to introduce the transforming rehabilitation reforms without a pilot. We agree that there was a significant overestimation of the ability of CRCs to reduce their costs to match any fall in income when the contracts were agreed. We agreed fully that we were unconvinced that splitting offenders by risk was the right way to split the probation system. We agreed on a cross-party basis that the transforming rehabilitation changes weakened local partnership and local accountability, so there was less joined-up working and collaboration at a local level. These things all matter because it is about preventing crime. It is about turning people's lives around when they have been in prison and need support in the community.

The Government have not yet accounted for the cost of that failure or for their performance, and they have not explained why bad decisions were made by Ministers, who rushed through proposals without due consideration. The Secretary of State can by all means do a calm, professional job—I tip my professional Member of Parliament hat to him—but he is presiding over his predecessors' failure, and he has the job of making improvements.

At this morning's Justice Committee I asked the chief inspector of probation, "Did the changes make the position worse?" She said, having been pressed a couple of times, "Yes, they did." The Government need to account for that failure. We had 110 years of a probation

[David Hanson]

service that took pride in its staff, with high morale. It delivered an effective service, but within the space of six years, the Government have put people at risk, split the service and reduced competence. We have not had an effective service, which has been shaken up, and it is now having to rebuild.

How does it do that? There is a model in Wales, where the probation service has been brought back together as a public service. I would like to see a justification not for why that has been done but for why it has not been done elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The Government are undertaking a consultation—again, in a calm, collected, professional way, the Minister is batting that ball and taking those hits—and the outcome should be clear: the probation service performed better when it was a unified body, working with serious and lower-risk offenders, and when it had good rehabilitation services, including community payback services, under its wing. Yes, it can contract out some of those services to the private sector—a drug charity might provide a good drug rehabilitation service; a local workplace scheme might best be provided by a local charity or a voluntary organisation. When I took the Offender Management Bill through the House of Commons in 2007, that was the private and voluntary sector involvement that we sought. It was not about splitting the service.

I simply say to the Minister, because I am coming to the end of my eight minutes, that I want to know who is accountable for this mess. If the Secretary of State stands up and says, “My predecessors”, that will help. I want to know what has been the consistent impact of this mess. There is a whole range of things that he and I know have gone wrong, and there are services that he and I know are not performing. It is his job to come clean and say those things in a professional way.

What happens next? I do not have time to talk about prisons, but I fully support my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) in the belief that we should bring the probation service back into the public sector to meet the needs of our constituents, reduce crime, and turn offenders’ lives around. I welcome the new Prisons Minister, who will respond to the debate. He should stand up and say, “I have looked at this. I have been in office for two or three days. I have come to the conclusion that my predecessors left an unholy mess, and I commit to bring the service back into the public sector.”

2.3 pm

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson), my very well respected colleague on the Justice Committee. I am always immensely grateful for the contribution that he and other Members make to the work of our Committee. There might be the odd difference in nuance and tone, but there is broad agreement between us in the factual conclusions of our Select Committee reports. They are cross-party reports, and they are based on evidence, so I am with him on many of the points that he made.

In fairness, it is right to say that the Secretary of State has struck exactly the right tone. I congratulate him on doing so. It is not the first time in recent weeks that he has made an important speech on prisons policy and on

other matters. The tone he struck in looking at the evidence has all too often been missing from the debate on prisons and on justice policy more generally on both sides of the political divide. I therefore welcome his tone and approach, and I broadly agree with where he is coming from.

There is not, to my mind, a need for a rigid, ideological division. There are differences on the evidence on prisons and probation. I think that the evidence of a mixed prisons economy makes it clear that good work is done in a number of private sector prisons. There are failures in those prisons, as there are failures in public sector prisons—the evidence provided by the chief inspector demonstrates that clearly. The issue is not who manages prison contracts—perhaps with the exception of facilities management failures, a specific area—but what we expect prisons and their staff to do on behalf of society and to achieve with the people sent there by the courts on behalf of the state. It is what we do to help them to ensure that prisoners are kept safely and decently, protecting the public, deterring reoffending and turning around the lives of those who go to prison so that they are less likely to reoffend and there are fewer victims of crime as a result.

Under Governments of all parties, we have not managed to achieve that satisfactorily for the past few decades—it is not a short-term thing—and investment is needed in some cases. I welcome the additional prison officers, but greater thought is needed, not just in the House but by society as a whole, about what we expect prison and the justice system to do. Ultimately, we can never make prisons places of rehabilitation and reform unless they are safe—when my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart) was Prisons Minister he got that absolutely right—but, realistically, we cannot do that unless we continue to put in the number of people that we currently do. To achieve that in a safe fashion that has public confidence, it is critical that we spend much more time and energy in our debate finding robust and viable alternatives that punish people in the community, rather than simply warehousing them in prison institutions, which is counterproductive for everyone. I very much welcome the Government’s willingness to look again at the presumption against shorter sentences, as has happened elsewhere.

There are important things in the prisons debate, but I, too, am not going to dwell on them as much as other matters. My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) is going to speak about prisons in particular, but I want to return, as the right hon. Member for Delyn did, to transforming rehabilitation and the probation system.

This morning, the Justice Committee heard from Dame Glenys Stacey, the chief inspector of probation, for the last time, as she is coming the end of her three-year tenure. She has done an excellent job. She has been robust and frank, and she has spoken truth to power, as an inspector should. She has not pulled her punches when necessary. The evidence that she has found is entirely consistent with evidence that the Select Committee found in a number of its reports, particularly one that we have recently published. It is entirely consistent, too, with the findings of the National Audit Office and those of the Public Accounts Committee. When, separately, four bodies produce reports based on essentially the same evidence and come to the same conclusions, the Secretary of the State and the Prisons Minister—I warmly

welcome him to his post—who have been brought up professionally to work on evidence, know that it is time for change.

I submit urgently to the Secretary of State that, whatever the good intentions behind the transforming rehabilitation programme, partly because of the pace at which it was undertaken, and partly because of the intrinsic nature of the probation service as a social service, which is different from the Prison Service in many ways, it has failed to achieve many of the laudable objectives set for it. It has not created greater diversity of provision and, above all, it has not succeeded in bringing the voluntary sector into probation work in the way that had been hoped. Most importantly, it has—like it or lump it—lost the confidence of many sentencers. If we are to achieve the objective I mentioned of developing robust alternatives to custody so that we do not overcrowd our prisons, it is critical that we have a system of supervision in the community, either as an alternative to custody or on release from custody, that commands the confidence of the sentencer—the judge and the magistrate—as well as of the public. It is very clear that that has not been achieved under the current arrangements.

The point about risk is an important one, as our report stressed. On all the evidence that we heard, the division of risk at the point of sentence and on the basis of the offence is, in reality, arbitrary. It is a snapshot in time that is then frozen for the rest of the offender's supervision, whereas in reality the evidence is clear that risk will change. If the supervision goes well, it will decrease, but in certain circumstances it may increase. This is not an efficient division of risk to have. It is interesting that a different approach has been taken in Wales. One of the reasons that is worth looking at is that it could enable us not to have that arbitrary division of risk. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friends will look at the practicality of how that works out, because this is a critical issue.

Another significant thing that Dame Glenys stressed to us is the way in which the contracts were written. The problem is that probation work—which is, of its nature, dealing with people with complex circumstances in quite often changing and difficult environments—cannot easily be distilled into a set of contractual requirements, which might be easier to do, in some circumstances, within a closed institution.

The current contractual systems model does not succeed in achieving either innovation or the sharing of good practice, because there is no reward for either of those things. The Secretary of State's review and consultation now gives us an opportunity to look at that. He was right to terminate the CRC contracts early, because they were simply not delivering what had been sought and intended. It is clear, on the evidence, that just recreating them would not be the answer. It would be more sensible to look at alternatives that, on the evidence, address the systemic problems that we now know are there but were perhaps not foreseen at the time.

There are areas that need to be looked at in relation to people with particular vulnerabilities—for example, the particularly high number of young offenders with black and minority ethnic characteristics going through our probation system, and the particular difficulties of female offenders, many of whom, of course, have themselves been victims of abuse or other types of offence in the past. There is the real problem that we have with through-the-gate

services, where clearly not enough is being done to discharge people from prison into circumstances where they will not be tempted to fall back into reoffending. I hope, in particular, that when the Secretary of State looks at new models for dealing with probation services, he will look specifically at the need to secure accommodation for people on release. Indeed, securing accommodation for people who are being supervised in the community as an alternative is central to the probation process. All the evidence clearly says that the best means of keeping out of trouble are a home, a job, and a family or support system relationship.

Victoria Prentis: My hon. Friend is making a fabulous speech. Will he comment specifically on the evidence we heard this morning showing that one in five prisoners have nowhere to sleep on the night they are released?

Robert Neill: That was very shocking evidence indeed. Frankly, it is an indictment of every one of us that we are releasing people under those circumstances. I have here a piece of evidence from, I think, a visit to a CRC premises in south-east London, not far from my constituency, that was trying to supervise people who were sleeping in church halls, or sleeping rough in a graveyard or on the night bus. It is an obscenity, frankly, if we are releasing people from prison, with the objective of trying to get them to turn their lives around, and they are trying to live under those conditions. It makes rehabilitation work impossible. Getting those things right is actually much more important than the argument about who owns, manages and runs the service; they are fundamental issues. I believe that the Secretary of State has the opportunity, the willingness and the determination to do that.

Both the Secretary of State and the new Minister of State, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Robert Buckland), are used to working on the basis of the evidence. Both they and I are also proud to hail from the one nation tradition within our party. That tradition reminds us that Conservative Members have always had a long-standing belief in social reform, as Members of other parties do, too. No one party has a monopoly on that. Getting prison and our criminal justice system right is a great cause of social reform, and I believe that the Secretary of State and the Minister get that and understand it. Equally, though, if all the evidence points one way, then that is the decision that the tribunal comes to. If they put those two things together, we have an opportunity to make progress in the coming weeks—I hope—and months.

2.15 pm

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the Chair of the Justice Committee, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill).

This Government's ideologically driven changes to the probation service have had a catastrophic impact on the justice system in this country. The reports from experts in the industry are damning, the first-hand accounts of those who have experienced the services shocking, and the damage done to our communities by this failing service all too clear to see. The comments we have heard from Members join the growing chorus of condemnation, alongside groups such as the Public Accounts Committee, the Justice Committee and the National Association of Probation Officers, to name but a few.

[Stephanie Peacock]

Perhaps none, however, has been as disparaging as the report on the outsourcing of our probation services undertaken by the National Audit Office. It speaks of significant risks being introduced by a Ministry setting itself up to fail; underinvestment in services by community rehabilitation companies motivated by commercial outcomes over public safety; and, perhaps least surprisingly, given the ministerial architect of the changes, a decision inspired by ideology that has proven a staggering waste of money to the taxpayer—this time, to the tune of nearly half a billion pounds. It is therefore difficult to disagree with the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), that it is

“unacceptable that so many unnecessary risks were taken with taxpayers’ money.”

But for all the talk of decisions taken in Westminster, with the colossal budgets in tow, we must not forget the impact, back in the real world, that these changes have on our constituents, because, more than anything, it is utterly unacceptable that so many risks were taken with taxpayers’ safety. It is residents in our communities, like mine in Barnsley East, who suffer when vital services, such as our probation system, begin to fail. Perhaps nothing demonstrates that more than the case of my constituent Jacqueline Wileman.

Last year, four men stole a HGV lorry and drove it around Barnsley, damaging cars, injuring pedestrians, nearly killing a man and eventually crashing into a house, but not before hitting and killing Jacqueline near her home in Brierley. All four men had existing criminal records, with nearly 100 convictions between them. They had several convictions for driving offences, and one had already been sentenced for causing death by dangerous driving. Two of the men had recently finished probation supervision, and the one who stole the lorry had no driving licence and was, staggeringly, on probation at the time. It can be argued that these men should not have been on the streets and able to commit these tragic crimes in the first place. The lenient sentences handed down to them following Jackie’s death have led to calls being made by her brave family to scrap the maximum sentence for those who cause death by dangerous driving to ensure that they will not be out in a few years to do so again—calls I wholeheartedly support. I have raised this in the House on more than one occasion, and I will continue to press the Government to act to increase the 14-year limit for death caused by dangerous driving as soon as possible.

Questions must be asked of the probation services responsible for supervising these criminals. The Barnsley area is covered by South Yorkshire CRC, which is now the responsibility of Sodexo Justice Services and was recently rated as requiring improvement in the latest inspection by Her Majesty’s inspectorate of probation. The inspection report noted, among other failings:

“Alarming... the large majority of probation staff here are not qualified, and many are not sufficiently experienced at managing risk of harm to others.”

This is a probation service, the effectiveness of which is crucial to maintaining the safety of my community, explicitly failing to manage the risk of harm to others. It is a shocking state of affairs, yet a product of decisions made by this Government. Simply put, the safety of our communities and constituents has been jeopardised.

I await the results of the internal review into what more could have been done by the probation service in the case of Jackie Wileman and what lessons can be learned. For her brother, Johnny, the impact on public safety of the outsourced probation service overseen by this Government is clear enough: “If the probation services had done their job properly,” he told me, “my sister would still be alive.”

2.20 pm

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the powerful speech by the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) and friends from across the House who broadly take the same view on the progress we need to make with the probation system. I am not going to focus on that. My views are carefully set out in the report of the Justice Committee and have been well rehearsed by my colleagues from the Committee on both sides of the House. However, I noted carefully what the Secretary of State had to say, and I am extremely hopeful that we will have an announcement or statement from him in the very near future. I hope the result will be one that we all applaud.

As ever, I would like to talk about prisons. It always shocks me how empty the Chamber is when we discuss prisons. If we are serious about helping the lowest strata of society, we surely have a fairly obvious place to look to find them. I for one was very grateful that the Opposition chose this subject for today’s debate.

I am fortunate to represent one of the biggest constituencies in the country. The number of my electors is broadly the same as the number of adult men in prison. The point I am making is that there are a lot of people in prison, a lot of families affected and, perhaps more importantly, a lot of future victims who are affected by our failure to treat people and by the breeding of future criminals in prisons as they are run at the moment. We must accept that about a fifth of prisoners are sex offenders and that nearly all of them will be released into our communities. Members know that I spend a lot of my time here arguing in favour of prison reform, but the most compelling reason for me to do that is that we must save future victims from crimes that will ruin their lives.

The Justice Committee has written not only a marvellous report about transforming rehabilitation, but a big report on the prison population—for me, it is our magnum opus—which I hope the new Minister, the hon. and learned Member for South Swindon (Robert Buckland), has read and digested and will return to many times during his tenure. I will whizz through the main recommendations of that report and then give him some jobs for the rest of the week.

Our report’s first recommendation is that:

“The prison population has become increasingly challenging in nature, with prisoners often having complex health and social needs. Many have learning disabilities or mental health conditions”, and that the Ministry of Justice needs to “acknowledge the challenge it faces and demonstrate that it has a long-term strategy”.

Secondly, the prison population is projected to grow, and the existing approach “limits the scope” for the Ministry thinking more laterally about planning for that growth. The report states that the “more challenging mix” of those sentenced to custody is likely to be partly attributable

to the impact of wider social factors over which the Ministry has no control, but the Ministry and prison officers have to pick up the pieces.

The third recommendation is that

“Trends in ethnicity and the social drivers of complex and challenging behaviour should be more explicitly identified”.

Fourthly:

“To close the large gap between the money allocated to prisons by the Treasury and the current costs of running and maintaining them, the Ministry of Justice has estimated that it would have to reduce the prison population by 20,000 places. By the Ministry’s own admission this is not achievable under existing strategies and funding arrangements.”

How will the Minister possibly close that gap?

We have got to take prison reform seriously. This is my fourth Prisons Minister. There have been six Secretaries of State for Justice since 2010. All of them—certainly the Prisons Ministers—have been one nation, compassionate Conservatives. I stalk their every movement, as this Minister will find out, and I count them among my closest friends in this place; I hope it is mutual. It is really important that the current Minister can stay in place for long enough to make substantive change.

Robert Neill: Unless he is in the Cabinet.

Victoria Prentis: Oh no, he is not going anywhere—this is a long-term sentence! I have the highest regard for the current Minister. He has done more than his fair share of heavy lifting in the impasse on Brexit. I offer him the following suggestions with affection, but they are urgent, and I wish him to do them immediately.

No. 1, we must accept that diversion from custody is the only answer for sentences shorter than 12 months. To do that, we need robust alternatives, not a “get out of jail free” card. Once we have those in place, we need to re-educate judges, who in my experience—as the Minister knows, I know at least one extremely well—are kind, well-motivated and have seen it all before. We need legislation to reduce the number of short sentences. We have to stop churn through the prison gates.

No. 2, we need a full review of categorisation. It strikes me that several Members here today are well placed to lead that review; I am not looking too hard at any Member on either side of the Chamber. We know from Lord Farmer’s review that being close to family reduces reoffending. Current categorisation is holding us back. We have new evidence about the age of maturity, particularly in boys, which needs to be fed into decisions on where we place people.

No. 3, the Minister needs to have on his desk—in my view, every morning, but possibly every week—figures on the regime, by which I mean hours outside cells and numbers of people in segregation, for every prison in the country. Only then can he truly evaluate what is going on. I would be grateful if he shared those figures with the Justice Committee. While he is at it, could he ask for monthly figures on imprisonment for public protection and share them with us? That would be really helpful.

No. 4, we need to end Friday releases immediately. There is no excuse for releasing people at the end of the week, when services are simply not available to help them.

No. 5, we need to evaluate why and when we make children and young people disclose their criminal records. We know that it ruins their lives. A diverse group of MPs are championing that, from my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) to the right hon. Members for Warley (John Spellar) and for Tottenham (Mr Lammy). The Home Office and the MOJ need to decide who is responsible for that policy and act as soon as possible. It is not right for any child’s life to be ruined by an early misdemeanour.

No. 6, for years we described—and I described in court—our sex offender training programmes as the gold standard. A substantial amount was spent on producing those programmes, but they have conclusively been proved to have failed. Can we evaluate the programmes we have put in their place? The number of sex offenders is growing.

No. 7, we need to block mobile phone reception in prisons now—why on earth not?

No. 8, we need to provide a £37,000 scanner for every prison to stop drugs getting in. Everybody from the Minister down needs to go through them. There was a major stabbing of a prison officer in Bullingdon Prison in my constituency last week.

No. 9, prisons are places of radicalisation. We need to grasp that and not lock people of similar views together simply because it makes control easier. A categorisation review might give us evidence to help with that.

No. 10 is on race. We need to be honest. It is not right that a black woman is more than twice as likely to be arrested as a white woman. I am pleased that the all-party parliamentary group on women in the penal system will look into the arrest of women. More than half the inmates held in prisons for young people in England and Wales at the moment are from a black and minority ethnic background. That is an extraordinary figure and not one to be proud of, and real change is needed. In short, I fear there will come a point when the Minister wishes he was back with the withdrawal agreement Bill.

2.29 pm

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis).

It is no secret that our prison system is in a state of turmoil, with an outdated Victorian-era system that sees countless prisons inspected and issued with reports that reveal dilapidated conditions, overcrowding, violence, self-harm, drug abuse, low staff confidence and poor support. A decent prison system should deliver meaningful rehabilitation and provide offenders with purposeful activity. It is clear that this is lacking across the board.

The urgent notification issued to HMP Birmingham last August by the chief inspector of prisons was damning in its assessment of a failed prison run by G4S. This was followed by the unprecedented decision taken by the MOJ to bring it back under public control, reinforcing the argument that the privatisation of our prisons has failed. Following an inspection in February 2017, the prison operator at Birmingham was given 70 recommendations and targets. By the time of the inspection that triggered the urgent notification 18 months later, only 14 of the 70 targets had been met. Safety was deemed by the inspector to have been a colossal failure. In a survey of prisoners, 71% responded that they had felt unsafe at some point in their stay at Birmingham.

[Ellie Reeves]

I visited HMP Birmingham, along with other members of the Justice Committee, in October—shortly after it had been issued with the urgent notification and as the new governor was getting to grips with what he had inherited—and it was clear that the system had failed at multiple levels. As the chief inspector noted, we found the prison to be in a state of disrepair, conditions that were unfit to be lived in and staff morale at crippling levels. While these issues are by no means limited to privately run prisons alone, the case of HMP Birmingham has highlighted the dangers and costs faced because of the distinct lack of accountability in its operation.

As well as ensuring that rehabilitation is provided inside prison, it is vital that our justice system has the means by which to monitor and assist offenders throughout their transition back to society. Nowhere has the failed privatisation of our justice system been so apparent as in that of our probation services. The transforming rehabilitation reforms pushed through at the end of the coalition Government were preceded by stark warnings that splitting the workload between a publicly run national probation service and privately tendered community rehabilitation companies, with payment by results, would have damaging consequences for the management of offenders. The recent reports on transforming rehabilitation by both the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee are deeply critical and prove that these previous cautions were fully warranted.

Last year, I held a Westminster Hall debate on the role of privatised community rehabilitation companies. Data had consistently shown that CRCs had met an average of just eight of the 24 targets set under their contracts, with the worst-performing organisation meeting only four. These reforms have turned probation into a tick-box exercise, rather than something that should be holistic and tailored to individual and specific needs. Since my debate, rather than improve, the situation has stagnated and in some cases has got even worse. It is worth noting that HMIP found that the quality of probation work was noticeably better across the national probation service by comparison with the privatised CRCs.

The role of a probation officer is not just a job, but a vocation. Yet a Unison staff survey of its 3,500 CRC workers has revealed that 25% of staff in CRCs have only occasionally had the equipment, resources or systems they needed to do their jobs properly, while 41 % said they had never experienced a manageable case load, 25% said that their CRC never or only occasionally completed community orders within the required time, and 43% said they never felt valued by their CRC. This fragmented, broken system is having serious consequences for the delivery of meaningful results.

The Public Account Committee report notes that, in 2018 alone, CRCs failed to provide nearly 3,000 prisoners with through-the-gate services. Additionally, there are numerous examples of single phone calls being deemed sufficient when monitoring offenders in the months following release, because that, rather than face-to-face meetings, is the simplest way for understaffed CRCs to meet their targets. The Public Accounts Committee report goes on to conclude that the transforming rehabilitation reforms have failed to reduce reoffending by as much as expected, with the average number of reoffences committed

by each reoffender actually increasing. The Justice Committee's "Transforming Rehabilitation" report has also called for a review of the long-term future of delivering probation services, including how performance might be compared with an alternative system for delivering probation—namely, a community-based approach.

One method to address reoffending rates is to look at abolishing short sentences. This is something that my Justice Committee colleagues and I have been calling for for some time, and I welcome the MOJ's latest efforts to move to a presumption against their use and towards more of a community sentencing model. However, for a community sentencing model to be effective and for it to get public trust and support, it must ensure that probation services are able to monitor and support offenders in their rehabilitation. On the enforcement of community orders, HM inspectorate of probation found that the publicly run national probation service was reaching levels of good-quality assessment 83% of the time, compared with just 37% among the privatised CRCs.

The privatised approach to rehabilitation has left a system in disarray, and it will ultimately end up costing the Government £467 million more than originally planned, following bail-outs and cancelled contracts. This money could have been put towards better prison conditions and improved community sentencing or, better still, spent on a fully funded, publicly owned and accountable probation service.

In her final annual report, the current chief inspector of probation, Dame Glenys Stacey, concludes that the current model left by the transforming rehabilitation reforms has left us with a probation service that is "irredeemably flawed". She goes further by saying that the profession as a whole has been diminished with an unhealthy reliance on unqualified staff, a service that has been changed by the impact of commerce and contracts that treat probation as a transactional business. She even says that terminating CRC contracts early and wishing to move to an improved tender process will not solve the issue. In short, her conclusions point to privatisation as the fundamental issue that is failing our justice system. Surely, it is now time to say that the privatisation of our justice system has failed. It is time to bring prisons and the probation service back under public control.

2.37 pm

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves). Devotees of Mortimer and the Rumpole series will well remember the Penge bungalow murders, so it is appropriate that she has spoken in this debate.

I stand to speak as neither a lawyer, a member of the Justice Committee nor indeed a former Minister, so I am tempted to say that I start with a distinct advantage. However, I particularly want to note the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis). I thought she spoke with incredible care, attention and knowledge, and we were lucky to hear what she had to say.

May I join many across the House in welcoming my hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Robert Buckland)? He is, I am tempted to say, one of my oldest and dearest friends in politics and personally. He is godfather to my youngest daughter and she is thrilled that he is now a Minister of State at the Ministry

of Justice. He is a fan and an impersonator of Mr Francis Sinatra. He will do this job his way, and he will do it magnificently.

Let me start by stating what I hope will not be controversial: our prison estate needs more money. Since 2010, I would suggest there has been too great a willingness by Ministers to accept overly zealous reductions in departmental funding in one of the most crucial areas of social and domestic policy. Those reductions have clearly affected the physical fabric of the estate, which means that the environment in which prisoners are held and in which our devoted prison staff work has gone down. It does need new funding, and I know that the ministerial team—coming, as others have referenced, from the centre ground-based, one nation Tory tradition—will make a very strong case for that to the Treasury. In making that case, I hope the Minister will underscore what I think is a feeling, certainly across the Conservative Benches, that new departmental money should not be found by milking the probate cash cow.

The hon. Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) spoke about ideology. I have some sympathy with him, but I was also confused by his argument. There is nothing more arid, given the sensitivity and importance of the subject, than rightly to clobber, as I do, those who say, in some sort of Orwellian way, that only the private sector can do these things and we must chase out the public sector—“private good; public bad”—only then to weaken one’s case by adopting at the Dispatch Box exactly the same position in reverse. He seemed to suggest that there was neither merit nor benefit in involving either the third sector or the private sector. Given the magnitude of the task and the importance of getting it right, I suggest—I say this not as a lawyer—that we should be encouraging an attitude of, “All hands to the pump.” I very much agree that we need to ensure that there is a level playing field—for want of a better phrase—in the assessment and monitoring of private and public provision.

I am lucky to have HMP Guys Marsh in my constituency. James Lucas is its first-class governor, and I have met many of the staff there and know that they are devoted in their duty. However, like many others, the prison is infested with Spice and has problems with the misuse of mobile phones and the drugs culture generally. It appeared in the national newspapers only a few weeks ago, when the entrepreneurial spirit of the criminal classes was found to be in full tilt after prison staff discovered that dead rats stuffed with SIM cards and drugs had been thrown over the fence for prisoners to find. I raised the matter with the previous Prisons Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), and I echo the point to my hon. and learned Friend the current Minister, that, given that one of the prison yards is adjacent to open farmland and a public footpath, a simple security net over the yard would make rat tennis a sport of the past.

We must take our hats off to those who devote their lives to working in our prisons. Many of those who work in our public services face threats of intimidation and violence on a daily basis, but those who work in our prisons do so in a heightened and tense environment. Prison officers face the scourge of “potting”, the uncertainty of what drug-induced state they will find a prisoner in, and worries about the impact on their own health of

inhaling drug fumes in the prison environment, as the Prison Officers Association explained to me at our last meeting.

Carillion used to manage HMP Guys Marsh, and it did its best, but what sticks in my mind—this speaks to the point made by the shadow Lord Chancellor—is that a contract involving the private sector is really only as good as those who manage it. Its assessment—I have heard nobody disagree with it—is that the expertise of the National Offender Management Service in managing those contracts was pretty poor. When contract management is poor, it should not be a surprise that the outcomes of the contract are not as good as they should be.

One of the challenges, I suggest to my hon. and learned Friend, is to identify bespoke policies to drive up recruitment in our rural prisons, where property prices are high and housing is often scarce. There are some incentives that could be deployed. Certainly, having talked with the governor at HMP Guys Marsh, I think the problem is not lack of appetite for recruitment, but lack of interest from people in the immediate locality. If we are to attract high-grade prison officers, we need to do something about that.

The third sector is absolutely crucial. I have had the pleasure of meeting Clean Sheet and Astara Training, whose managing director, Victoria Smith, is based in my constituency. I have also seen the excellent work of Eva Hamilton MBE, who runs Key4Life, which has a contract with HMP Guys Marsh. Their work is focused, bespoke and attentive to detail. Those are the sorts of charitable-focused, third-party social enterprises that my hon. and learned Friend and his ministerial team should really be focusing on, to foster their support, engagement and initiative. They work in education, apprenticeships, securing vocational qualifications and drug rehabilitation.

I will close my remarks with this *cri de coeur*. The aridity of an Orwellian approach of “Two legs good; four legs bad”, whether from the left or the right, will not benefit our country, our society or our communities, and it will certainly not benefit those who work in our prisons or those serving sentences. The state should always have this as a final test: if it is to hold the right to deprive a man or woman of their liberty, it should always consider what impact any decision it makes will have in order to ensure that that man or woman is a one-time visitor to prison. If the state keeps that in mind when making each decision, whether it is the third sector, the private sector or public sector, and with the instincts and experience of the Lord Chancellor and the new Prisons Minister, I have every hope that we can get this right.

2.46 pm

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), and I echo his remarks about the hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), who has an incredibly impressive knowledge of this subject—I suggest that she is a little wasted on the Back Benches.

I want to focus my remarks on the impact of prison on prisoners and their families, and to consider whether prisons are fulfilling the role that we expect of them. I am increasingly receiving communications from constituents who are in prison, or visits from their family members

[Melanie Onn]

in my surgeries, who are deeply concerned about just how safe prisons are. I have met families with grave concerns about suicide risk, repeated incidents of self-harm, lack of attention to mental health conditions, and issues with education and family support.

Most recently I had a father and partner of a prisoner come to see me about a young man who is in prison. He has given himself the most appalling injuries, having forced into his arm a pen and two metal bars. That happened while he was in HMP Humber. His injuries were left untreated for so long that by the time he was moved to HMP Hull, which then took him to hospital for the rods to be removed, the hospital was completely unwilling to do that, because there was too great a risk in taking them out. He has been left in a physical condition that means he has repeated infections, fevers and risk of sepsis, because the prison failed to take action at the time.

There might be very little public sympathy for that young man, but society has accepted that prison is a remedy for criminal acts. We have also accepted that rehabilitation, as well as punishment and public safety, is the purpose of prison. While people are self-harming, they are in absolutely no position to be rehabilitated.

I have no doubt that prison officers struggle with monitoring appropriately all the individuals under their watch, due to staffing numbers, high turnover and high sickness levels. However, sadly, I have also had brought to my attention situations where, for whatever reason, officers are involved not in the safeguarding and management of prisoners, but either in ignoring their needs altogether, because they are quiet and compliant, or in assaults against inmates. Another constituent contacted me to tell me about the times he was assaulted by prison officers, who are in a position of authority and great trust. He claimed that he was seriously beaten on four separate occasions during the 14 months he was in HMP Humber. After he complained to the governor, he found that the CCTV of the incidents had gone missing. I have no way to prove whether that story is accurate, and I take with a pinch of salt some of the claims that are made, but how sure is the Secretary of State that incidents and complaints such as that are recorded? Prisoners are immediately less likely to be believed than those who are employed and in a position of trust. Are those instances investigated?

My office struggles to get any information out of prisons to fully and properly advise constituents and their families in a timely fashion, so what hope do those who are incarcerated have? It has the feeling of an impenetrable service and while we all might expect the walls of prisons to be suitably impenetrable, surely Members of Parliament should be able to get to the bottom of an issue and ascertain whether something has gone awry. How can CCTV footage simply have disappeared? It is a source of great frustration to this man, who was sentenced to three years and three months for joint enterprise in a robbery, that he has now been in prison for 11 years, because of indeterminate life-sentence sentencing. He says that he cannot wait until the end of the year for another parole hearing, and will take his own life if this continues. I can imagine how he can get to that point—expecting to be in prison for three years but being there for 11. It seems that the primary reason

for this—I have heard nothing to the contrary from the prison—is his mental health status, not his likelihood of reoffending.

The issue of indeterminate sentences is coming up more often. Of course I want to see the public protected, but I had another case in which mental health again has played a huge role in the prisoner's circumstances. A 15-year-old boy was charged with an offence, then he was sectioned for a month. He was arrested after he came out of hospital and he sat on remand for a year. In 2013, he was sentenced to 220 days with a life licence. Six years later, he is still in custody. He has repeatedly self-harmed. I wrote to the previous Prisons Minister about this case, because of the ping-ponging between Rampton and Humbercare about who would take responsibility for his care. I could get nowhere with those organisations, and it took the Prisons Minister's intervention to achieve a resolution. In all that time, his family have struggled to get any information out of the prison, and even to get access to their son. His withdrawal from any contact or communication led the prison to tell the family, "Well, he doesn't want to see you." The family has therefore had very little information, but now, thankfully, there has been some movement. It should not take intervention by Ministers for basic systems to be in place to reassure family members. When people are put in prison, they are not the only ones who suffer: their families do too, and they have done nothing wrong. Families often feel out of the loop and find it difficult to get any information. I do not know what it is like for colleagues, but my office has found it extremely difficult to get a good standard of response in a timely fashion from prisons.

My final point about probation is that at the weekend we saw many reports about how fly-tipping has increased enormously. Locally, dumping in alleyways is a huge issue for residents. Until August last year, our probation service had community payback activity that involved cleaning the alleys. That has now stopped because, apparently, it did not provide a feeling of worth for the individuals. It is private land and the council have no responsibilities over it, but tenants and landlords are not taking responsibility for it. That activity provided a useful public service, and I ask that it be reinstated as a rotational duty for community payback participants. While it may not seem to have any worth for them, it does for the wider community.

2.54 pm

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the thoughtful speech from the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn), the powerful speech from my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) and the deeply insightful speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis).

I am not an expert in prisons, but in 2015 there were riots at Chelmsford prison, and six members of staff ended up in hospital. Chelmsford is an extremely busy category 3 prison that serves all of Essex. Some of the prison blocks date back to Victorian times. Indeed, as a child I remember watching "Porridge", which was filmed in Chelmsford prison. When I was first elected a couple of years ago, the prison had not changed much since the 1970s. In fact, it was dire—severely over-crowded, many parts of the prison were in desperate need of repairs,

staff levels were dangerously low, violent assaults were increasing and staff were struggling to get to grips with high levels of drug taking. The prison is in the centre of the city so it is easy to throw drugs over the walls and into the prison. The then governor was also extremely concerned about the high levels of mental health problems that he saw in the prisoners. He told me that he saw prison as a microcosm of the problems we see in society. Where we see drug use and mental health issues growing in wider society, they are magnified within the walls of prisons.

There was some good news. The prison recruited many new staff, up to the full complement, but many of them were young and inexperienced, and I was concerned about staff safety. The previous Minister—and I thank him for his work—kindly visited the prison with me and saw at first hand the need for repairs, and we heard from the governor and staff about the lack of ongoing support and mentoring for trainees. That Minister promised action.

When I last visited the prison a few months ago, I was pleased that several actions had been taken. I heard about new mentoring for younger members of staff, and there was a much more positive attitude. Lots of work had been done to reduce the amount of drugs coming into the prison, through mobile phone detectors, netting and better work with the police, including the use of dogs to patrol the outside perimeter. That was helping. I also saw that the state of the prison had improved. The overcrowding had been reduced. The prison was physically lighter and cleaner, and a more purposeful place. Indeed, many of the prisoners had been involved in refurbishing their own areas of the prison, with better lighting, fresh paint and new flooring. The place felt safer in many areas.

The new prison governor told me how passionate she is to try to break the revolving-door cycle and make sure that the people who come into prison have opportunities to learn skills. She started a strategy so that every prisoner, within three days of arriving in the prison, would do a course on food hygiene and safety, and be given a certificate with their new qualification. That also had the advantage that all prisoners could help to serve the food. It set them on a journey to learning, not just being locked up. She told me how she wanted more local companies, businesses and charities to be involved in the prison to help to bring skills, opportunities and training to the prisoners. She was also very pleased about the key worker scheme that was just starting to make sure that prisoners had someone they could confide in, who would talk them through their journey as they were about to leave prison, and make sure that they were helped in that situation.

The governor was also enormously concerned by the seven tragic deaths—every death is tragic—that had happened in the prison in the past couple of years, and the level of violence is still high. There have been improvements, but there is still a way to go.

I do not care who runs our prisons, whether it is the public or private sector, but I want to make sure that our prisons are well run. I am delighted that we have an excellent new Prisons Minister and I ask him to come to Chelmsford prison—we are only an hour away—and see what more we can do. The previous Prisons Minister promised and delivered changes, but we need more and I hope we can work together to deliver them.

2.59 pm

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford). In September, HMP Bedford became the fourth jail in a year to be issued an urgent notification. The prison has the highest rate of assaults in the country. Prison officers may not be allowed to strike under the law, but they are certainly protesting with their feet. So bad are the recruitment and retention problems in our prisons that, at HMP Bedford alone, some 77% of prison officers have less than one year of service. The cuts that led to the loss of about 10% of prison officers have resulted in an increase in violence of more than 250%. How can a Government who claim to be concerned about the level of violence in our prisons continue to fail to do their basic legal duty to protect staff and to ensure a safe working environment?

Prison officers do not go into work to be attacked and the courts do not send people to prison to be assaulted. The level of self-harm and drug addiction and suicide and reoffending rates among prisoners have reached record levels. The public expect prisoners to be rehabilitated and reformed so that, when they come out, they are not a danger to society. How can that happen when conditions are so poor?

The decline in HMP Bedford since 2010 is set out in the shocking inspection reports that led to the urgent notification last year. I am committed to building on the positive relationship that I have with the staff and management at the prison, who I know are working hard and doing their best in challenging circumstances.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): It might surprise the House to know that I have spent some time in HMP Bedford—I hasten to add, not at Her Majesty's pleasure but as the director of a charity that worked with prisoners and their families. My hon. Friend talks about the dedication of the staff at the prison and one thing that struck me was the role of the prison chaplaincy there. Chaplains of all faiths and denominations do an incredible amount of work not just in the establishment in his constituency but across the country. I am sure he, and I hope the Minister, would like to acknowledge that and ensure that they get support to play the hugely positive role they can play in rehabilitating those serving sentences.

Mohammad Yasin: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Last year when I visited Bedford prison I noticed that and I am pleased with the service they have there.

The management at HMP Bedford are working really hard under challenging circumstances, but I remain concerned that the publicly run prison is deliberately being run into the ground and deprived of adequate funding. Meanwhile, money is being used to build the new super-size prison just down the road in Wellingborough, which will be handed straight to the private sector. Questions remain unanswered as to why the MOJ banned the public sector from bidding for that new prison, yet it is happy to hold a competition involving the failed prison privateer G4S and the recently collapsed private provider Interserve. Statistics show that private prisons are disproportionately more violent, dangerous and overcrowded than their public sector counterparts. If that is the Government's response to the overcrowding and violence crisis in our prisons, it has already failed.

[*Mohammad Yasin*]

The Government's refusal to publish the HMPPS estate and transformation team's report into whether the public sector should be allowed to operate new build prisons has led to deep suspicion. If the Government admit that the public sector is the benchmark, why is it shut out of the bidding process? Marketisation has utterly failed in the prison and probation service and public safety has been compromised. It is time for the Government to listen to frontline workers who know exactly how to turn things around. The Government must end the two-tier workforce for pay, conditions and professional standards in the probation and prison service.

3.4 pm

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): The privatisation of the probation service must be one of the worst decisions ever taken by Government. The hard work of committed probation staff has been totally undermined by the Government's transforming rehabilitation reforms, which in 2014-15 broke up the probation service and part-privatised it. Driven solely by political dogma, this failed, dangerous experiment has wasted £467 million of taxpayers' money. It has failed to reduce reoffending and led to a huge increase in people on short-term sentences being recalled to prison. Reoffending rates for serious offences such as murder, rape and manslaughter are soaring, and our public are now less safe because of the Tories' profit motive.

The privatisation of the probation service has been roundly condemned. The chief inspector of the probation service, Dame Glenys Stacey, the National Audit Office and the Justice Committee have been critical. The state of the part-privatised probation service is, to quote Dame Glenys Stacey, "irredeemably flawed". It should be abandoned, with the service taken back in-house.

The privatisation was rushed through by the then Secretary of State, splitting the probation service into two. High-risk offenders were to be dealt with by the national probation service, with the rest dealt with by privatised community rehabilitation centres. Public money is now sucked into private profits, causing damage to the service, staff, users and local communities. The number of probation professionals has dropped to a critical level, forcing them to cut corners, and the profession of probation has been downgraded.

Napo has warned that the reforms have created a two-tier workforce between the CRCs and the NPS for pay and conditions and professional standards, with an average pay gap of 4.5% in favour of NPS staff and worse terms and conditions for CRC staff. Service users need a relationship of trust with the probation service to reduce reoffending. However, the current state of the probation service forces offenders to share personal information about their lives with strangers each time they see a probation officer, hindering their willingness to engage.

Staff are committed to delivering vital work in probation, but working conditions are putting undue pressure on the workforce. The underfunding of CRC contracts has led to a scaling back and to cuts in specialist support for offenders leaving prison, which, as we heard this morning from Dame Glenys Stacey in her report to the Justice Committee, has resulted in more than a fifth of offenders

released from prison being released with no fixed abode and many suffering from substance abuse, both of which are high-risk factors that lead to reoffending.

As the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) mentioned, many services provided by the voluntary sector have been cut as a result of the CRC contracts. We have seen a loss in services provided for substance abuse and for housing resettlement for prisoners, following the awarding of CRC contracts, which many CRCs have claimed were badly drafted, although it should be pointed out that their successful bids were based on the MOJ's specifications.

The CRC contracts were granted to monolithic private sector providers that, like the Titanic, were too big to fail, yet this year we have seen two of the providers—Working Links and Interserve—announce that they have called in the administrators due to financial problems. Having thrown good money after bad, the Government need to stop this charade that the CRC model is anything other than bust. The National Audit Office has said so, the Justice Committee has said so and the chief inspector has said so. When will the Government get the message?

Labour has opposed the privatisation of our probation service from the outset. This once award-winning service, now in the hands of private companies, is crying out to be brought back in-house and devolved to new local probation services with proper local, democratic control and accountability. Both Napo and Unison, representing thousands of members in the probation service, endorse this model of public ownership and local control.

The privatisation of our prisons gives us further evidence of the failings caused by running public services for profit. In October 2018, I visited HMP Birmingham following the serving of an urgent notification by Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons after the major disturbances at the prison in 2016, which resulted in severe damage and four wings being taken out of use. Her Majesty's inspectorate of prisons carried out an unannounced inspection of the prison in August 2018. The inspectorate found that the prison had been so badly run that it initiated an urgent notification protocol, saying there had been a

"near total failure to address...previous recommendations"

and

"an abject failure of contract management and delivery".

The next day, the Secretary of State for Justice issued a contract notice removing the prison from G4S's control and placing it under the leadership of a governor from Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service. This was a shocking outcome for G4S, and few will have had confidence in its ability to run prisons, but, lo and behold, the Government have allowed it to bid for the right to run more prisons.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) said, a Labour Government would take the running of prisons back into the public sector. Time after time we have seen the failures of privatisation in the prison and probation service, only for the Government to reward failure by ploughing more public money into the pockets of private contractors. It does not work and will not work in the future. It all needs to be brought back in-house. If the Secretary of State does not heed the warnings, he risks wasting more public money, making the public, staff and prisoners less safe and rewarding failure. This has to stop. We need to bring it back in-house.

3.10 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I am always pleased when there is a consensus. I listened carefully to the contributions of Government Members, who claim to be promoters of social reform, but the proposals for social reform introduced under the coalition Government far too often were done also to save money. Social reform cannot be done on a shoestring. That is where these things always go wrong. If Government Members are serious about social reform, everyone across the House needs to think about what those reforms are worth. We should not only value social reform but put the money behind it.

I welcome the new Prisons Minister to his role. His predecessor promised to resign in August if he did not achieve a substantial reduction in prison violence by then. I wonder whether the new Minister will stick to that pledge or whether he will be reshuffled before. The Government have collapsed into paralysis. The House should be full on Tuesday afternoons, but it is not. I wonder whether the Government are able to act any more, particularly on the crisis in prisons, the state of probation services being one example of that crisis. I hope that the promises made will result in some improvement soon.

The partial privatisation of our probation services has been another instance of the Government's determination to implement a rushed and badly researched policy. The new system was introduced without research or piloting. I asked the Secretary of State about piloting but he did not really answer my question. I hope that if changes are introduced they will first be piloted, before we throw a lot of Government money at them. Rehabilitation should be a holistic project in which an offender and his community feel secure and able to rebuild. This type of work cannot be done on a shoestring and focused on the bottom line.

This is a public project asking what type of society we are trying to create. The Liberal Democrats believe in a society that puts rehabilitation and communities first. Today's reality could not be further from that. Last month's Justice Committee report confirms what the Liberal Democrats have been saying for months: our prisons are not fit for purpose. The prison population has exploded, leaving the services unable to cope with the demand. Some 60% of prisons are over capacity and some now hold 50% more inmates than they were intended for.

This pressure on space has a human cost. Recent statistics on deaths, assaults and self-harm in prisons are shockingly high and increasing. Last year 325 people died in prison, including 92 from suicide, and there were more than 50,000 recorded incidents of self-harm. Government policies mean that this crisis will become more extreme, with the prison population projected to rise by 3,000 over the next three years, unless we do something about it.

What are the long-term consequences for everyone else? We are failing to rehabilitate, with record numbers of ex-prisoners going on to reoffend, and this is putting more strain on a system already stretched to breaking point. Short sentences are one of the many factors in this escalating problem, yet we already know that short sentences simply do not work. Evidence released by this Government proves that community sentences are far more likely to stop someone reoffending. Short sentences

target the most vulnerable offenders, especially women: 72% of all women offenders are sentenced for less than a year and 61% of women given short sentences go on to reoffend. Often these months in prison are just long enough for a woman to lose her job, house and children. They find themselves released back into society with no safety net and very little support.

Private probation companies are simply not up to the job, given the state of today's prisons and the severe lack of integration between these services. Today we have heard story after story of these companies being unable to offer the support they are required to give. Some of these failures are worse than others. Reports from Her Majesty's inspectorate of probation last September found that private probation companies were failing to protect survivors of abuse once the abuser had been returned to the community. The report stated:

"Too often we were left wondering how safe victims and children were, especially when practitioners failed to act on new information indicating that they could be in danger."

Further investigations discovered that only 27% of eligible offenders had been referred to an accredited programme designed to prevent further abuse.

Private probation companies, allowed under the new system to manage low to medium-risk cases, are overstretched. Last September's report stated that private probation companies viewed home visits as a "luxury". Domestic factors, such as escalating abuse or unstable living situations, are often determining factors in whether someone goes on to reoffend. It is simply not acceptable that probation companies are not able to act because of the costs involved.

The prisons system and by extension probation services are not considered by most people, who hope they will never encounter them personally, but the way we treat the men and women unfortunate enough to end up in prison matters, not just to the individuals but to our wider communities. Rehabilitation, when done properly, spans both the prisons system and probation. This work must be integrated to be successful. Rehabilitation is not just some soft-hearted liberal project; ultimately, it is about the security of our communities. I call on the Government to reinvest in rehabilitation by reforming standards, increasing resources and improving services to build a safer and more cohesive society, and yes social reform must cost the money that it is worth to us.

3.17 pm

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), who made important points about the need for social reform and how it does indeed cost money.

I want to speak in particular about the value of women's centres as a community response to women offenders. I start by paying tribute of course to my friend and colleague the inspirational Baroness Corston, whose groundbreaking report led to the establishment of a wider network of women's centres across the UK. I have visited one such centre—Eden House, in my neighbouring constituency of Bristol East, Baroness Corston's former constituency—a few times in the past few years, the first time in my former professional role at Respect, the national organisation for domestic violence perpetrator work, in order to discuss specific interventions for women with complex histories of domestic violence and offending.

[Thangam Debbonaire]

Women experience the majority of domestic violence. While there are of course male victims, their abusers are disproportionately male partners, although there are female perpetrators. There is no excuse for the abuse of a partner, female or male, but in my previous work I learned a lot about the differences between the profiles of female and male domestic perpetrators, particularly those with a complex picture of experience as a victim and a perpetrator.

Some women are indeed very violent and controlling and do fit the profile of coercive and controlling abusers, but the majority of those who use violence tend to do so either in self-defence or resistance in the context of a partner who is controlling and on whom they may be dependent. Some of the women I met at Eden House had this complex history. Often it started young—sometimes they had experience of child abuse—and their offending was intricately linked to their experience of abuse as well as to mental health and substance misuse. Those are examples of the specific needs and experiences of women offenders that Baroness Corston identified and of the reasons she concluded that specific women-centred responses were needed.

Baroness Corston also identified three specific groups of characteristics. First, the domestic category covers abusive relationships, but also childcare. Single mothers with sole responsibility for children are much less likely than male offenders to have someone on the outside to look after their home and the children, and are therefore more likely to lose both. Secondly, there is the personal category. Many women offenders have severe mental illness or substance misuse problems, which are likely to get worse if they are remanded in prison. They may also be self-harming, or have eating disorders. The third category is the socio-economic. Women are paid less than men, and are more likely to experience relationship breakdown as economically damaging. They are more likely than men to face under-employment or discrimination because of their parenting responsibilities.

A fourth category relates to the offending itself. Most, although not all, women offenders are convicted of non-violent offences, and present little public risk. They actually present a greater risk to themselves than to others. However, because there are fewer of them, they are more likely to be sent further away when they are sentenced. For other reasons, proportionate to their numbers, they are more likely to be remanded in custody than men. Because of their domestic responsibilities, they may therefore experience further, compounding consequences, such as fewer visits from children and other family members, leading to a further likelihood that their children will be taken into care permanently. Shorter sentences are also less likely to deflect future offending.

For all those complicated reasons, prison makes the lives of women and their children much worse than it makes those of male offenders, although I am not suggesting that there are no complications for male offenders. It is also much less likely that their reoffending rates will be reduced by a prison sentence.

Baroness Corston pointed out that because of those differences, there should be distinct, separate and different approaches. She recommended that community sanctions for non-violent women offenders should be the norm,

that responses should take into account women's vulnerabilities and their domestic and childcare responsibilities, and that the Together Women programme should be extended and a network of women's centres set up as soon as possible. As I am sure you are aware, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Together Women programme was set up by the Labour Government with £9.1 million in 2005 to develop and test holistic responses to women.

As a result of Baroness Corston's recommendation, a further £15.6 million was allocated for 2009 to 2011 for the number of women's centres to be increased to, eventually, 46. At their best, they provide a combination of one-to-one holistic support, help with substance misuse, counselling, therapy, domestic abuse programmes, life skills classes and workshops, referral to other help and, sometimes, on-site childcare and residential facilities. A Ministry of Justice evaluation has found statistically significant differences in favour of women's centres compared to custodial sentences in respect of the risk of reoffending.

Kate Green: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Thangam Debbonaire: I am short of time, but I will give way.

Kate Green: I just wanted to make a point about cost-effectiveness. Does my hon. Friend share my concern about the underfunding of women's centres relative to other disposals? According to those who run my local centre in Greater Manchester, none of them have been able to access the tampon tax funding. Surely that would have been ideal for them.

Thangam Debbonaire: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that excellent point. In 2011, a report on the social return on investment produced by the Women's Resource Centre and the New Economics Foundation stated that every £1 invested in women's organisations generated between £5 and £11 in social value. My hon. Friend has made the important point that there is often a long-term saving to be made, and that those organisations need investment. Other evaluations have documented substantial improvements in mental health and other dimensions such as relationships, work, housing, health and money, all of which, combined with the reduced risk of reoffending, make women's centres a good investment.

Where are we now? The Women in Prison report "The Corston Report 10 Years On" found that many pioneering women's centres either do not exist or can no longer provide the full range of services, and that their model does not fit the "payment by results" model which has been introduced into the privatisation of probation. The Government's female offender strategy acknowledges the legacy of the Corston report and the need for the value of women-specific services, but we just do not have the national network that we should have.

I am told that the Treasury will receive £80 million from the sale of HMP Holloway, which would transform women's centres. The Howard League for Penal Reform has reminded me that, following its inquiry last year, the all-party parliamentary group for women in the penal system said that there was a real risk that many women's centres were now so watered down that they could no

longer be as effective as they should or could be. I ask the Minister to talk to his colleagues in the Treasury about keeping the £80 million and investing it to ensure that there is a fully funded network with a full range of women's services across the country, because that range really saves lives. It saves women from the risk of reoffending, it saves children from the risk of being taken into care, and it helps to turn lives around. That was true in 2007, when Baroness Corston wrote the report, it was true in the "10 Years On" report, and it is true now.

3.25 pm

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire). The excellent speeches that have been made by Members on both sides of the House have shown how important justice is. It is, I believe, the cornerstone of democracy, and it needs to be respected and resourced as such. The current Transport Secretary clearly did not share that view when, as Justice Secretary, he accepted a 40% cut in the Justice budget at the start of the austerity regime.

Prisons have been reduced to places that brutalise offenders, and have become more like universities of crime. Her Majesty's inspectorate has reported some of the most disturbing prison conditions that we have ever seen, conditions that have no place in an advanced nation in the 21st century. Prisoners are living in squalor. The inspectorate described conditions in the UK—one of the largest economies in the world—as squalid.

I recognise the improvements that were begun by the previous Prisons Minister in the 10-prison project, but we as a Parliament and the Government need to take a long and concerted look at how those improvements can be replicated in the many prisons that have not benefited from the same focus. We also need to take a long and concerted look at whether privatisation of the prison system is really the appropriate approach. Will the private sector ever share best practice with its competitors, which may well be competing for one of the services that their opponents are providing? I do not think so.

Sadly, the Government's policies are not limited to the prisons themselves, but extend to the probation service. Irreparable damage is being caused to that system by the breaking up and part-privatisation of the UK's award-winning probation service, which is served by proud, professional probation officers who are committed to working to help to reintroduce people to society. Their careers have been smashed. The way in which professionals have been treated in our justice system is so unfair.

Owing to the actions of the previous Justice Secretary, one in five people who are released from prison have no fixed abode. The community rehabilitation company, the private sector provider, is issuing tents to people who are released from prison. Some are currently sleeping on 24-hour bus services, and some are even being directed to church graveyards. How can anyone look at the current prison and probation service and see anything other than crisis and failure?

We have new people in; the last Prisons Minister was a good one and I am told we have a good one now and a good Secretary of State. I call on them to be brave; I call on the Government to respect justice as a cornerstone

of democracy and to fund it as such. The whole of society benefits from a good justice system, yet at present it is being taken to its knees. I call on the current team to be brave and shout out for more resources and respect justice for what it is: a cornerstone of democracy.

3.29 pm

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): Throughout this debate we have heard strong speeches on the dangerous consequences of privatisation in our justice system, with Members warning against heading further down this path. These contributions were made by those on both the Government and Opposition Benches. The point made earlier around the Tory ex-Secretary of State Sir Malcom Rifkind's quote is pertinent and should be used again: he said that deprivation of liberty "should not be the responsibility of a private company".

And we can be left in no doubt that the needless privatisation of our probation system and the heavy involvement of the private sector in prisons have proved to be nothing less than a catastrophic disaster.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend, the shadow Secretary of State and I all share the same probation trust; it is run by Purple Futures, part of Interserve, which has gone into administration. Does my hon. Friend share my concern that this is a developing pattern, and that the former Secretary of State who transformed rehabilitation did not think it through, and we now need to remodel it and bring it back into the public sector?

Imran Hussain: I absolutely agree and will come on to that point shortly. I would have liked to say a lot more but have been given firm instructions by the Deputy Speaker that I must stick to a strict time limit, so have had to cut a lot of my contribution.

Much of the focus of today's debate has been on the privatisation of probation, and I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock), who made important contributions which I will come on to later. The Chair of the Justice Committee, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), spoke about the impact on probation and made the point that there have been numerous reports, all of which highlight the failure in probation.

We have seen offenders released into the hands of private companies whose concern is not the public and their safety, but shareholders and profits. It is right that this has been a key focus, for the Government have not transformed rehabilitation but have destroyed it—crushing rehabilitation, not transforming it.

The failure of private provision companies on reoffending is singled out for particular criticism, as while the principal aim of the plans was to reduce reoffending, the MOJ's own proven reoffending statistics instead show a rise in reoffending. The blame for this lies squarely with the privatisation of probation and the horrendously delivered through-the-gate services, which are so ineffective that prison and probation inspectorates found there would be no impact at all if they were removed. It is easy to see why they reached this conclusion, as private probation companies have consistently failed to deliver effective support for offenders around accommodation, welfare and employment, all of which are factors determining the likelihood of reoffending.

[Imran Hussain]

But it gets worse, as inspections of private probation companies routinely found that they were not just delivering a poor level of supervision of offenders but were carrying it out in non-confidential open public spaces such as libraries, and shockingly in some cases through texts, rather than in private locations. So poor is the record of the community rehabilitation companies in providing support that a 2016 report found that none of those serving a sentence of less than 12 months who were met by the inspectorates had been helped into employment or training after release by through-the-gate. That is absolutely shocking.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for breaking his extremely good speech. The people trying to deliver these services are, whoever they work for, incredibly dedicated and want to do an extremely good job, which many of them are capable of doing, but the problem is the fragmentation of the service, about which I warned the former Secretary of State, as did my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green). The former Secretary of State's words were: "I don't need any evidence, I don't need to pilot it; I have inner belief that this will work," but he was wrong.

Imran Hussain: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, who raises important points on staffing, on the two-tier workforce and on staff morale, which has also been impacted. Time does not permit me to go into detail on that today, but the 4.5% pay gap between those who work in the private sector and those in the national public service illustrates the massive difference between them.

The privatisation of probation has proved to be not just a disaster but a costly one, with the taxpayer being forced to stump up a total of £467 million to bail out private probation companies in what is nothing short of a reward for their damning failures. In return for this bumper payment, the public have received no guarantee that the services delivered by probation companies will improve and no certainty that they will make any investment to achieve that. And all the while, the Ministry of Justice remains happy to continue to throw good money after bad. Despite this colossal bail-out, the financial difficulties of probation companies remain, with a number forecasting losses and with Working Links collapsing and Interserve entering administration earlier this year. The financial failure and collapse of a probation provider, a key component of the justice system, should be unthinkable, but under this Government's privatisation agenda, that is exactly what is happening as they erode key functions of the state that should remain in public hands and hand them over to private companies.

We have also heard today about the failings in the private prison estate. The hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves), the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn), the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), my hon. Friends the Members for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) and for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous), the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) and my

hon. Friends the Members for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) and for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer) all made important points on this. One of the important things about this debate is that Members on both sides of the House have made pertinent and important points highlighting the serious emergency and the dire situation in our prison and probation systems at the moment. It is disappointing that the Secretary of State opened his speech by referring to the shadow Secretary of State's contribution as "simplistic, dogmatic and bombastic". We have an emergency in our prisons, we have a safety issue in our prisons and we have a crisis in our probation service, yet the Secretary of State comes to this important debate and uses words such as those. I find that quite disappointing.

The issues in our prisons were most recently brought to the fore by the prisons inspector's highly critical report on HMP Birmingham, which has been mentioned a number of times today. The fact that conditions there were so bad and the prisoners so violent forced the removal of G4S as the private operator of the prison. Many Members have referred to individual prisons today, including those in their own constituencies, with particular reference to safety. The Ministry of Justice's own statistics show that private prisons are disproportionately more dangerous, with 156 more assaults per 1,000 prisoners in private prisons compared with those run by the public sector, and that three private prisons appear in the list of the 10 most violent ones. That highlights the points being made by hon. Members today.

As we have heard, the Government know about the huge problems associated with private prisons and they are aware of their failings, yet they are pressing on with opening two new prisons, at Wellingborough and Glen Parva, which will be operated by private companies rather than public sector operators. If the Government are so confident of the ability of private companies, why will they not allow HMPPS to bid to operate Wellingborough and Glen Parva, rather than burying the evidence on why they have not done so? The Prison Officers Association has repeatedly asked for the HMPPS estates and transformation report, but it has repeatedly been denied access to it. This shows that the Government's plans are driven not by a desire to deliver the best benefits for the public but by ideology, and we are seeing a complete failure by the private sector to stand on its own merits when compared with the public sector.

In conclusion, this debate not only demonstrates the colossal failure of the Government's privatisation agenda, but represents a staggering row about the Government's plans for further privatisation in our prisons and to hand larger contracts to the same private companies. There can be no half-measures in the Government's actions. They must commit not only to ensuring that Wellingborough and Glen Parva are run by HMPPS, not private companies, but to bringing probation back into public control for good. The Ministry of Justice says that it has learned its lessons, so now is the time to prove it. I urge Members to support our motion today.

3.40 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Robert Buckland): It is a pleasure, after only two working days in office, to close this important debate and to make my first speech to this House as Minister of State for Justice.

I heard a call in this debate, and I will deal with the issue, because my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), to whom I pay warm tribute, made a pledge. I have already said this, but I will say it again: I am going to do things my way. I am going to bring nearly 30 years of experience in the criminal justice and penal system to bear upon the serious job that I will undertake. The work of the “10 prisons project” will carry on, and we will see its results in the summer. It will continue in the same determined and urgent way that it has been pursued up to now.

I am here to reflect on the prison and probation services and, indeed, the whole criminal justice system. I want to leave a legacy that will demonstrate that, in whatever time I am given to serve in this office, I will have played my part in making justice neither tougher nor softer, but smarter when it comes to serving the public.

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): I welcome the Minister to his new role. He says that he would like to leave a legacy. Does he agree that the current devolved settlement between Wales and the UK is broken? To fulfil that legacy and simplify the system, we need to devolve justice, prisons and probation to the Welsh Government to enable the smooth running of this broken service.

Robert Buckland: As a proud Welshman, I have a long and deep interest in such issues, and I think greater unity is the way forward. Many excellent lessons have been learned from the Welsh probation system, and they inform our decision making as we reach a final decision on the future of the probation service. At this time, I much prefer to support a Wales-and-England approach when in Wales and an England-and-Wales approach when in England, and we need greater unity.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Robert Buckland: Let me develop my points, and I will give way in a moment.

My right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice has proposed a radical, evidence-based approach to put rehabilitation truly at the heart of our prison and probation services. I am delighted to be joining his team, and it is right to pay tribute to and congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer) who has taken her place—it was my place for many years—as the Solicitor General.

This has been a wide-ranging and informed debate. It included speeches from distinguished members of the Justice Committee, on which I served for four years with some Members present, and I am grateful to them for their considered, eloquent contributions. The debate moved away in a welcome manner from the rather false dichotomy of public good, private bad, or vice versa, because the truth is that neither is true. We are seeking a genuinely mixed approach that works whether in the south-west or north-east of England. We want an approach that keeps rehabilitation and reducing reoffending at the heart of our deliberations.

I want to take this opportunity—my first such opportunity—to pay tribute to the biggest single asset in our prison and probation services: the people who

work in them. I have been in professional contact with these people since the early 1990s. Probation officers work hard to prepare important pre-sentence reports. Prison officers work tirelessly, often on the frontline of potential harm, to make our prisons civilised and safe places. I am thinking, too, of the volunteers who work alongside them—the prison chaplaincy has been mentioned—and the healthcare staff and charity workers. Of course, we should not forget the offenders and former offenders who work hard to help their peers, and the listeners trained by the Samaritans to help prisoners who are struggling to cope. The system just would not work without all their dedication, skills and bravery, and it is my task to champion their work and to give them the resources, tools and conditions in which to excel.

A lot has been said about the need for a clear evidence base. As a lawyer, of course, I naturally support that, and it is right to support it because I think we can agree that blind ideology, whether in favour of an overweening state or in favour of a mythological free-market paradise, is not the right answer for our prison and probation services.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): I welcome my hon. and learned Friend to his job, to which I hope he brings the same tremendous skills as he brought to his previous job as Solicitor General. He was kind to listen to my representations last night about my local probation area in the south of England, which has managed to make the system, as it currently exists, work extremely well. My local service has an outstanding reputation, and in listening to what it says, I am struck by the fact that for it to tear up all the progress it has made under the present system for another system would not help those it looks after. I urge him to consider some form of flexibility in his plans so that the very best that has been learned in the current system can be incorporated into the new system.

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, and of course I am familiar with the CRC to which he refers. It is an example of how best practice has been achieved, and it shows excellent delivery of unpaid work placements right across the region. It offers a comprehensive range of programmes and, frankly, outstanding leadership, too. He is right to talk about flexibility within a national framework.

The right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson), as he always does, made some pertinent points about recall rates. It is right to say that the increases are a direct consequence of the fact that 40,000 more offenders are being supervised as a result of the positive transforming rehabilitation changes. It is inevitable that there will be an increase in breaches with an increase in numbers, but I take his point. It is very much part of my consideration and thinking to ensure that, as we go forward, the monitoring and enforcement of orders is as important as the imposition of those orders—in fact, more important in many respects.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), the Chairman of the Justice Committee, who in his inimitable way made the important point that, from the evidence he has heard at length, a mixed-economy approach to prisons and probation is the right one. He spoke about

[Robert Buckland]

through-the-gate support, and it is good to note that there is £6 million of funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to support people to move away from rough sleeping and into accommodation, which is clearly one of the key gateways away from reoffending.

The hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) raised a horrifying case, and I reassure her that a serious further offence review is under way. The Government remain in favour of raising the maximum sentence for causing death by dangerous driving, and we will look to do so as far as parliamentary time allows.

Stephanie Peacock: Exactly when will the Minister do that? The Government have committed to it previously, but we are still waiting.

Robert Buckland: I hear the hon. Lady, and I share her sense of urgency. I cannot promise a specific timescale, but, as a former Solicitor General, I have considerable experience of dealing with such offending, which is a very high priority for me. I am grateful to her for raising it at this early opportunity.

My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) made an important and comprehensive speech. Although I would like to address her many points in turn, it would perhaps be an invidious encroachment on the House's time, but I look forward to working closely with her, particularly on developing better alternatives to custody. She is absolutely right on that; I have been a sentencer, as a former part-time judge, so I know that it is vital to have integrity in all the options before the sentencing court—whether custody, community sentences or another type of disposal. I take her points very much on board and look forward to engaging with her.

Right and hon. Members made other points about the performance of CRCs. I accept that performance has been mixed, but quick actions have been taken to raise the quality of supervision. For example, telephone supervision was amended last year to mandate at least one face-to-face appointment per month with every offender. Changes were also made to introduce higher standards to more fairly reflect the cost of delivering services. As a result of the ending of the CRC contracts earlier, we will now expect to spend about £1.4 billion less on CRCs than was originally expected.

Ian C. Lucas: Will the Minister give way?

Robert Buckland: I cannot, because time does not permit me to do so. I am under some pressure and I wish to deal with Members' contributions.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) was right to mention the excellent performance of his local prison, Guys Marsh. It is a good example of a prison that has had past challenges but, with excellent leadership, is turning around. We are working closely with Guys Marsh to identify the problems of drug issues and of rural recruitment. Indeed, there is a £3,000 income supplement for people who wish to work at that prison.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn), in an interesting speech, talked about prisoner welfare and self-harm. I can reassure her that that is taken

extremely seriously, with the rolling out of new training on suicide, self-harm and mental health to more than 14,000 staff who have completed their training. That means an improvement in the way in which vulnerable prisoners are assessed and supported. Further work has been done with the Samaritans, which supports the listener scheme to which I referred.

The hon. Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) talked about his local prison. We are taking robust action to respond to that urgent notification by appointing a new and experienced governor and additional operational managers, by making sure that staff undergo intensive training, by increasing the number of searches and by seeking support from national and regional specialists to support a safer regime in that prison. I know that he will be holding me to account and keeping a close eye on that.

May I deal with the role of the private sector and the evidence of the current chief inspector of probation? Dame Glenys Stacey is retiring shortly, and I want to pay warm tribute to her. Her evidence was more nuanced than perhaps has been suggested. In the body of her evidence, she acknowledged that the private sector has brought benefits to the service, particularly with regards to the delivery of IT and training, and innovation in rural areas, where local communities' needs have been recognised. In her evidence, she acknowledged that a mix of the public, private and voluntary sector working together is indeed a viable and appropriate way forward.

I have answered the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), who challenged me about the pledge of my predecessor, and I have answered in the words of Mr Frank Sinatra.

The hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) made an important and interesting speech about the vicious cycle involving coercive control, abuse and perpetration. I want to work with her to improve our understanding of that, because we have done some excellent work in the field of women's offending. The number of women in prisons has reduced, as a result not just of some target exercise but of increased understanding of the particularly vulnerable position of women, who are often the victims of domestic abuse. I am grateful to her for raising those important points.

The hon. Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer) reminded us all eloquently and clearly to respect and support justice and the rule of law. I could not agree with her more, and that is what I intend to do throughout my tenure.

It was suggested that the words of the former Cabinet Minister and my friend, Sir Malcolm Rifkind, were in some way a condemnation of Government. May I assure this House and all hon. Members that, ultimately, the deprivation of liberty is always the responsibility of Government? How that is administered is a legitimate place for the voluntary and private sector to be involved. As I have said, based on the evidence, I believe we can continue the work that is under way, not only to make our prisons safe, decent and secure, but to make sure that there are viable community alternatives. I look forward to the work ahead and am grateful to the House for its indulgence.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House notes HM Chief Inspector of Probation's recent conclusion that the privatised probation system is irredeemably

flawed and that public ownership is the safer option; recognises that the Public Accounts Committee concluded that probation services are in a worse position than they were in before the Government embarked on its reforms; further notes the Government's decision to return HMP Birmingham to public ownership following repeated failures under G4S; is concerned by the Government's plans for at least two new prisons to be privately run; and calls on the Government to end its plans to sign new private probation contracts and contracts for new privately-run prisons.

Health

3.55 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, that she will be graciously pleased to give directions that the following papers be laid before Parliament: any briefing papers or analysis provided to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care or his Ministers since 9 July 2018 including impact assessments of public health spending reductions and any assessments made on falling life expectancy and the minutes of all discussions between the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England on funding pay risks for Agenda for Change staff working on public health services commissioned by local authorities.

A child born at this very moment in the very poorest of communities—whether in inner cities like Manchester or my own city, Leicester, or in towns such as Blackpool or Burnley—will have a life expectancy that is around nine years lower than that of a child born at this very moment in some of the wealthiest communities, such as Chelsea, Westminster or east Dorset, and they will enjoy 18 fewer healthy years of life. Two babies born today could have years of difference in life expectancy and years of difference in healthy living, due entirely to the circumstances into which they are born. The child born in the very poorest of areas is more likely to leave school obese and almost 70% more likely to be admitted to A&E. That child is less likely to receive measles, mumps and rubella vaccinations, more likely to take up smoking as a teenager, and more likely to need the help of specialist mental health services at some point.

Of course, health inequalities have always existed, throughout the 71-year history of the national health service, but nine years of desperate, grinding austerity have brought us record food bank usage and in-work poverty, and seen child poverty increase to 4 million, with 123,000 children today growing up homeless in temporary accommodation—a 70% increase since 2010. Some 4,700 of our fellow citizens sleep rough on our streets, an increase of 15%, and, tragically, nearly 600 of them die on our streets. There have also been savage cuts to public services, including social care, which have left 600,000 elderly and vulnerable people without support. We have seen nine years of all that, and we should be shocked, because the advances in life expectancy that we all take for granted and that have steadily improved for 100 years are grinding to a halt.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): My hon. Friend is setting out clearly why the Opposition called for this important debate. Does he agree that the fact that for the first time since Victorian times we are seeing life expectancy falling for the poorest women in the most disadvantaged communities in our country, where the cuts have been heaviest, is a sad indictment of nine years of Conservative rule?

Jonathan Ashworth: Absolutely. Not only are there indications that advances in life expectancy are going backwards, particularly for women, but the Institute for Fiscal Studies has been quite clear today in launching its Deaton review:

“In 2001, women born in the 10% most affluent areas could expect to live 6.1 years longer than women born in the 10% most deprived areas; by 2016, the gap stood at 7.9 years.”

That is why we secured this debate.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making an excellent case. In my local authority, Sandwell, life expectancy is in the bottom 15% nationally and the childhood obesity rate is more than three times that of the best local authorities, yet although nationally the Government boast that they are investing money in the health service, public health spending seems to be left out. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is essential that there is a big boost to public health spending, so that local area health budgets do not have devastating long-term obligations in future?

Jonathan Ashworth: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and, typically, anticipates the argument I am going to make.

Advances in life expectancy look as though they are going backwards for some of the poorest in our communities, particularly women. Let me take as an example our infant mortality rates, which reflect the survival rates for the very sickest of small babies. Those mortality rates have risen again, for the second year in a row.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Two or three weeks ago I visited a food bank, one of the biggest in the west midlands, and what amazed me was that it had to provide clothing for babies, which struck me as very profound. In other words, at least 20,000 people in Coventry are using food banks, and that tells us the consequences on people's health. When they have to go to these centres for clothing and cots, does that not say something about austerity under this Government?

Jonathan Ashworth: It most certainly does. We are seeing a huge rise in the number of children living in poverty and an explosion not just in food bank use but in so-called baby banks, where parents arrive to pick up toys, nappies, and so on—even milk. It really is quite shameful.

We are also seeing an increase in the prevalence of mental health conditions among the poorest. Children and adults in the poorest areas are three times more likely to suffer mental health problems. We are also now seeing an increase in so-called “deaths of despair” for those in middle age, that is, deaths from suicide, drug and alcohol overdose, and alcohol liver disease. They are rising—[*Interruption.*] The Secretary of State says that that is not true, but it is in the report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies today.

Rates of premature mortality, including deaths linked to heart disease, lung cancers, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, are two times higher in the most deprived areas of England compared with the most affluent. Growing up and living in poverty means people get sick quicker and die sooner. It is shameful.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): I find the picture that my hon. Friend paints deeply disturbing. In my area in Reading, there is exactly the position that has been described by other colleagues; there is a 10-year gap in life expectancy in one town in the south of England between areas that are only two or three miles apart. Does he agree that it is now time for the Government to listen and take urgent action to address these serious problems that are linked to their own policies?

Jonathan Ashworth: Absolutely. Everybody accepts that advances in life expectancy cannot continue indefinitely, but we need urgent investigation into what is happening here in the United Kingdom. As Michael Marmot, the authority on these matters, says:

“Since 2010, this rate of increase has halved. Indeed, the increase has more or less ground to a halt.”

He goes on to say:

The first thing to say is that we have not reached peak life expectancy. A levelling off is not inevitable. In the Nordic countries, in Japan, in Hong Kong, life expectancy is greater than ours and continues to increase.”

We need to understand what is happening in the United Kingdom. Surely it can be no coincidence that this halt in life expectancy advances has come after nine years of desperate austerity in our society.

Many of us are puzzled by the fact that, although we know that growing up in poverty means that people get sick quicker and die sooner, and we all accept that it is shameful—the Prime Minister accepts that it is shameful and talked on the steps of Downing Street about wanting to tackle these burning injustices—the Government continue to cut public health services by £700 million, including cuts of £85 million in the current financial year.

The stark reality is that these inequalities are costing the NHS £4.8 billion a year, and we are seeing a growing burden of chronic ill health in society. The NHS long-term plan, with its many laudable goals and ambitions, is simply undeliverable without investment in local public health services and a reversal of these deep, swinging cuts.

Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is disgraceful that while we are talking about all those cuts to the health service the Government have provided more than £4 billion in tax giveaways to alcohol companies, which is the equivalent of the salaries of 160,000 nurses?

Jonathan Ashworth: As my hon. Friend indicates, government is about choices. The Government have chosen to give big tax cuts to some of the richest and most privileged people in society while cutting the public health services on which the most vulnerable rely. That tells us all we need to know about the Tory approach to the national health service.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend has eloquently linked poverty and life expectancy. Does he agree that when we look at statistics such as the 64,000 people who die prematurely as a result of air pollution, that is focused on poorer people who live near busy roads? When we look at people who die from diabetes who have been force-fed processed foods, there is another correlation. The common theme is partly the support that the Government give to manufacturers of sugar, diesel and so on. That disproportionately hits poorer areas and ends up killing more people.

Jonathan Ashworth: The House has no greater champion of clean air than my hon. Friend. He is quite right—we have to tackle the wider social determinants of ill health, including pollution. We would introduce a clean air Bill. I am disappointed that the Government do not seem to agree that that is necessary.

I shall run through—[*Interruption.*] The Secretary of State is chuntering. He will have a chance to respond to the points that I have made. We all accept that smoking

is a No. 1 cause of ill health and early death, causing about 115,000 deaths a year. Some 480,000 hospital admissions are attributable to smoking, which is an increase of 6% since 2013. That costs the NHS £2.5 billion a year—it costs primary care £1 billion and social care £760 million—but because of public health cuts, smoking cessation services in communities have faced cuts of £3 million. Over half of local authorities have been forced to cut services. Some local authorities have had to decommission smoking cessation services altogether, and 100,000 smokers no longer have access to any local authority-commissioned support. The number of people using smoking cessation services to help them quit has decreased by 11%—the sixth year in a row that the figure has fallen.

That means that smoking cessation services are, in the words of *The BMJ*,

“withering on the vine as councils are forced to redeploy funding to other areas”

Those cuts will lead to the risk of more people developing cancer and to higher costs for the NHS. It is a similar story with drug and alcohol services, which have seen cuts of £162 million, with more cuts to come this year.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): A family came to see me to tell me about their alcoholic son who, in the past year, had been taken to hospital by ambulance 35 times, and had spent four weeks over that year in hospital. All that they wanted was support services to help him get his addiction under control. The urgent care was there, but that was not good enough for them. It is devastating for him, but it makes no financial sense for the NHS.

Jonathan Ashworth: My hon. Friend makes an eloquent and powerful point. She is absolutely right. It makes absolutely no sense to cut alcohol addiction services, as that fails a number of vulnerable people in society and only increases pressures on the wider NHS.

The NHS recognises the pressures on alcohol services. It announced in its long-term plan that it wanted to roll out alcohol care teams in hospitals—a proposal that I made at the Labour party conference last year. At the same time, public health budgets are cutting alcohol addiction services in our communities. Years of investment under the Labour Government in drug and alcohol treatment and recovery centres helped to reduce HIV, hepatitis and drug-related deaths, and also helped to reduce drug-related crime and wider social harms. Yet the number of those receiving treatment and in recovery for alcohol problems has fallen by 17% since 2013. When alcohol misuse costs wider society £18 billion a year in crime and lost productivity, and when drug misuse is also a factor in so much crime, surely these cuts represent the very worst type of short-term thinking—cutting proven preventive services for a short-term saving but ignoring the bigger and longer-term human and financial cost.

What about weight management programmes? The Government pride themselves on their obesity strategy, but when the NHS spends £5 billion on obesity, when there are 617,000 hospital admissions because of obesity, when 18% of hospital beds are occupied by a person with diabetes, when 25% of care home residents have diabetes, and when we have one of the worst childhood

obesity rates in western Europe, why are weight management programmes being cut in communities? One GP told *Pulse* magazine:

“This is crazy. It makes conversations between GPs and patients very difficult. They say, “you tell me that I need to lose weight, but the only help you can give me is advice and a diet sheet printed off Google.”

Another GP told *Pulse*:

“You try to refer someone for bariatric surgery but they can only have it if they’ve undergone 12 months of a weight management programme—but there isn’t one.”

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): My hon. Friend is doing very well. Does he agree that movement is medicine and we need far more physical activity strategies in our NHS? For instance, if we had more ParkRun activities, particularly in working class neighbourhoods, that would help a lot in improving health inequalities in many parts of the country.

Jonathan Ashworth: Absolutely. I hazard a guess that when the Secretary of State stands up, he will talk about the support for social prescribing that he has given to general practice so that GPs can send people for more of this activity. But, at the same time, public health budgets are cutting these very types of activities. One hand does not know what the other hand is doing.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): I met Professor Paul Gately of Leeds Beckett University, who set up the applied obesity research centre. He also established Europe’s longest-running weight loss camp for young people, although only the better-off families can now afford it. He asked me to ask my hon. Friend and the Secretary of State why the sugar tax cannot be used to fund some of that work.

Jonathan Ashworth: That is an entirely sensible proposal, and I look forward to the Secretary of State’s thoughts on it. The sugar tax is supposed to be funding more physical activities for young people across the country.

At a time of rising demand, we have also seen £55 million cut from sexual health services. That has meant that half of councils have reduced the number of sites commissioning contraceptive services, with the result that 6 million women of reproductive age live in an area where one or more services have been closed. Prescriptions of long-acting reversible contraceptives—the most effective form of contraception—have decreased by 8% at the same time as abortion rates for women over 30 have been steadily increasing. We have seen an increase in sexually transmitted infections such as syphilis and gonorrhoea while, because of cuts, the number of sexual health checks has dropped by 245,000. I was particularly shocked to hear the evidence given recently at the Health and Social Care Committee by Dr Olwen Williams from the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV, who said:

“We are seeing neonatal syphilis for the first time in decades and neonatal deaths due to syphilis in the UK... We are seeing an increase in women who are presenting with infectious syphilis in pregnancy, and that has dire outcomes.”

That was the evidence presented to the Committee about the impact of these cuts on sexual health services in communities.

[Jonathan Ashworth]

What about the cuts to health visitor numbers? Last week, we heard concerns across the House about falling vaccination rates, which fell for the fourth time in a row. Vaccinations are one of the most important public health interventions we can make, and our health visitor workforce is vital to ensuring their take-up. Yet public health cuts and wider local authority cuts have meant that we have lost 25% of our health visitors. Every 12 hours since October 2015, we have lost one health visitor, and there are no proposals to reverse those cuts in the long-term plan. School nurse numbers have gone down, and the case loads of health visitors and school nurses are increasing. As a consequence, parents and small children are missing out. According to the Government's own figures, 14.5% of children are not receiving a six to eight-week review on time, and 24% are not receiving a 12-month review on time. With high caseloads, there are increased risks of abuse or poor health of babies not being picked up, of maternal mental health issues not being picked up and of domestic violence and trauma not being picked up.

We need investment in the wider public health workforce and we need to expand training opportunities. The Government should honour their commitment to pay the public health workforce properly, and especially those on "Agenda for Change" terms and conditions. Last year, when the Government announced a pay increase for staff, they said they would honour that for all public health staff working for local authorities or in the voluntary sector. We are now told that the Government and the NHS are refusing to honour a pay rise this year. I hope the Secretary of State will tell us whether all public health staff employed on "Agenda for Change" terms and conditions will get a pay rise this year.

We are pleased that the Secretary of State has joined us today from the leadership campaign trail. We look forward to his response but, whenever he is asked about public health cuts, he says, "Well, prevention is better than cure." Who would disagree with that? He never tells us that he is going to stand up to the Chancellor and demand that these cuts be reversed. He simply says that individuals' attitudes have to change. But it is not just about individuals; it is about the services that are available in local communities. He gives the impression that he just wants people to look after themselves. For example, he said that those who present at hospital with ailments related to alcohol abuse will be targeted for a "stern talking to"—that is his answer. He needs to take it up with *The Sunday Times* if that was not what he said.

We know that the Secretary of State loves an app, and one of his solutions is more targeted advertising on Facebook. Whenever there is a problem in the NHS, he says that we are going to have more apps; that is the solution to everything. I am told that he and his old friend George Osborne are now part of a WhatsApp group called "Make Matt Hancock Great Again"—there are some problems that even an app cannot fix.

This is not leadership. Real leadership would be reversing the cuts to public health services and intervening to stop the health inequalities and the rolling back of life expectancy advances. Only Labour is offering that leadership on health inequalities. We will fully fund public health services. We will not cut public health services.

We will adopt a health in all policies approach; this Government will not. We will invest in the health and wellbeing of every child and meet our ambition to have the healthiest children in the world. Longer, healthier, happier lives will be our mission. I commend our motion to the House.

4.18 pm

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): It is a great pleasure to respond to this Opposition day debate on health. It is worth saying at the start that, for all we have heard from the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth), today's debate gives the House the chance to discuss the record £33.9 billion of extra funding that we are putting into health services in the UK, how we are going to spend that money and what we will do to improve the nation's health.

I will respond to the many points that the hon. Gentleman made and explain why it is important to look at the facts when debating these things, but let me start by being crystal clear about what he is trying to do. This debate should start from a point of welcoming the record investment that is going into the NHS. Instead, all we get is Opposition Members talking down the NHS. I will get on to the details but, before I do, let us remember why we can put £33.9 billion extra into the NHS. It is because we have a strong economy, with record employment, not through increasing the tax that people pay, but by having more people in work paying income tax. *[Interruption.]* I hear those on the Opposition Front Bench say "No", but just this morning we have seen record numbers of jobs—yet again, record numbers of women in work and record numbers across the board—which means that we can have this money.

It was Gordon Brown who said, "When you lose control of the public finances, it's the most vulnerable who pay the price". It is certainly true that we have had to do a big job of fixing the public finances, but now we are able to put in this record investment to be able to make sure that the NHS is always there in the future.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Change UK): I am grateful that the right hon. Gentleman has confirmed that this investment in the NHS, which we should all welcome, is as a result of an improvement in our economy and has absolutely nothing to do with what was written on the side of a bus. In other words, whether or not we leave the European Union, does he agree that this money is guaranteed to go to the NHS and it has nothing to do with Brexit?

Matt Hancock: Yes. We can only fund a stronger health service and we can only fund strong public services if we have a strong economy and that would be put at risk by the recklessness of the Labour party. Let us talk about the details of how we are going to improve healthcare in this country, but let us say first and foremost that we can fund public services only if we can ensure that the economy is run well.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Would the Secretary of State like to address the issues that my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) raised? We are seeing a flatlining of life expectancy, with the infant mortality rate having increased for the first time in 100 years. Will he address that in his response, please?

Matt Hancock: As I have said, I will come on to the details because there is undoubtedly work to do. Normally, we work on these issues in a fairly non-partisan way across the aisle. If we take tackling the problems of children of alcoholics, the hon. Member for Leicester South and I have worked together on that, and I pay tribute to the work he has done. In fact, he normally comes to this Chamber—as he did yesterday, for instance—in a spirit of discussion and objectivity to try to improve the health of our constituents. He is normally an extremely reasonable man. He is a very nice man. I know that he agrees far more with me than he does with his own party leader. Generally, he takes the approach of being constructive. I accept, and we accept, that improvements need to be made and we on this side of the House are determined to make those improvements, but we have to start from a basis of objective fact.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): The Secretary of State is making a really powerful case. On mortality, I would say that, far from the age going down in Somerset, it is going up. This is a good thing, but the conditions from which people are suffering are getting more complex. This is something we have to address. Indeed, I know the Government are seriously looking at it with many of the models they are bringing in.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab) *rose—*

Matt Hancock: I will give way in a moment, if I may just make a bit of progress.

Of course extending healthy life expectancies is a central goal of the Government, and we will move heaven and earth to make it happen. Yes, that does involve ensuring that the entire budget of the NHS—not just the public health budget, important though it is, but the entire budget of the NHS—and all those who work in it are focused more on preventing ill health. The entire long-term plan of the NHS, which sets out how we are going to spend all the extra taxpayers' money that is going in, is about focusing the entire NHS more on prevention than on cure. To choose just to look at the public health grant—it is important, but it is smaller by far than the entire budget of the NHS—is entirely to miss the point.

Clive Efford: The right hon. Gentleman must accept that it is not acceptable that, in the fifth richest economy in the world, life expectancy has flatlined across the country and in some areas has actually gone backwards. Is that not an indication that wider policy approaches by this Government than just those on health are not working?

Matt Hancock: It is true that across the western world the incredible rise in life expectancy is continuing but the rate of improvement has slowed. Our task here is to ensure that we extend healthy life expectancies.

Clive Efford *rose—*

Matt Hancock: I have taken the hon. Gentleman's point. That is the purpose of the entire prevention agenda: to help people to stay healthy in the first place.

Let me give a few examples. The hon. Member for Leicester South talked about deaths of despair, and each one of those suicides is a preventable tragedy, but he did not mention that the suicide rate in this country

is the lowest it has been in seven years. We should be celebrating that while also resolving to drive it down further. Similarly, he talked about some of the sexually transmitted infections that are rising around the world, including in America, France and Belgium, but he did not mention that STIs overall are down. Indeed, HIV is down very significantly, and the UK is one of the leading countries in tackling HIV. It is important to look at the objective facts and not just pick out some. Of course there are STIs that we must tackle, and we will, but we must look at the overall picture. I will give one more objective fact: the number of attendances at sexual health clinics has gone up. That is one of the reasons why STIs overall are down.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): When will the Secretary of State meet his commitment to expand the PrEP—pre-exposure prophylaxis—impact trial? He made that commitment some time ago but it has still not been delivered.

Matt Hancock: Yes, I have made that commitment and we have made that available. The NHS is doing its part but some local authorities have not yet chosen to make that available and, because sexual health services are delivered through local authorities, I cannot direct that to happen. What I can do is ensure that I play my part, and I have.

Neil Coyle: I thank the Secretary of State for giving way again; he is being generous. The bottom line here is that there are men who have contracted HIV as a direct result of PrEP not being available. He must get a grip on the situation because he cannot keep passing the buck to local councils. He does have the resources and it is his commitment.

Matt Hancock: We have made those resources available. The resources from the NHS to make PrEP available have been put forward. I find it deeply frustrating that in many areas that has not yet been delivered by local councils. We are working with local councils and urging them to take up the offer that is already available from the NHS. I totally understand and share the hon. Gentleman's frustration. We are working to push local authorities to do this, but responsibility for public and sexual health services was transferred to local councils, as a result of a decision taken by this House. I am doing my part. I would love to work with him to ensure that it can actually be delivered on the ground because he is absolutely right that it is the right thing to do and the right direction to go in.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): The objective fact is that the public health grant has gone down by £700 million between 2014-15 and 2019-20. If a person gets on the tube at Westminster station and travels to Whitechapel station in my constituency, average life expectancy drops by six months at every stop. That is the reality in constituencies such as mine. My appeal to the Secretary of State, if he is serious about tackling health inequalities, is to back local authorities with the resources they need.

Matt Hancock: The public health grant is of course an important part of this, but it is only one part. The overall funding of the NHS is rising by £33.9 billion,

[*Matt Hancock*]

the first £6.2 billion of which came on stream last month. I understand the hon. Lady's point. That is on the money. On the health inequalities, I entirely agree with her that they should be tackled. Doing so is at the heart of the NHS long-term plan. It is a vital task that we do not shirk. Indeed, we embrace it and are addressing it.

Let me turn to the details of the motion. While I care deeply about making sure that we have the best possible health in this nation and the strongest possible NHS—and we are prepared to put the resources in to see that happen—I also care about good governance of the nation. The way that we are run is one of the reasons this country has been strong over generations, and I believe that using the Humble Address to undermine the ability of experts, clinicians, and civil servants to give me the benefit of their frank and wise advice not only undermines me as Secretary of State, but makes it harder to make good decisions. I know the shadow Secretary of State sits on the Front Bench with revolutionaries, but I thought he was a grown-up. I do not know what his mentor, Lord Mandelson, would make of his posturing today. Of course, we will object to the motion and, if he searched the depths of his heart, he would too.

The hon. Gentleman has obviously had a missive from the Leader of the Opposition's office—LOTO, as it is called—telling him to present the Humble Address, but it is not his style. I hope that we can get back to debating these issues on a proper motion in the future. I respect and like the hon. Gentleman: he is a really nice guy. If he had asked for the information directly—perhaps he could have sent me a message on the app—

Jonathan Ashworth: I'm not on it.

Matt Hancock: Now that is an insult! There are only two types of people in the world—the people who are on the Matt Hancock app and the people who are not on the Matt Hancock app yet. I can see that the hon. Gentleman falls into the latter category. I digress.

If the hon. Gentleman had asked for the information directly, I would have been more than happy to provide it. To show willingness, I am happy to provide the House with the information requested in the motion. We will republish the impact assessments on the public health grant. They have already been published, but I am happy to do that. We will republish the Office for National Statistics stats and the Public Health England report on life expectancy. We will publish a statement on the “Agenda for Change” decision that he mentioned. It had been released already this week, as it happens, before we saw the motion.

If the hon. Gentleman wants to know about the “Agenda for Change” pay rises, I am delighted to keep talking about them. Perhaps he should ask the 1 million NHS staff who last month received a pay rise of up to 29%, including £2,000 extra a year for new full-time nurses. That came into force at the start of last month. I will debate with him the “Agenda for Change” pay rises any day of the week. Because the Government are running a strong economy, we can afford to put the money in to make sure that under “Agenda for Change” nurses get the pay rise they deserve.

Jonathan Ashworth: I am delighted that the Secretary of State wants me to join his Make Matt Hancock Great Again WhatsApp group. Please add me to it. Perhaps in the group I can get some style tips from him, because he looked rather Alan Partridge-esque in the photos on Friday. I digress.

On Agenda for Change, it was reported in the *Health Service Journal* that the Government will not honour the pay rise for public health staff such as health visitors, sexual health staff and school nurses—all the sort of staff we have been talking about this afternoon—and that there was a dispute between NHS England and the sector about who will fund that £50 million pay rise. Is he telling us today that the Government will honour that pay rise for public health staff working in public health services?

Matt Hancock: We are honouring the pay rise proposed—of course we are. I love the *HSJ*, which is an absolutely terrific journal, but it was wide of the mark on that. We are putting in record funding.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): The Secretary of State has done well in getting the extra money that the NHS needs. Will he briefly summarise what extra service and capacity we will get for that money? It is important to spend it wisely.

Matt Hancock: My right hon. Friend anticipates my very next point. It is important to get value for the extra taxpayers' money we put in. I always try to refer to it as taxpayers' money, because there is no Government money or NHS money. Every single penny we put into the NHS—rightly, in my view—comes from the taxes that people pay, and it should be treated with the respect that that deserves.

Geraint Davies: The thesis of a strong NHS is based on a strong economy, yet will he accept that under this Government since 2010 overall debt has gone from 45% of GDP to nearly 90% of GDP? It is not about tax; it is just borrowed money from a failing economy.

Matt Hancock: No. I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of clean air, but I gently point out that dealing with the deficit—the annual amount by which the Government was overspending—is, and must be, the precursor to getting the debt down. Now, thankfully, the debt is falling relative to the economy, but there has been an awful lot of hard work to get us there.

Let us look at some of the things the NHS is delivering. The entire population now has access to evening and weekend GP appointments. More than a million GP appointments a month are now booked online, and consultation increasingly takes place online. More than three million repeat prescriptions are done online. There are more than 2 million more operations a year than in 2010, and we see 11.5 million more out-patient appointments than in 2010. Since last year, more than 500 extra beds a day have been freed up in hospitals.

When it comes to the future, only yesterday we announced that a new treatment aid for brain cancer can be rolled out across the country, benefiting up to 2,000 patients, all because of the extra money we are putting in. My right hon. Friend the Member for

Wokingham (John Redwood) is quite right that in return for the extra taxpayers' money we are putting in, we must get extra out, too.

Dr Paul Williams (Stockton South) (Lab): Extra investment in the NHS is welcome, but when will the Secretary of State start talking about health visitors, school nurses, drug treatment services and other services funded out of the public health grant—the topic of the debate?

Matt Hancock: The public health grant is settled in the spending review. The NHS settlement has come before the spending review, and the public health grant is only one part of the approach to public health. In 2015, this House agreed, with broad acceptance across parties—I know the hon. Gentleman was not in the House then—that local authorities should take responsibilities for public health, to ensure that the entirety of local authority activity could be focused on better public health.

Public health is not just what happens in the NHS, with councils or in GP surgeries or hospitals. For instance, the Government have taken a global lead in getting social media companies to remove suicide and self-harm content online because of the danger that poses to people's mental health, and in particular that of children and young people. That is a public health issue. Likewise, the efforts we are making to reduce air pollution in the environment Bill—a broader piece of legislation than just a clean air Act—are about a public health matter. It is not in the public health grant, but it is a public health matter.

Geraint Davies *rose*—

Anna Soubry *rose*—

Matt Hancock: I give way first to the right hon. Lady.

Anna Soubry: As a former Public Health Minister, I understand the huge remit of what we call public health. The Secretary of State is right that we should invest more in prevention, particularly with regard to certain diseases and conditions, but the real concern about the Government's plan is that, while that is happening, all the other important services not in the “prevention is better than cure” envelope, such as sexual health and the treatment of alcohol and smoking, delivered at a local level, will be cut in real terms.

Matt Hancock: I respect the right hon. Lady's work as Public Health Minister—she was excellent in that role—and I was going to turn to this point. It is very important that we understand the base we are starting from, but we also have the spending review, in which these budgets will be settled, and that is clearly an important cross-Government question that we will be addressing in the coming months.

Smoking cessation services have been mentioned. Now, the smoking rate has fallen since 2010 from 20.1% of the population to 14.9%, which is excellent, although it is part of a fall over a generation, not just the last 10 years. Likewise, the drug use rate has fallen from over 10% to 8.5%. We have to provide the services for those we still need to get off smoking and to support people to stop using drugs, but the number of people smoking and using drugs has fallen too.

On clean air, the World Health Organisation has called the clean air strategy we published an example for the rest of the world to follow, so I think in this area the necessary action we are taking should be being welcomed across this Chamber.

Geraint Davies: I know the Secretary of State accepts that the environment Bill is the vehicle to deliver cleaner air, but is he aware that, as it stands, it does not include indoor air quality? Given that we spend 90% of our time inside and that the medical research now shows a cocktail effect of outdoor dirty air conflating with indoor air that has poisons in it—from sprays, cleaning products, chemicals in furniture and all the rest—if we are to properly tackle the problem of dirty air causing 64,000 deaths a year, indoor air quality has to be included in the environment Bill. Will he press the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to ensure that it is?

Matt Hancock: The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and I are working incredibly closely on this because clean air is a public health matter. The challenge is that, although measuring outdoor air quality is essentially a public matter and in public buildings it may well be a public matter, inside most people's homes it is far harder to make a direct intervention, but I accept the premise of the hon. Gentleman's point. It may be something we can look at in public spaces. *[Interruption.]* He mentions schools and hospitals. I accept the premise of that point and I think it is something we can take away. The same is true inside vehicles, but that is a wider question.

Anna Soubry: I want to come back to the Secretary of State's answer to my intervention. I am worried because, if I may say so, it is rather simplistic to say—I think this is what he said—that because the levels are falling we can accordingly reduce the amount of money being spent on those services. I would suggest that he listen to the experts and the evidence, because I suspect they will say that we must continue to invest to make sure those reductions continue and to take account of any eventualities. Police spending is a good example of how Government can cut too far.

Matt Hancock: I am glad I took that intervention because that was not the intention I was trying to convey at all. We need to do more to tackle smoking, and we will, and we need to continue to tackle the abuse of drugs, and we will. My argument is that this House decided that public health was better delivered through a broad approach by local councils working with the NHS than separately. On sexual health services, I gently say that many such services—for instance, the provision of PrEP—are preventive, not just reactive. However, the boundary between what is prevention and what is cure in sexual health services is, by nature, more complicated.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): May I take up that issue of prevention? Earlier this afternoon, the Secretary of State said that he would move heaven and earth to achieve healthy outcomes. When will we see a ban on junk food advertising before the watershed?

Matt Hancock: We have not discussed obesity much during this debate, but the Government have a whole programme to tackle it. That includes tackling advertising

[*Matt Hancock*]

and, in particular, tackling the pro-obesity environment in which too many children grow up. There is a broad range of actions on our agenda, with more to come.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Matt Hancock: I will give way one final time, but I want to leave some time for Back-Bench speeches.

Rachael Maskell: The Secretary of State has boasted about the amount of money that is going into the NHS, but the Government have transferred public health services to local authorities, whose funding is being slashed, and as a result funding for those services is also being cut. Can the Secretary of State say how much of that NHS money will support the role of local authorities in delivering the public health agenda?

Matt Hancock: Local authorities and the NHS work very closely in delivering a huge number of services, and authorities often commission services back from the NHS. I can tell the hon. Lady that between 2013 and 2017, the number of attendances at sexual health centres increased by 13%. The suggestion made by many Opposition Members that there has been a cut in the number of such attendances is not supported by the facts.

We will not rest until we can solve these problems.

Nick Smith: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Matt Hancock: We are putting money in, and we are putting commitment in. The NHS was proposed from this Dispatch Box by a Conservative Minister, under a Conservative Prime Minister, and its expansion has been overseen by Conservative Governments for most of its 71-year history.

Nick Smith: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. The Secretary of State is not giving way, and we are running out of time.

Matt Hancock: Once again, a Conservative Government are expanding the NHS and planning for the future to ensure that it will always be there for us, with a record £33.9 billion investment and a focus on preventing ill health in the first place. I believe that, from the bottom of our hearts, we all know that we need to deliver.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Before I call the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), I should give a gentle warning to colleagues. Obviously a great many people want to speak, and there is limited time, so there will be an initial speaking time limit of six minutes. I give that warning in advance so that speeches can be restructured.

4.48 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is an absolute pleasure to speak on behalf of the Scottish National party and to see you in your place, Madam Deputy Speaker.

As we know, public health campaigns can be extremely successful. They make health improvements in a widespread manner; individual interventions do not have the same effect. However, the work of public health campaigns and departments is not always visible. It tends to take place behind the scenes. Constituents do not often speak to their MPs about these issues. Very infrequently has anyone come to my door to ask about a cervical screening appointment, or about our campaigns and work on obesity. Public health is not the most visible area of our NHS, unlike the frontline issues of access to treatments, accident and emergency waiting lists and access to GP appointments. It does not have the profile that it ought to have, and it certainly does not feature the sensationalism on which the media often want to report. However, it is important to say that public health is fundamental to the health of the nation. Therefore, public health should not be underestimated and should certainly never be underfunded.

Since 2006-07, the annual health resource budget has increased in Scotland by £4.8 billion, and the Scottish Government have passed all consequential on to health and care. Funding for NHS boards will increase again by £430 million—an increase of 4.2%—and the package of investments in health and social care in Scotland for integration programmes will be £700 million to the better. Health spending per head in Scotland is almost 9% higher than in England, according to Treasury analysis in 2018.

Investment in primary care is essential; our GPs are at the frontline and it is important that we increase funding for that. The Scottish Government have invested over £930 million in primary care, and £30 million will be invested to extend the free personal care individuals have in Scotland to the under-65s. Some £11.1 million will be provided to increase nursing and midwifery bursaries from £8,100 to £10,000 the following year. Again, midwives and nursing staff are on the frontline of our public health achievements.

Young families across Scotland receive the opportunity to have a baby box as soon as their baby is delivered, which is fundamentally to the good; it is about saying, “We know your baby is born; it is the most valuable thing in your life and we want every baby in Scotland to have the same start and to reduce the inequality we know impacts on people’s lives and families.”

We also need to increase our sportscotland funding, and there has been a pledge of 3%. We have discussed obesity today. I was a member of the Health and Social Care Committee when it was looking at the issue, and again this underlines the importance we must place on public health investment. Advertising and marketing campaigns overshadow the work we are able to do because of the huge investment the industry puts into encouraging people to eat and to feed their children the wrong types of food and to give ourselves treats many more times than we should. I have fallen foul of that, particularly since arriving in the House of Commons; our Tea Room has far too many little treats at the

counter. These are all things we grapple with as families and individuals, and that is why it is so important that public health and public health campaigns are supported.

I am pleased to learn more about the Government's nudge unit. The UK Government has put some investment into psychological approaches to public health and to health, and I was pleased to meet a member of the nudge unit a few months ago at the all-party group on psychology, which I chair, because we must try to help people shape their behaviours and make it as easy as possible to make the right decisions moving forward. Making the right decisions is difficult anyway, but things such as having the opportunity to have a piece of chocolate at the till when we are making purchases makes it that little bit more difficult for people to make the choices we know they need to make. Public health and taking responsibility for our health is all about shaping behaviour: making those choices ourselves through our motivation, but also the Government helping to shape the society we live in and make sure that the easy choices are the healthy choices.

It is important that we raise as much awareness as possible of mental health, particularly in this week, Mental Health Awareness Week. This has often been about communities plugging gaps, however. Progress has been made across the UK, but community mental health service waiting times are still far too long, particularly for young people and adolescents awaiting access to child and adolescent mental health services. That is why there has to be a partnership between public health, health services, voluntary agencies and others in the community.

An example is the Trust Jack Foundation in my constituency, which was formed following the tragic suicide of a young person in my constituency, Jack. His mother came through that terrible trauma and created the foundation, which enables young people in Stonehouse and elsewhere in Lanarkshire to have access to mental health services while they are on the waiting list for CAMHS, and it is really making a difference by giving them the support they need and the earliest possible intervention.

On disability, we must pay cognisance to the fact that those who are disabled are much more likely to be living in poverty than those who do not have disabilities. It is important to take account of that, because people who have disability have less access to the workplace, to transport, to adapted housing and even to shops, because in some cases, Changing Places toilets are not available in our shops. They also have less access to getting about, because Changing Places toilets and facilities and accessible transport are often not available. All those factors contribute to the impact of poverty on people with disability, and we need a joined-up approach across Departments if we are to make a difference.

I want to speak briefly about homelessness. I cannot help but notice that every time I arrive here in Westminster each day, there are people sleeping at the underground station just outside the entrance to Westminster. I have also noticed that, a number of times, there have been flowers left for those who have died there. It is incumbent on us all, as MPs and as a Government, to notice what is right in front of our eyes and to act to ensure that those homeless people have opportunities and that their health and wellbeing are cared for.

I want to touch briefly on the subject of older adults. Public health campaigns will have to focus on and target older adults in the years to come. We are living longer by virtue of the good health we enjoy as a result of the interventions, treatments and technologies that are now available, but chronic illnesses will be with people for longer and affect many more people.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree with a point made to me by a number of my older constituents at an event last week, which is that we need to ensure that sports facilities are providing the right encouragement and opportunities to keep older people active for longer, given that that is crucial for public health goals?

Dr Cameron: Yes, that is an absolutely fantastic point. I was going to mention the fact that our local sports and leisure facility has an agreement with the NHS that GPs can prescribe sports facilities to people so that they can have an exercise regime designed specifically for them. If they can benefit from such a regime, that can maximise their health. All these things actually save money in the long term, and that is why public health is so crucial. We really are investing for the good of the nation.

From my own experience of working in addiction services many years ago, I know that we have to take on board the fact that there are huge levels of comorbidity with mental health. Often, people in addiction services have a history of trauma. They are self-medicating with alcohol or drugs, and they are not coping with life due to their underlying mental health issues. However, those very same people are often refused access to mental health services treatment until they have dealt with their addiction. That is a circular argument, and those who are struggling with mental health and addiction problems never really get the support that they need or deserve. That is why integrated services in relation to addiction are so important.

Diana Johnson: I am interested to hear about what is happening with drug and alcohol services in Scotland, particularly the 9% budget increase that the hon. Lady mentioned. Has she had the same experience that I have had in Hull, where more and more people on the streets seem to be taking Spice, which turns them in an obvious way into someone who is taking drugs and which is causing real problems on the streets? Is that happening in Scotland as well? We have seen an 18% cut in drug and alcohol services since 2013.

Dr Cameron: This is always a difficult situation, because when people self-medicate, they tend to take the drugs that are available. They may take something that has an impact on their behaviour and personality, which may then have an impact on their life if they become involved in crime and so on. The types of drugs that are coming on to the market seem to lower people's inhibitions, so they can get into terrible difficulties with the criminal justice system, but their difficulties—their underlying trauma and addiction—are not dealt with. That money is welcome, but we have a long way to go to ensure that we also deal with other issues.

Finally, it is important not to forget about our veterans when it comes to public health. These individuals who have served us may be invisible, silent or hidden in the background, but they need interventions and they need

[Dr Cameron]

us to reach out. I wanted to mention the excellent Veterans First Point service in Lanarkshire for providing counselling without a waiting list to our local veterans to ensure that their needs are met.

I thank everybody who will take part in this extremely important and timely debate. The more that we can do in terms of public health, the better success we will have in years to come in dealing with inequality and the underlying issues that mean those in our society who did not get the best start do not get the chances that they deserve. We can achieve that only by working together on a cross-Government basis, with local councils and within communities, and I look forward to working with everybody in the Chamber who has an interest in moving this issue forward to ensure that progress is made.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. As I indicated earlier, there will be an immediate time limit of six minutes.

5.2 pm

Suella Braverman (Fareham) (Con): I am pleased to speak in this debate about local public health, but the Opposition are seriously off target in calling for it in the first place. Of all Government budgets, the NHS has had record investment since 2010 and, although I am not going to do Labour Members' work for them, there are stronger cases that could have been made about public funding in other Departments. When we look at public health outcomes since 2010, the Conservatives can point to a good record. The Labour party does not have a monopoly on our health service. There is this assumption that Labour somehow knows best and that the solution is simply more cash and more managers, but that is not true at all. I grew up as a proud Conservative and as a daughter of an NHS nurse—my mother worked for the NHS for 45 years. The NHS has been there for my family, for me and for my baby to be, which is due in July. I love the NHS, and just because I am on the Conservative side of the Chamber does not diminish my commitment to it whatsoever.

I want to speak about Fareham, where there are definite challenges when it comes to health services, such as with the mental health services provided by the Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust. I want to put on the record my gratitude to the Secretary of State for meeting me on behalf of some of the families who have been affected by Southern Health's issues. When it comes to social care, I have met many relatives of elderly residents for whom the system has not worked well, a subject that I discussed in the Chamber some weeks ago.

Notwithstanding those challenges, I want to talk about a fantastic facility in my constituency called Fareham Community Hospital, and I am using my speech to launch a report that I have prepared about a future vision for how we can use the hospital better. When I was first elected in 2015, the No. 1 issue was how to make better use of Fareham Community Hospital. It is a relatively small, relatively new facility in the heart of the constituency, but it remains underutilised, according to several footfall surveys we have conducted. Rooms are frequently booked

by various health trusts but still lie vacant, at considerable cost to the taxpayer. Complex lease arrangements render the release of space time-consuming and bureaucratic. There is no coherent public information system or public-facing management to signpost services for local people.

Random and sporadic services are offered. Most recently, phlebotomy and blood testing were removed, much to the disappointment of many residents and to Friends of Fareham Community Hospital, which plays a vital role in co-ordinating volunteers who want to support this asset. In short, the hospital is at risk of becoming a wasted opportunity and a wasted asset.

I set up a Fareham Community Hospital taskforce in 2015 to bring together many of the health providers: the local CCGs; Hampshire County Council; Solent NHS Trust; Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust; Friends of Fareham Community Hospital; Community Health Partnerships Ltd; Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust; and University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust. The sheer number of organisations reflects the complexity of how the hospital is run.

Last year, I ran a constituency-wide survey on how the community would like to see the hospital run better. I am grateful to the many hundreds of people and all the organisations that participated. I am pleased to launch the "Fareham Community Hospital Future Vision" report, which can be found on my website. The report compiles the survey, and it makes seven recommendations.

First, the report welcomes the new primary care same-day access scheme run by local GPs at the Jubilee, Whiteley and Highlands surgeries for the past 18 months, which is a reflection of the historic £4.5 billion commitment at national level for primary and community health. The scheme has been welcomed by the community, and it is working effectively. There is a call for it to be expanded to other GP surgeries. I put on record my thanks to Dr Tom Bertram for leading the initiative.

Secondly, the report recommends that more consideration be given to other clinical priorities. Scanning facilities and using the hospital as a diagnostic centre could be viable options for the future. Thirdly, public health functions should be considered at FCH. A public health hub could support patients with clinical obesity, depression, anxiety and other conditions. Lastly, accessibility is a key theme running through the responses. We need a bus stop at the hospital and a method to enable elderly and ill patients to get to it more easily.

Fareham Community Hospital is a great example of how a local asset is available to a community and how local health providers can come together to make it more responsive to local needs. I am pleased to launch the "Fareham Community Hospital Future Vision" report today, and I hope it provides a starting point for future work.

5.7 pm

Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Ind): The Secretary of State is right to say that the shadow Secretary of State is, indeed, a nice man, but he is far more than that. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) for the tremendous work that he and the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) have done on behalf of the children of alcoholics—they are making a tremendous difference.

I will focus on the impact of cuts to mental health services. At a time when there is a welcome all-party commitment to parity of esteem between mental health and physical health, there is an alarming gap between rhetoric and reality. Headline national figures too frequently do not reflect the experiences of people at the sharp end. It is widely acknowledged that mental health services were underfunded to start with, and the perpetual cuts we have seen have made matters worse.

A lethal cocktail of cuts to health and benefits has created a shameful epidemic of rough sleeping that is so evident in the towns and cities of our country. Specific Government funding, although welcome, is inadequate and no substitute for the savage cumulative cuts to mainstream services. It is paying for the damage caused by indiscriminate, disproportionate cuts.

I put on record our support for the tremendous leadership shown by the Mayor of Greater Manchester with his “a bed every night” initiative, but that will need considerably more investment from the Government if it is to achieve its noble objectives.

My “Talking About Mental Health” campaign in Bury South has attracted a lot of support from people with mental health issues and their families. It has illustrated a simple truth: one in four people experience mental health problems every year. The campaign is encouraging people to feel able to talk about their own experiences and is galvanising support to improve local services. Cuts have meant too often that people endure long waits for psychological therapy, and are unable to access appropriate in-patient and emergency services. Community support is scarce, and far from services being focused on prevention and early intervention, people can usually access services only in the event of a crisis. Relatives and carers are frequently left to struggle alone.

We have some excellent, innovative local voluntary services, such as the Creative Living Centre, Moodswings and The Friendship Circle, but they are underfunded and cannot be expected to meet the scale of the demand for support. A major concern is the state of child and adolescent mental health services. Although the Government’s pledge of an extra £1.4 billion to transform CAMHS in 2015 was welcome, work by YoungMinds has demonstrated that in the first year of extra funding only 36% of clinical commissioning groups that responded had increased their CAMHS spend by as much as that Government funding.

In my constituency, I am currently advocating on behalf of a number of local parents who have autistic children with mental health problems—I am sure other hon. Members have the same experience. These people are under unspeakable daily pressure, yet services consistently fail to meet their needs. In the light of it being Mental Health Awareness Week, I would like to read part of a blog written by my brave 19-year-old constituent Libby Bean, who describes the realities of living and coping with a mental health condition as follows:

“I found going to many psychologists that it just wasn’t working for me, I didn’t like the by the book exercises and help they would give me and treat my case like every other person as I believed it had to be adapted specifically for me. After several psychologists I tried this one amazing person that I had heard was great for anxiety. Me being me I said I’d try it because”—
it was just an opportunity—

“to get rid of my feelings of anxiety, I thought how this will be any different to what I have been through before, well I was wrong. This changed my life. They have helped me so much and have been the best support system.”

The point that I am making and that I think Libby is making is that health and local public service cuts are making it harder for people such as Libby to receive the tailored care and support that they need. A one-size-fits-all approach is always destined to fail; an issue as varied as mental health requires personalisation.

Supporting mental wellbeing should be at the heart of any responsible Government’s approach to building a better society. It requires health and local government leadership, and a joined-up, cross-government approach. It requires us to continue the tremendous progress that has been made in recent years in tackling stigma. It also requires the full engagement of employers in the public and private sectors. Parity of esteem and a shift to prevention and early intervention are noble objectives, but disproportionate cuts to local government and underfunding of the NHS mean that the reality is very different. Not only does this make vulnerable people even more vulnerable, but it corrodes trust in politicians and this place. I hope that the Secretary of State will give serious consideration in the future to ring-fencing funding for mental health, so that people at the sharp end genuinely see the benefits of extra funding that is announced at a national level.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): May I just say that to get everybody in and give them equal time, five minutes will be the order of the day?

5.13 pm

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Supporting the NHS and its values, and securing the best healthcare for my constituents, has always been one of my highest priorities as a Member of this place, so I warmly welcomed the news that the NHS would get the biggest increase in funding in its history, with a £20 billion cash boost. As we have heard today, the demands on our health service are increasing as we grow older as a society, and I would like to pay a warm tribute to all NHS staff, especially those working in and around my constituency at the Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals and in primary care. They do incredible work and we all owe them a great debt of gratitude. We need only to consider some of the statistics that the Secretary of State shared with us, such as the fact that the NHS currently sees 3.3 million more people attending at A&E than in 2010. The number of operations carried out is up dramatically, as are the number of diagnostic tests and out-patient appointments. The NHS is delivering more care than at any time in its 71-year history.

There is much that we should praise about the service but, as we have heard today, we should also acknowledge the challenges and the concern felt about waiting times, about access to new and innovative treatments, about caring for our frail elderly, about dealing with health inequalities and about action to improve outcomes for the most serious conditions, such as cancer. That is why the new funding and the new NHS plan are both so crucial. The goals set out in the NHS long-term plan will greatly improve patient care, and they should also boost productivity in the NHS to ensure that taxpayers’ money is used as effectively as possible and gets to the frontline care about which we all care so much. The key challenge now is to ensure that those goals are delivered in practice.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): Does the right hon. Lady agree that we also need to tackle the preventive measures covered by public health programmes? It is really important that we maintain public health spending and run smoking cessation programmes and others that prevent ill health from developing in future.

Theresa Villiers: I think there is cross-party support in the Chamber for effectively funding our NHS and public health. Both those spending areas will continue to be a priority for the Government.

I particularly welcome the Government's commitment that primary care and GP services are at the heart of the NHS long-term plan. GPs are very much in the frontline of increasing healthcare needs, and they are feeling the pressure. I want to see the Government's £4.5 billion commitment to primary care deliver expanded GP capacity in my Chipping Barnet constituency. The proposals for GPs to be able to call on support from teams of other professionals, such as district nurses and pharmacists, may play a helpful role in relieving the pressure on GP services.

If we are to ensure that patients can get appointments when they need them, we need to train and recruit more GPs. This need is even more intense in areas such as Whetstone in my constituency, where new homes are being built and patient rolls are getting longer. I would like to have the Minister's assurance that the Government's target to increase medical school places from 6,000 to 7,500 per year will be met. It is also vital to ensure that whatever reforms are introduced to our immigration system when we leave the EU, we ensure that the new system meets the needs of the NHS and ensures it can continue to bring in skilled professionals from the EU and beyond. It is also important to enable doctors to expand their buildings to improve facilities for patients, and I commend the plans to do so that GPs in High Barnet, Whetstone and elsewhere in my constituency are taking forward.

A third aspect of the NHS plan that I would warmly welcome is the improvement of digital capability, in which respect I wish to highlight an important success in my local area. In autumn last year, Chase Farm Hospital reopened in a brand new £200 million state-of-the-art building. It uses the most up-to-date digital facilities, and the new building is significantly improving patient care. It is situated just outside my constituency but used by many of my constituents and is part of the same trust as Barnet Hospital. I campaigned for many years to secure Chase Farm Hospital's future, and I welcome the great new facilities for my constituents.

I will always be the strongest supporter of the NHS and its values. This debate is an opportunity to celebrate the incredible achievements of our national health service and its staff, but also to recognise that there is a huge amount of work to be done to ensure that the NHS can continue to meet the needs of future populations. We should never ever forget that delivering a strong economy and strong public finances is imperative if we are to continue to have a strong NHS. It is the only way to deliver the funding that the NHS needs to provide the care on which we all depend. A strong economy is vital to ensure that our constituents get the best possible healthcare in the years ahead, and I urge the Government to ensure that they continue to deliver the economic stability and prosperity on which we all depend and on which the NHS depends for a successful future.

5.19 pm

Eleanor Smith (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): I thank the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) for raising her points.

Since 2010, we have seen the Government cut health services and social care by £7 billion. Because of this, we MPs have been seeing local cuts in our individual constituencies. Last week, a constituent of mine came to visit me during my surgery about a new policy that has come into effect. The policy states that a patient will no longer be given prescriptions for over-the-counter medicines for a range of health conditions, even if they qualify for a free prescription. I would say that that is a public health matter.

There are 33 conditions that are part of that policy, from acute sore throat, excessive sweating and period pains to warts and verrucas. My constituent is 64 and has various health conditions that stop her from working. She is on universal credit, which gives her £317 a month, which is much less than she would earn under the Government's national minimum wage if she were working part time. Because of her low income, she has had to use up all her savings and even pawn her jewellery, which holds sentimental value, to make ends meet. She recently went to her doctors for her hay fever medication and was told that she is no longer entitled to a free prescription. I feel that that is a public health matter. When she disputed the claim, she was told that under the NHS England guidelines they could no longer provide free prescriptions for mild to moderate hay fever.

As a nurse of 40 years, I am dismayed at how poorly NHS England and the Government publicised the consultation. Many people were unaware of this and it just sums up what the Government and their Departments seem to do. Backdoor and underhanded changes: these have been the steps the Government have been taking over the last nine years to move towards privatising the NHS. It brings me to tears to see the changes that NHS England is bringing in, which affect the most vulnerable. Socioeconomically deprived groups too often face the prospect of poorer access to healthcare, a public health matter.

We know that some of the conditions mentioned in the guidance are the first symptoms of more serious conditions and, if diagnosed too late, they can cause long-term complications for the patient, a public health matter. Did NHS England take into consideration single parents and those on low income who are on universal credit? How are they going to afford to pay for medication for themselves and their children under this new policy? That is a public health matter. It is unfair to them—having the right to free prescriptions was their safety net and one less problem to think about. Is this part of the Government's NHS 10-year plan? To punish the most vulnerable individuals in society? The Government need to review this policy again. It is short-sighted and will have repercussions for their 10-year plan within the public health agenda.

5.22 pm

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): The NHS is without a doubt a much-loved and vital service. Established almost 71 years ago, it has been under the stewardship of a Conservative Government for 44 of those years, almost two thirds of its existence. The NHS treats 1.4 million

patients every 24 hours. It is literally where we start our life, and a constant support and safety blanket throughout our lives. We simply could not live without it.

That is why the NHS is this Government's No. 1 spending priority. It is beyond question that this Government have provided the biggest investment ever into our NHS in the post-war period. The scale of the commitment is mind-blowing, at £33.9 billion extra in cash terms by 2023-24. If any other Government had done it they would have been celebrating it and would have spoken of little else. By 2023, we will be spending £157 billion a year—many billions of pounds more than the Opposition proposed.

My mother-in-law, who was a frequent user of the NHS in her later years, used to say to me “You have to be able to cope to be able to care.” I find her words very poignant when talking about our magnificent NHS, because it is vital that we maintain a strong economy to fund the NHS at these record-breaking levels. The biggest danger to the NHS in my view is a dangerous experiment with socialism coupled with a £1,000 billion spending commitment. The NHS will literally be competing with railways and utility companies and goodness knows what else for a pot of money which will be much smaller due to economic failure.

As someone who has worked in the private sector for most of her life, my approach is somewhat different. The private sector has to work well if the NHS is to have the funding that it needs. There are other lessons that are relevant in my experience. It is reasonable to assume that we can increase efficiency. There are many examples across the NHS and many new ways of working: multidisciplinary teams, primary care networks, integrated services, urgent care centres, Pharmacy First, online GP services, and much more innovation to come as part of the long-term plan.

Nowhere have I see that endeavour for excellence combined with efficiency more than in St Richard's Hospital in Chichester. I pay tribute to our wonderful staff and the phenomenal record of the whole Western Sussex Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, led brilliantly by Dame Marianne Griffiths. We are extremely proud that our hospital trust is rated outstanding, and was described as effective, caring and well led during its Care Quality Commission evaluation. It is not surprising that the trust has won awards. Over the past four years it has won best organisation in the health service, best education and training in patient safety, and the top hospital award. Marianne has won best chief executive two years running. We need that excellence in all our hospitals across the country.

Before I was elected to Parliament I was lucky to serve on the hospital trust board of governors, where I learned a great deal. Most importantly, I saw its can-do attitude and search for continuous improvement combined with sensible and inclusive leadership that ensured that it delivered great results. For those who doubt that the NHS can make efficiency savings year on year while maintaining top-quality services, Western Sussex Hospitals has managed a surplus every year but one since its creation in 2009, wiping out £20.5 million-worth of legacy debts.

West Sussex County Council has stepped up to the public health challenge, and only last month launched a new joint health and wellbeing strategy, “Start well, Live well, Age well”. Prevention through education is a

key component of our health and wellbeing. In West Sussex, we have introduced a winter falls prevention programme, a tobacco control strategy and alcohol reduction initiatives, as well as programmes to counter loneliness, suicide and self-harm. Listening to Opposition speakers in this debate, people could believe that the system is broken. It is not, and that is certainly not the story in my constituency, where I am lucky to work with great people: doctors, nurses, porters and all the other NHS staff.

None of this is to the credit of politicians, who often use the NHS as a political football, spreading nonsense and rumours with threats of privatisation. It is down to the committed people in the NHS doing a great job with strong leadership on the ground. That is now underpinned by the right funding model for the future—the biggest cash injection in NHS history, which is something that we should all celebrate.

5.28 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan), with whom I work closely and proudly on the all-party parliamentary group on radiotherapy.

When the NHS long-term plan was published, the emphasis on strengthening preventive care was a welcome step in the right direction. Good preventive care and public health are kinder and cheaper than the late interventions that are often caused by not addressing issues that could have been spotted earlier.

The Government's actions since then suggest that their commitment to preventive care was little more than smoke and mirrors. Having loudly proclaimed their commitment to preventive healthcare, Ministers ever so quietly, ever so slyly, just before the Christmas recess, sneaked out £85 million-worth of cuts to public health budgets. That money is used for key services, as we have heard, such as preventive mental healthcare, preventive physical healthcare, “stop smoking” clinics, sexual health clinics, and drug and alcohol misuse services. The Government may say that public health spending is the decision of local authorities, but all they have done is give them the responsibility to care for their communities while leaching away much of the resource that would enable them to do so. Councils' public health budgets, which fund school nurses and public mental health services, have been reduced by £600 million since 2015. In Cumbria, the public health budget is set to be slashed by half a million pounds, and it is one of the 10 local authorities receiving the least money per head from the Conservative Government. Cumbria's spending is now set to drop to just £36 per head—barely half the national average of £63 per head, and ridiculously lower than that of the City of London, which receives £241 per head.

The impact of this has of course been tangible. School nurses not only provide a host of services but are a valuable source of health education for children and young people—a place to turn to as they try to navigate the complexities of adolescence. The removal from schools of health professionals who contribute so much to children's health education means that children are vulnerable to slipping into bad mental, dental and physical health. In 2015, the coalition Government made a commitment to spend £25 million a year on Cumbria's public health, but cuts to spending since then

[Tim Farron]

mean that Cumbria gets less than £18 million a year. Pernicious, heavy cuts to the public health budget mean that Cumbria now only spends a pathetic 75p per child per year on preventive mental health care.

In the face of this, young people themselves are determined to fight for better mental health provision. In my constituency, the CAMHS crisis service was not available at the weekend or after school hours in south Cumbria until our community campaign forced local health bosses to change this. But we still have an awfully long way to go. Proper investment in public health budgets would allow us to place a mental health worker in every school. The key to young people being resilient and healthy, and to making sure that problems do not become so severe further down the line, is surely to do just that.

The Government's failure to take prevention seriously puts at risk a range of preventive health measures—physical as well as mental. I very much welcome the Minister to her new role. She is the most senior Blackburn Rovers supporter to sit on the Front Bench since Jack Straw; I hope she does far better than he. The question that she must answer is this: when the Government verbally prioritised preventive care but then cut public health by £85 million, were they being deliberately cynical or was it mere incompetence? Either way, will she fix this matter and restore public health funding to Cumbria and elsewhere so that we can tackle mental and physical health problems before they become tragically serious?

5.32 pm

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I am very pleased to follow the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), and to talk about the Government's commitment to public health. This Government are providing an additional £4.5 billion for primary and community health services as part of the long-term plan for the NHS. In ensuring that this plan operates properly, a renewed focus has been put on prevention. When the Prime Minister announced the £33.9 billion funding boost for the NHS, she said that the accompanying 10-year plan must have that focus on prevention. As hon. Friends have said, none of this is possible without a strong economy and without a Government who understand that tackling the debt and the deficit is really important, because we cannot have the services we want unless we do that.

One of the key parts of the plan is the importance of new screening methods. Earlier testing for bowel cancer is one of the issues that will be dealt with. I want to say a big thank you for the grant of £79 million that we got to build new theatres at Musgrove Park Hospital, which is Somerset's main hospital but also a really big hospital providing services across the south-west. With part of that grant, it is building a whole new endoscopy service and suite. This really will help the population not just of Somerset but of the whole south-west with early diagnosis, which is the way we have to go. We also have a new MRI scanner, thanks to the community, which contributed towards it. That will help a great many people by picking up diseases early.

Somerset has a wonderful record on diabetes. Diabetes is a big issue, and amputations are very costly. One amputation costs £20,000, and a person with diabetes

who has a limb amputated—sadly, that is what can happen—unfortunately then has a life expectancy of only five years. Somerset has implemented a diabetes foot pathway, which cut amputations from 122 to 66 in 2017. Not only are people living better and more healthily, but that pathway is saving the NHS a huge amount of money. That is the kind of model we need to put in place.

The public health grant remains ring-fenced, which I am very pleased about, and protected exclusively for improving health, but local government spending on health is not just about the grant. It is about local authorities being able to prioritise what they think is important, and indeed they are, with a range of innovative models in Somerset.

One third of Somerset residents will be 65 or over in 10 years' time, compared with 21% nationally, and that has to be dealt with as a matter of urgency. Somerset County Council is responsible for all adult social care, children's services and special needs, which take up 70% of its budget. While I welcome the Government giving another £240 million to adult social care and enabling local authorities to add adult social care to their precept, there are still pressing issues in Somerset that must be dealt with relating to the elderly population. Despite a great number of pressures, the council has done really well in sorting out its finances thanks to some tough decisions, but we have to make the resources go further. The council will be the subject of a "Panorama" documentary soon.

We must have better models. One model I want to mention is micro-providers. A list of self-employed, accredited providers can be accessed for all kinds of care and health needs across Somerset, so that people can stay at home, and providers go in to help them. We are using it at home for my family, and it really is a good model. I hope the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy), will visit us to have a look at it.

We need to do more. While 92% of our care providers in Somerset are good or outstanding, which is above the national average of 83%, the current spending review needs to acknowledge that the pressures from not only the growing costs of care but being a rural county are different from those in other places. Somerset gets £730 of Government funding per head of population, which is 11% less than the national average. Our school transport gets less money than urban areas, and our public health funding from Government is only £36 a head, compared with £56 nationally. Will the Minister—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order.

5.37 pm

Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): This week is Mental Health Awareness Week, and I fully support the need to break the stigma and talk about our own and others' mental health. Public health has an integral role to play in improving young people's mental health, but we live in a country where, because of the actions of the Conservative party, the funding and the ability to access care from trained professionals are being decimated. What happens when we realise that we need support? How long do we have to wait for help? What are we doing to provide support for people who are struggling and their families, who are left to cope without sufficient support? How do the Government

expect to provide support when they have cut £700 million in cash terms of the public health grant to local government between 2015-16 and 2019-20, according to the Local Government Association, of which I am a vice-president?

Today I want to speak specifically about children and young people's mental health. NHS figures show that one in eight people under the age of 19 in England have a mental health disorder, and half of all mental health problems start before the age of 14. I recently conducted a survey of schools in my constituency. In 10 of the 11 schools that have responded to the survey so far, the number of pupils suffering with mental health problems has increased over the last five years. One saw a 15% increase in the last 12 months alone, and all but one have seen these cases becoming more severe.

I want to place on record my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmire (Chris Elmore) for his chairing of the all-party parliamentary group on social media and young people's mental health and wellbeing. The group's recent inquiry found that 27% of children who are on social network sites for three or more hours a day have symptoms of mental ill health. That stands against 12% of children who spend no time on such sites. The Government's online harms White Paper concurs with research by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, which reported that there was "moderately-strong evidence for an association between screen time and depressive symptoms."

The Government need to take real responsibility for the children in this country and their wellbeing. Instead, we have heard that they will support further research without saying what that will be, and that they welcome industry efforts. What parent would feel reassured by that? The industry has taken some steps to regulate itself, but it is obvious that it is not doing enough. Public health cannot be left to businesses, and with the mental health of children and young people at stake, we need to look at the various contributing factors. It is not enough simply to acknowledge the problem and not to address what is seen to be one of the growing risks to our children's mental health and wellbeing.

Let us take the next step of the process: when a child has mental health problems, how are they identified? Teachers are often the individuals on the frontline most likely to spot this need, but they are working with larger classes and increased pressures, without teaching assistants or additional support. Schools in my constituency and many across the country are doing an amazing job in trying to make appropriate provision for their pupils to deal with mental health problems—from developing their own wellbeing support to check-in sessions and peer mentors—but this is not sustainable. Schools in my constituency have told me that immediate support is usually unavailable to vulnerable children and parents; response times from overburdened mental health agencies are poor; there are long waiting lists; and early help support is limited. Because of the fall in the ability to access core public health services, schools are forced to pick up the slack despite often not having had the appropriate training or resources to do so. A quarter of 11 to 16-year-olds with a mental health disorder have self-harmed or attempted suicide, and that figure rises to as high as 46% among teenage girls with a disorder.

The Children's Commissioner has said:

"There is a danger that we continue to have a system that fails to help children until they are so unwell that they need specialist intervention."

Funding pressures mean many councils are being forced to cut early intervention services that support children with low-level mental health issues and avoid more serious problems in later life, which cost far more over the coming decades. If we are to improve provision of preventive and early intervention services, it is vital that the Government adequately fund public health in the forthcoming spending review, as reducing spending on public health is short-sighted and irresponsible at the best of times.

5.41 pm

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan), I am disappointed that in this debate we are using health once again as a political football, and that we are constantly talking down the NHS. I say that as someone who still works in the NHS, as you can see, Mr Deputy Speaker, from my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I am still working in the NHS, and for the staff and those working day in and day out, it is depressing not to have some of the many achievements recognised.

Where is the recognition that this year, after huge investment and better co-ordination, we have seen no winter crisis? In previous years, there were urgent questions demanding answers year after year, but the Government have delivered on that. My local council in East Sussex got £2 million this winter, and despite an 11% increase in demand, there was a 33% reduction in delayed discharges. That is because social care and healthcare are working better together.

Where is the recognition of the achievements in tackling breast cancer? Mortality rates for breast cancer are down 38% since the 1970s and down 22% in the last decade, while they are predicted to fall further by 23% in the next decade. That is personal for me because I lost my mother to breast cancer when I was a teenager, and four of my aunts. If they had been diagnosed now, their chances of survival would be so much better. That is down to improved early detection and screening, improved treatments for many of the difficult-to-treat breast cancers, and improvements in follow-up and early detection. And where is the recognition for cancers overall? According to Cancer Research UK, mortality rates for most cancers are predicted to fall between now and 2035.

Where is the recognition of the progress made on HIV? According to the Terrence Higgins Trust, in relation to overall mortality for those aged between 15 and 59 who are now diagnosed early, for the first time ever their life expectancy is equal to that of the general population.

Where is the recognition of improvements for stroke outcomes? In its "State of the nation" publication, the Stroke Association says that stroke deaths have now fallen by half since the 1990s. That is because we are reducing risk factors, detecting early risk factors early and getting treatment started within an hour of a stroke happening. The stroke call that now goes out in A&E when someone arrives, with the urgent CT and the anti-embolism treatment, means that people do not just survive a stroke, but live better lives after a stroke. That is so important, given that stroke now causes almost twice as many deaths as breast cancer. Smoking rates have fallen, as the Secretary of State explained; 14.9% of

[*Maria Caulfield*]

people now smoke, compared with 19.8% in 2011. TB rates have fallen by 40%, whereas under the previous Labour Government they were actually increasing.

We have much to celebrate in public health and in the NHS, but there is no doubt that we could do with more funding. I say that as a Member for an East Sussex constituency, where life expectancy is higher than the national average, because so many people retire to the south coast—we have the highest number of 85-year-olds in the country. As I mentioned in a recent debate, we would like another four-year funding settlement for social care, so that we could make better plans for our ageing population.

I will conclude with the facts that I would like to see included in the Humble Address to Her Majesty, because this is not just about complaining about what we have not got. Perhaps the Labour party would like to explain to Her Majesty why it voted against the £16 billion of public health spending between now and 2021, and also why it has not supported the £20 billion a year for the NHS, or the extra £4.5 billion for primary and community health services. As those on the Government Front Bench will know, I am often a critical friend of the Government, but I would like to stand on facts, rather than causing political mischief.

5.46 pm

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): I welcome the debate, as public health cuts are having a dramatic impact across the country. The Health and Social Care Act 2012 pushed responsibility for sexual and public health services from the NHS to local authorities—from national oversight to a postcode lottery. In Rotherham, we are fortunate that the contract for sexual health services was retained by the NHS. Others in south Yorkshire were not so lucky, leading to patchy provision by private providers, increasing waiting lists and services being shut.

Public health funding is vital for preventing sexual disease, but it is also important in recognising sexual harm and responding to it. When I visit Rotherham's sexual health clinics, I am constantly struck by how, for many, they are often the first port of call for disclosing sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and modern slavery. We need to build a healthcare system that is ready to support victims of the most horrendous sexual crimes, not one that is driven by profit.

Sexual assault referral centres have a key role to play in the matrix of support for survivors, and I have been encouraged by recent investment in them. However, England has only 47 of the 71 SARC's recommended under the Istanbul convention. People are not aware that they can self-refer, and that SARC's are also for past sexual abuse, not just recent rape. The Government need to do more to promote that information.

The all-party parliamentary group on adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, which I chair, last week published a report following a six-month investigation into support for adult survivors. Some 89% of survivors told our inquiry that their mental health had been negatively impacted by child sexual abuse, but only 16% said that NHS mental health services met their needs.

Survivors said that they want the specialist voluntary sector to provide them with counselling and support. Our research found that specialist voluntary sector agencies receive, on average, 13% of funding from local authorities and 14.5% from clinical commissioning groups. However, when I asked the Department of Health and Social Care for its assessment of the effectiveness of CCG funding of therapeutic services for survivors, I was shocked to find that it does not even collect data. Does the Minister agree that the Government need to get a grip on the effectiveness of commissioning specialist voluntary sector services and that they should start by collecting the right data?

Survivor after survivor told the APPG of disappointing interactions with NHS staff who were often poorly equipped to respond to disclosures of child sexual abuse and ill-informed about the services they could refer patients to. The Minister needs to ensure that frontline professionals, including GPs, sexual health nurses and social workers, are trained in trauma-informed practice, so that survivors receive a service that is empathetic, empowering and appreciative of the impact of trauma.

Today's debate is rightly framed around reversing the cuts in public health spending. This is a sorry, short-sighted state to be in. The Health Foundation calculates that an additional £3.2 billion a year must be made available just to reverse the impact of Government cuts to public health services.

The APPG's inquiry found that as our understanding of the scale of sexual violence and abuse grows, and ever more survivors come forward looking for support, the Government should meet the challenge by launching a nationwide public health campaign that raises awareness of the impact of child sexual abuse on survivors, tackles myths and stereotypes and directs survivors and professionals to information and support. Does the Minister agree that we have a moral duty to provide survivors of sexual abuse with the knowledge they need to make decisions about their own recovery, especially in the absence of knowledgeable professionals and access to public services? Will she therefore lobby the Chancellor to make a serious commitment to ring-fence funding for all sexual and public health services in the next spending review and to make sure that some of the money is dedicated to services and information for victims and survivors of sexual abuse? Any less is a dereliction of duty.

5.50 pm

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): We are talking about preventive health care, and I want to focus on podiatry and its workforce. This place has supported changes to the nursing bursary, and I continue to support those changes for students, but they are having an impact on mature students that I do not think was intended. We all have feet, which we need to look after, and if professionals help to take good care of our feet, it can avoid problems in the future. We all need the podiatrists and others who work to care for our feet.

Plymouth University has recently announced that because of changes in applications for its podiatry undergraduate programme, it will be unable to run the course from September, so in the south-west, especially Cornwall and Devon, no one will train in podiatry. We all know that when people train in an area, they tend to stay there.

Rebecca Pow: The diabetes foot pathway relied on opening eight podiatry clinics across Somerset. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is the podiatrists who are helping to solve the diabetes problem?

Derek Thomas: I completely agree with my hon. Friend, and I attended a conference 18 months ago at which the podiatrists and Plymouth University mentioned the risk of this happening. We are now seeing that prophecy being fulfilled. I appreciate what my hon. Friend says about what has been done to improve the pathway and reduce lower limb amputations. We must not see that good work reversed.

When it comes to caring for our feet, we are heading for a perfect storm. Fewer people are going into training because of financial barriers, and in 10 years we will see an enormous amount of podiatrists retiring from the profession. That adds up to a real challenge that we need to address quickly. I ask the Minister to look at what has happened since the nursing bursary was removed for mature students and whether we can address that.

The impact on patients is severe. Type 2 diabetes is the fastest growing health threat facing our nation, and 3 million people are living with it. That figure is set to reach 4 million by 2030. Diabetic foot care costs the NHS in England between £1.1 billion and £1.3 billion a year—£5.7 million per clinical commissioning group. It accounts for £1 in every £100 spent, more than the combined cost of three of the four most common cancers. Some 80% of the 135 lower extremity amputations each week in England are preventable through good foot care, and the Government have made a commitment in legislation and policy to provide safe care. That is just one example of how, if we do not get this right, we will fail to avoid the impact on patients of more lower limb amputations and lower life expectancy. The facts show that after a lower limb amputation, life expectancy is reduced to about five years.

There is also an impact on the NHS. I have mentioned the sheer cost of caring for lower limb problems, and it will have an impact on multidisciplinary teams if we do not keep people with the skills coming through. It will also have an impact on budgets. As well as the impact on social care and on the budgets for those delivering support in people's homes, making changes around a home because someone has had a lower limb amputation is a costly affair that is easily avoided if we get it right and get enough podiatrists on the ground.

There is an urgent need for action. I ask the Government to look at why mature students are uniquely impacted when going to study these important professions. If a mature student is on any sort of benefit—housing benefit or other financial support—the minute they take out a student loan to study to be a podiatrist, they lose all that support. Perhaps the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Work and Pensions need to look at that, because that is a significant barrier to people coming into a skill we so badly need.

I ask the Minister to look at solutions to reverse the reduction of mature students going into important parts of the NHS such as podiatry so that we can save money for the future, to be used where needed, and provide a real opportunity to improve people's lives.

5.55 pm

Dr Paul Williams (Stockton South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my colleague the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas), who serves with me on the Health and Social Care Committee. I warmly welcome the new Minister to her place, but if she thought she would learn about public health in the debate, she will be sadly disappointed. I and Opposition colleagues have sat and listened to Government Members talk about anything other than public health. It is so disappointing that Government Members do not seem to know what public health is.

I really care about public health. I care about it so much that, after spending five years training to be a doctor and another four years training to be a GP, I did a master's degree in public health. It is so important because it is about health inequalities and the massive gap in life expectancy, which we are seeing increasing. I represent the town of Stockton-on-Tees, where the life expectancy gap between men living in the most deprived areas of town and those in the wealthiest is more than 11 years; for women, it is more than 16 years. Much of that is because of the inverse care law that tells us that the people with the highest need are those least likely to access healthcare. Those with the highest need for cervical screening are least likely to access it. Those with the highest mental health problems are less likely to access those services. Those with the highest needs for smoking cessation services are least likely to access them. Investment in public health makes economic sense, because prevention is better than cure, and it makes really good social justice sense.

Tempting as it may be to invest in another building or buy another machine that goes ping, the real difference that can be made to health inequalities and public health comes right at the beginning of life. The first 1,000 days are where most health inequalities are sown. It was a privilege recently to chair the Health and Social Care Committee's inquiry on the first 1,000 days of life: a time when developing brains make a million new connections every single second. If we get it right then, we can build healthy minds and healthy bodies, but if we get it wrong, that can cause all kinds of problems.

The fact is that more than 8,000 children in this country live in homes with the triad of a parent with a mental health problem, a parent with substance misuse problems and domestic violence. What intervention will make the real difference? How can we help those children? That is done largely through the work of health visitors, and I am afraid that since public health funding and the responsibility for public health was transferred to local authorities, we have seen a cut of 2,000 health visitors employed by the NHS and 1,000 Sure Start centres have closed.

These are the things that make the real difference. They make a difference to breastfeeding, of which our rate is one of the lowest in Europe; to child mortality, our levels of which are much higher than those in comparably rich countries; and to detecting the hidden half of women with perinatal mental health problems who say they were not detected by health services.

I hope that it has not been a deliberate strategy to disinvest from these important services. I think that it has happened by accident. Either way, we have to make a difference; the situation must be rectified. I welcome

[Dr Paul Williams]

the work of the cross-departmental ministerial working group that the Leader of the House is leading, and I hope that the new Minister is lobbying the Treasury and making a passionate case for investment at the start of life.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech about the importance of public health, especially in the early years. In Blaydon, which is part of Gateshead Council, the public health budget has reduced by 15% since the transfer of health visitor services, which has led to the loss of services that make a big difference to people on the ground. Is it not a shame that we are losing vital public health services?

Dr Williams: It is painful that that is happening in places such as Blaydon, where life expectancy is declining. Life expectancy in the north is declining, and there are huge life expectancy gaps between north and south. It is the very part of the country where we should be investing in public health, not making cuts. In Stockton-on-Tees, public health has been cut by £1 million in the past two years.

What do we want? It is 10 years since the Marmot review set out the evidence base for how to reduce health inequalities. We should be doubling down on investment in health inequalities. We should be investing in sexual health services. We should be investing in drug treatment services, which nationally have been cut by 16.5%. Instead, we see year-on-year funding reductions, public health is being cut to the bone, life expectancy is falling and health inequalities are rising. The Government need to show an absolute commitment not just to treatment services but to grassroots prevention services in communities up and down the country, and they must invest properly in public health services. Local authorities are the right place for them to be, but they have to be properly funded and supported.

6.2 pm

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams), but I want to put it on the record that Conservative Members understand and appreciate the importance of public health. I have heard several contributions from hon. Friends about exactly that. I am grateful that public health is at the heart of the long-term plan for the national health service and that investment is already going into it.

My constituents would not forgive me if I did not start by talking about the Alex Hospital in Redditch, which is the No. 1 concern for me and my constituents. Yes, we are having a debate about public health, but this takes its place at the heart of that. It is not just about funding—a lot of money has been invested in the Alex for wards, infrastructure and facilities thanks to all our lobbying, but that is not enough; it is about how that money is managed across the trust. Unfortunately, services were centralised in Worcester, and that is not working for my constituents. I welcome the Minister to her place, but she will definitely receive more visits and correspondence from me on this issue. I have an Adjournment debate tomorrow night, so I will not steal my own thunder, but I want to place it on the record

that it is very much about leadership, making services work across a county and getting the right outcomes for patients and my constituents.

One of the causes close to my heart is the menopause. Anyone who has been watching BBC's "Breakfast" programme this week will know it is featuring it as part of its menopause week. It is brilliant that people are brave enough to talk about their experiences. This is a taboo subject, but we are starting to talk about it in this Chamber, and I have received cross-party support, which is fantastic. This goes to the heart of what we are talking about: prevention and public health. It is about educating primary care providers and GPs to do the right thing when prescribing for women entering the perimenopause and the menopause and to understand that it is not just about having hot flushes and those other stereotypical symptoms but that there can be hundreds of different symptoms. Every woman is different. There is widespread ignorance, but when women visit their GPs, very simple treatment should be available. This does not cost money. It is just a question of ensuring that GPs are in the right place to prescribe what those women need: treatment that will make a transformative difference to their lives, and will enable them to continue to contribute at work as well as in their families and communities. I hope that the Minister will recognise the importance of this issue, because it affects not only women; it affects every man who has to work with a woman or is related to a woman. That fact is often hidden, and we need to break down the stigma to an even greater extent.

My third point concerns technology. We are talking about prevention, and technology plays an important role in that. I have been a tech entrepreneur, and I was delighted to learn about a service called GP at Hand, which was released recently. I have been using it, and it has made a massive difference to me. We are all stuck here, and I do not know about other Members, but I find it very hard to make an appointment to see my GP. However, I have an app on my phone. I need only log on, and I can secure an appointment within five or 10 minutes.

Let me add, before Members jump up and say it, that we all know that that service will not work for everyone. Of course it will not work for complex patients and vulnerable people who are not able to use technology. However, if it can work for people who are confident and comfortable with technology and can embrace it, it will make a huge difference in freeing up more resources for the patients who need more care and support in the GP's surgery. I think that the two services can work side by side. What we need to do in the long-term plan for the future is embrace what technology can do and spread that across the country. There needs to be a real impetus behind solutions such as GP at Hand which provide more time for talking to people who need a lot of support, including mental health support. It really is a brilliant service, and it is free to use in London. I believe that it is being piloted, and I very much hope that it will extend across the country.

I commend the Government's efforts, and their focus on public health. Let us not forget that if it were not for a Government who sorted out the economy and enabled it to grow, we would not have this multi-billion-pound investment. I believe that £157 billion of public money will have been invested in the NHS by 2023.

6.7 pm

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): For the first time since the 1890s, we are seeing a slowdown in health improvements, including, as we have heard, a flatlining in life expectancy. However, that varies in different parts of the country. Men's average life expectancy in Windsor and Maidenhead is 81.6 years, while in my constituency it is 77 years. As well as the data from the Office for National Statistics, we have information from the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries that falling longevity has accelerated. Last year's analysis cut forecast life expectancy by two months, and this year it took off another six months. Since 2015, it has fallen by 13 months for men and 14 months for women. That renders the Government's increase in the state pension age an absolute nonsense, and is rather cruel to women born in the 1950s.

Healthy life expectancy—how long we expect to live in good health—has also declined for women, by three months between 2009 and 2011. That, too, varies across local authority areas, by 21.5 years for females and 15.8 years for males. Our children have been affected as well. As the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health reported last year, infant mortality is on the increase for the first time in 100 years. Four out of 1,000 babies will not see their first year, which is an indictment of the fifth richest country in the world. We are also seeing increases in child mortality, linked closely to the poverty that children are experiencing.

Why is this happening? It is absolutely true that the cuts in public health spending which were described so eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams) have played a part, but they are not the only cause of the decrease in life expectancy and other problems. We know that investment in the NHS has been far from perfect, and it should have been at least £30 billion by 2022 instead of the £20 billion that has been promised. The coalition Government have a lot to answer for with the Health and Social Care Act 2012, which championed the outsourcing of NHS contracts to the private sector among other things. There is also strong evidence that that has contributed to not only increases in inequality in access to health care but inequality in outcomes.

There is clear evidence, as many of us predicted, of the impact of the coalition Government's and this Government's wider austerity programme. It has widened the inequalities of income, wealth and power and contributed particularly to the premature deaths of many of our citizens.

I welcome the launch today of Sir Angus Deaton's inquiry to review inequalities across our country, and I hope it builds on the evidence Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson produced in their totemic publication "The Spirit Level" a decade earlier. However, we also need to explore other aspects of inequalities that have been not yet been investigated, such as the inequalities in power and the rise of nationalism.

I also hope that the inequality review analyses evidence presented at a recent event I chaired. Professor Danny Dorling referred to Office for National Statistics data published the day after the EU referendum showing that there were 52,400 more deaths than the previous year. This was the seventh largest single-year increase in deaths after cholera caused an increase in 1849. The evidence

showing a correlation with austerity, as people's long-term care needs were most affected, is compelling. We now have the 10th lowest level of public spending out of 12 developed countries, and in 2018 some 1.4 million older people had unmet care needs.

Professor David Taylor-Robinson provided evidence showing that the impact of austerity is also taking its toll on our children. His report, "Due North", provided evidence of the north-south divide and the impact on health, including child health. We now have the worst child health in western Europe and rising child mortality, which is clearly associated with child poverty.

The Government's first duty is to protect their citizens. For our children, our old people and our disabled people, it is clear this Government have failed and I urge them to take this more seriously.

6.12 pm

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams). First, I should probably declare an interest: I am the wife of a consultant oncologist, the sister of a consultant geriatrician, the daughter of a retired ophthalmologist and my late father was also a consultant geriatrician. They all dedicated their professional lives to the NHS.

The NHS is extremely precious and it is right that we should value it, and I for one was very proud to see a long-term plan for its future, taking it into the 21st century with unprecedented levels of funding and a focus on primary care, prevention, mental health and investing in staff and above all, as someone who cares deeply about science and research, a commitment to continue investing in science and innovation.

But in all large organisations there are areas that are going well and areas that need focus. In Mid Essex for many years there has been a difficulty recruiting GPs and experts in mental health, and I am delighted that this year we opened the first ever medical school in Chelmsford—the first ever in Essex, the first in a generation in the country—with 100 young students now nearly through their first year, specialising in general practice and mental health. From day one of their course they are on placements in local GP practices, becoming embedded in our primary care network. The places for next year at Anglia Ruskin medical school in Chelmsford are already 12 times oversubscribed; it is that popular.

I also met our mental health network last Friday and they told me about some amazing stuff that has already been introduced since the announcement of the long-term plan. They are doing new work on perinatal mental health, identifying mums-to-be who are at risk of post-natal depression or are depressed and working with them before the babies are even born. They are introducing a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week crisis and urgent care service, which will be in place by the end of this year, along with new early intervention on psychosis and more work on dementia and on placing mental health practitioners directly into the primary care networks. These new networks will bring GPs together so that they can work with their neighbouring practices, allowing those practices to get more specialist care into the primary care networks, thus helping prevention. This will include specialists in physiotherapy and in medicines reviews, specialist district nurses and specialists in areas such as chiropody and diabetes, all of whom will be able to work locally.

[Vicky Ford]

I am concerned, however, that we are struggling locally with recruiting nurses, especially at hospital level, where a number of nurse places have been vacant for a long time. We have to be honest with our constituents about this: a number of the EU staff have left the UK, and we need to resolve the uncertainty over Brexit. We need to reassure the staff that we care for them. There has been a drop-off in the number of people applying to nursing college, particularly among older people, and that needs to be resolved. I am also concerned to hear from many of the senior doctors in my constituency about the impact that pensions and taxation are having on them.

On the positive side, I have heard about new treatments, especially for diabetes. My diabetic patients can now get continuous glucose monitors, which they have never been able to have before. However, other treatments are still needed. My poor constituent Cait is nine years old and she desperately needs Kuvan for her phenylketonuria. It would also prevent many other diseases. Any other country in Europe would prescribe it, but we do not.

We are the world leader in many areas of medical research—we lead the world in genomics, for example—but we must ensure that the treatments that are developed here are prescribed here, otherwise, we will lose that research. One area of research that particularly impressed me was dementia research. We were told on a recent visit that a quarter of dementia cases might be preventable, but that will involve understanding the condition much earlier—decades before the symptoms become evident. We need to be able to identify those at risk and ensure that they get the right treatment. That is why I am so pleased by the long-term plan. It is already putting those words into action to ensure that we can deliver a world-class NHS for the future.

6.17 pm

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Air pollution—the silent, invisible killer—is now leading to 64,000 premature deaths in Britain each year. The figure was thought to be 40,000 by the Royal College of Physicians, but it has now been updated by the *European Heart Journal*. Pollution is now the biggest killer in the world—bigger even than smoking. We know that 8.8 million people die from air pollution, compared with 7.2 million who die from smoking. People are killed, or their lives are prematurely ended by heart attacks, heart disease, lung cancer, lung disease and strokes. Air pollution is also a massive cause of dementia. Pregnant mothers have their foetuses impacted by the particulates that they breathe in, and children in so-called clean air zones have a 10% lower lung capacity and much worse mental health issues.

I am therefore pleased that *The Times* is now supporting a five-point action plan to tackle air pollution. It supports the idea of a clean air Act, and I have a Clean Air Bill going forward. People have a right to clean air, and it is important that local authorities and others have the resources to deliver that. It is also important that the Government get off their seat and say that, instead of banning all new diesel and petrol cars by 2040, we should do so by 2030. After all, that ambition is now held by India, China, Ireland and others, and we really need to do much more. We need to ban traffic from idling outside schools, and we need to ensure that the 40 cities in Britain that breach the World Health Organisation

standards do more to stop older vehicles entering city centres and charge them. We need to monitor local levels of air pollution through local authorities and the Environment Agency, so that people have the figures and the power to campaign to stop pollution. It is also important that we stop building new schools next to busy roads.

In addition to that, my Clean Air Bill sets out a fiscal strategy for tackling air pollution. Fuel duty on diesel has been frozen since 2010. There is no differential between that and petrol, let alone electric cars. We require electric car infrastructure across Britain, but the Government have given that responsibility to BP, which of course has a vested interest in keeping fossil fuel on the road. We also need proper testing. Volkswagen was fined in the United States following the testing scandal, but not in Britain, and 300,000 VWs still have not been called back for correction. The Government are hurtling ahead with expanding airport capacity, leading to more dirty air. We need to do more on ports, with a maritime strategy that ensures that ships coming into port are connected to electric power. We should be converting to electric trains, but Swansea, which was promised electrification, is getting diesels.

It is also important that the environment Bill considers both indoor and outdoor air. I am pleased that the Secretary of State put it on the record today that schools and hospitals should be included in the Bill, and I will certainly be holding him to his word. People inhale all sorts of dangerous chemicals when indoors through cleaning agents, which may be sprayed on people's bodies, fire retardants in sofas and so on.

We must ensure that high standards are enforced. Members will know that ClientEarth has taken the Government to court over their failure to protect people from dirty air, and we need an assurance that if we do Brexit—I very much hope that we do not—enforceable standards will be in place to ensure that people are safe. Put simply, children and the rest of us have a right to clean air, but the Government are failing in their duty to deliver that right. They need to get on and protect our public health, protect our future and deliver clean air.

6.22 pm

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies). I want to talk about the impact of public health grant cuts on Rochdale Borough Council, which serves both my constituency and the Rochdale constituency. Reductions in the public health grant will inevitably have an impact on a wide range of services and on the ability to plan and deliver prevention. The Rochdale borough public health team takes a broad view of health and wellbeing, seeing it as being influenced by health behaviours, wider determinants of health, such as housing and education, and relationships with others.

Local public health work is about much more than health promotion and telling people what is good and bad for them. It includes support for youth services and libraries and for victims of domestic abuse. It involves training to help to prevent suicide, support for volunteering, and reducing the impact of alcohol and drug abuse.

The work of the public health team also includes supporting people in residential homes to improve their oral health and nutrition. It includes seeking funding

from grant-giving bodies to improve local health. Importantly, the work involves helping to reduce the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. However, as we have heard, cuts to sexual health services are leading to an increase in the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases. In Greater Manchester as a whole, the abortion rate is rising as access to sexual health services and contraceptive help and advice diminishes.

The work of the public health team also includes providing direct input into NHS commissioning and providing essential support for NHS services. For example, while the NHS provides cancer screening, it is work within our communities that helps to get people to attend appointments. The public health team works to increase attendance at NHS health checks and to get people tested for diabetes, which can result in lifestyle changes and real savings in treatment costs. With Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale having one of the north-west's highest rates of type 2 diabetes, the importance of this work cannot be overemphasised. The public health team works to reduce smoking, especially in poor communities and among people with long-term conditions. When NICE looks at such prevention work, it is always shown to be highly cost-effective.

To give an idea of the health challenges facing my community, a man or woman living here in Westminster can expect to live, on average, five and a half years longer than a man or woman living in the borough of Rochdale. Such health inequalities exist here in London, too. My hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) tells me that for every tube station from here to Queen's Park there is a year's reduction in life expectancy.

Yet such health inequalities are not compensated for by increased funding. In the borough of Rochdale, the public health grant is now £3 million lower than it was in 2016-17—decreasing from £19.7 million then to £16.7 million in 2018-19. For this financial year, 2019-20, the budget has been cut yet again to £16.3 million, giving cumulative cuts over the past four years of over £8 million. That has led to cuts in support to HIV charities, children's playgroups, physical activity events, pest control, smoking cessation services and other much-needed vital services.

A reduction in the public health grant has to be considered in the context of wider council savings and the contribution of public health. As cuts to services and support have to be made due to a reduction in funding, the inevitable result is additional hardship for residents.

The choices we face are stark. Do we stop support for a necessary service such as help for domestic abuse victims, or do we not recruit much-needed staff? With the shocking news that we are seeing the return of diseases of the Victorian era—cases of whooping cough, malnutrition and scarlet fever are all increasing—this Government cannot be complacent and must take another look at their false economy of cutting public health funding.

6.27 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is always a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), who brings her health expertise to this debate.

The discord between the Government's narrative and reality could not be more stark. The long understood centrality of public health to addressing health inequalities

was ably brought to the fore by Michael Marmot's report a decade ago that highlighted the social determiners of poor health. We therefore cannot just look at health in this debate; we have to look at the wider impact of health across our society.

Of course the Government's 10-year plan and long-term approach are welcome, but the reality is that there are serious funding cuts to the delivery of public health by local authorities. Half a million pounds is proposed to be slashed from York's public health spending, which will have an impact on the services to be delivered.

Public health is about the long term, and the disadvantage for local authorities is that, with their strained budgets, they are having to focus on the emergencies today. Of course, local authorities have no levers over the NHS, which ultimately picks up the tab for the failure to deliver a public health agenda. Controls over the system is not in the right place.

Of course, the advantage of moving public health back out of health and into local authorities is that it impacts on education, the environment, the economy, housing and the wider community. We are deeply worried about the ending of public health grants. To date, there is no clear vision of how public health will be funded as we move past the comprehensive spending review. The clock is ticking and plans need to be made now.

In York, the health inequality is eight years between Clifton, the poorest area of my city, and the richest area. The council has slashed long-term contraception services, which has meant a rise in the number of unwanted pregnancies. Health checks have been cut, although they are a major intervention in prevention. We have also had smoking cessation services ceased; in 2010, we had 1,948 people using the smoking cessation service, whereas last year we had just 92.

On substance misuse, I must thank my friend Councillor Michael Pavlovic, whose forensic scrutiny of drug and alcohol service funding highlighted the serious £550,000 cut over a five-year period when usage was at a crisis. Shockingly, the drug death figures for York are the worst not only in Yorkshire, but in the whole country. The Government have not been taking a public health approach to substance misuse and it is vital that that now moves into a public health arena.

We have also seen alcohol being used hazardously in York, with 7% of my constituents—15,000 people—doing so. Some 10% of accident and emergency admissions were alcohol-related in 2014, and in December last year it was found that 33% of admissions to York Teaching Hospital involved people who were using alcohol. Of course, that leads to premature death. We also see the impact it has on the criminal justice system, with 75% of arrests involving alcohol. Alcohol is the influencing factor in a third of crimes. So investing in public health saves not only NHS spend, but wider service spend. Of course alcohol has an impact on the safeguarding of young people. In York it also has an impact on domestic violence. Yet York has 799 premises that sell alcohol. We know there is cost, risk and devastation, and we know there is an impact on wider public services, families and wider society. We therefore need a more comprehensive approach and properly funded public health services.

I ask the Minister whether the Government will look again to ensure that there is a comprehensive screening programme for people across the country, so that they

[*Rachael Maskell*]

can check in at the key point and transition phases in their lives to ensure their mental and physical wellbeing is reinstated. Local authorities being able to cut these services is of serious detriment.

6.32 pm

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): The health of the population should be the Government's and Parliament's highest priority. From the times of the ancient civilisations, enlightened authorities have sought to prevent disease, provide clean water and sanitation, and enable citizens to live long, healthy lives. In the UK, we have a long history of interventions to improve the health of the nation, from the great sanitation projects in the Victorian era, to the Clean Air Acts, slum clearances and inoculation programmes in the 20th century, and the public smoking ban in the 21st century. Of course, all of that was accelerated with the establishment of the national health service, yet in these first decades of our new century it is clear that something is going seriously wrong.

With all our medical and scientific advances, surely we should have ended preventable disease, enabled many more years of healthy life, and witnessed ever-lengthening life expectancies. But we know that the opposite is true, as many right hon. and hon. Members have pointed out. We face an explosion of obesity and obesity-related diseases, such as type 2 diabetes and coronary heart disease. We are in the depths of a mental health crisis, with ever-growing demand for ever-diminishing mental health services. Society faces the health risks from smoking, alcohol and drug misuse, and sexually transmitted diseases.

The thing that should make us really angry is the stark difference in health and life expectancy between rich and poor. These inequalities in health are a terrible scar on our society, no matter which side of the House we are on. How can we fail to be ashamed when a person's life expectancy depends largely on their postcode and income, and what their parents did for a living? There are many incredibly positive things in my constituency, including some of the most improved schools, which have not only improved opportunity and life chances but played a role in tackling health inequality and improving wellbeing. I pay tribute to all the health professionals and community workers in the clinical commissioning group, including its chair Sam Everington and others, who have led the way on tackling the public health challenge, but the reality is that despite all their work my constituents face massive health inequalities.

With every tube stop between Westminster station and Whitechapel station, people's life expectancy goes down by six months. That is a scandal. Tower Hamlets has the shortest life expectancy of all London boroughs, with men living on average five years less than men in Kensington and Chelsea. We have the 12th highest prevalence of diagnosed diabetes, major challenges with obesity among children, and high levels of smoking, HIV, sexually transmitted infections and drug addiction. Even though many of my constituents abstain from alcohol, Tower Hamlets unfortunately has the seventh highest number of people with alcohol dependency.

In 2017, Sir Michael Marmot warned that the historic rises in life expectancy—the result of centuries of improvements—had ground to a halt. It is almost beyond belief that centuries of progress should end on our watch.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has warned of some of the challenges, including around suicide, drug overdose and alcohol-related liver diseases, which are affecting middle-aged men throughout England. Given the scale of the challenge and the dangers of going backwards, what are Ministers doing about this? We would think they would be investing in the kinds of programmes that help to tackle the public health emergency, but instead we see significant funding cuts, as many Members have said. In my borough, we have lost £3 million since 2015-16—in one of the areas with the highest levels of deprivation and child poverty in the country.

We need Government investment to tackle the public health challenge. Otherwise, all the Government's investment in the national health service will be undermined, as many have pointed out, and the Government will be missing a trick. We should in this debate be unified on the need to tackle the public health challenge in all our constituencies. Ministers talk about cross-party working, so my appeal to them is that they put that to the test and put in the investment to support local agencies, local authorities and health professionals. Let us deal with this appalling challenge by working together, because it is desperately needed.

6.37 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I am happy to be closing an excellent debate on public health in what is, as we have heard, Mental Health Awareness Week. I thank those who have contributed to the debate: the hon. Members for Fareham (Suella Braverman) and for Bury South (Mr Lewis); the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers); my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Eleanor Smith); the hon. Members for Chichester (Gillian Keegan), for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) and for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow); my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill); the hon. Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield); my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion); the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas); and my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams), whose speech was absolutely excellent and is the only one I am going to highlight—[*Interruption.*] Yes, there is a little bit of favouritism. I also thank the hon. Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean), my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), and my hon. Friends the Members for Swansea West (Geraint Davies), for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), for York Central (Rachael Maskell) and for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali). There were a lot of excellent speeches in among all those.

It has been a passionate debate—with good reason—and I am pleased to see so many Members who are as passionate about public health as I am. Let us be clear: it is not talking down the fabulous work that our NHS does day in, day out, or the amazing doctors, nurses, radiographers, clinicians, porters, catering staff, cleaners—indeed all NHS workers—to say that the health of our nation is at risk because of this Government's callous and careless cuts to public health services. The public health grant is expected to see a £700 million real-terms reduction from its 2014-15 level. That includes £85 million in the current financial year, at a time when the Government

are peddling the phrase “prevention is better than cure”. That phrase means nothing without adequate funding for our public health services.

I therefore ask the Minister, since prevention is a priority for this Government, whether she will commit today to reversing years of public health budget cuts. Public health spending is just a tiny proportion of the overall spend on health in England. It was just 2.8% in 2018-19, and that figure is falling year on year. Because of that, the Association of Directors of Public Health says that reductions in services are now “inevitable”—and that is a direct quote. This is at a time when services are needed more than ever, as we have heard.

Gonorrhoea and syphilis rates are on the rise, rates of smoking among pregnant women have risen for the first time on record, Victorian diseases—scarlet fever, whooping cough, malnutrition and gout—have seen a 52% upturn since 2010, and there has been an increase of more than 3,000 hospital admissions per year: that is all on this Government's watch. This Government are making our country ill. Local authorities were given the responsibility for public health in 2013, rightly so in my opinion, but without sustainable funding they have buckled under the pressure of austerity. Their ability to maintain and improve the health outcomes of local residents has been jeopardised. Last year, for the first time in over a century, increases in life expectancy stalled, and in some parts of the UK they have even decreased, as we have heard.

The life expectancy gap between women in the most deprived and least deprived areas is 7.4 years. The healthy life expectancy gap between men in the most deprived and least deprived areas is almost two decades. Yes, you heard me right, Mr Speaker—I said two decades. That is 20 years of difference in healthy life. There is a persistent north-south divide in life expectancy and healthy life expectancy, with people residing in southern regions of England on average living longer and with fewer years in poor health than those living further north. As someone from the north, as Members can probably tell, that particularly concerns me.

The Northern Health Science Alliance, or NHSA, set out why that is so important in its “Health for Wealth” report, published last year. I recommend that every Member reads it. Productivity is worse in the north, because health is worse in the north. Improving health in the north of England would therefore lead to substantial economic gains. What will the Minister do to address these regional health inequalities? Obviously, I agree with the notion that prevention is better than cure, but I do not share the Government's belief that prevention is possible without sustainable funding. If we are to reduce the ever-growing pressure on our NHS, we should therefore be investing in our public health services to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to live a healthy life—*[Interruption.]* I am pleased that we have been joined by the Secretary of State, and I shall have to try to repeat some of my best lines for him.

Analysis by the British Medical Association shows a continued trend of decreased funding, despite hospital admissions in which obesity, smoking, and alcohol was a factor increasing over a similar time period.

We have an obesity crisis in this country. The UK has one of the worst childhood obesity rates in Europe, but the Government's childhood obesity plans have failed to seriously tackle this crisis, and with consultations still

ongoing we have yet to see any material action by the Government. The UK spends about £6 billion a year on the medical costs of conditions related to being overweight or obese, and a further £10 billion on diabetes, but less than £638 million on obesity prevention programmes. Will the Minister commit to correcting that funding imbalance today?

Smoking remains the No. 1 cause of death in England, yet Action on Smoking and Health, ASH, found that in England from 2014-15 to 2017-18 local authority spending on tobacco control, including stop smoking services, fell by 30%. Furthermore, an annual survey conducted by ASH, commissioned by Cancer Research UK, found that, in 2018, 30 local authorities had no budget for tobacco control activity outside of stop smoking services. Although smoking costs the NHS an estimated £2.5 billion, NICE estimates that for every £1 invested in stop smoking services, £2.37 will be saved on treating smoking-related disease and lost productivity. Will the Minister therefore justify the Government's reasoning for not investing in stop smoking services?

Alcohol is the leading risk factor for ill health, early mortality and disability among people aged 15 to 49. Even though hospital admissions associated with alcohol have nearly doubled since 2006-07, and have risen tenfold when obesity is also a factor, the budgets for alcohol and obesity services have been cut by more than 10% over the past three years. Does the Minister agree that if there is a need funding should follow? Will she ensure that public health services are funded sufficiently?

Demands on sexual health services have also increased. At a time when sexually transmitted infections such as gonorrhoea and syphilis are on the rise, the Government have cut funding for sexual health services by £55.7 million since 2013-14. I welcome the Government's commitment to end HIV infections in England by 2030, but that progress risks being undone by those cuts. Sexual health services are essential if we are to end new HIV transmissions in the UK, but clinics report that they have to turn people away because of cuts to services. Does the Minister agree with the assessment by the Terrence Higgins Trust? *[Interruption.]* If the Minister's two colleagues will allow her to listen to what I am saying, the trust said that

“sexual health services are at crisis point”.

The Secretary of State may shake his head as much as he likes, but that is not me saying that—it is the Terrence Higgins Trust.

Finally, I would like to state my disappointment and frustration at the fact that there is no future funding settlement for the local authority public health grant after 2019-20. The Minister will know all too well that time is ticking by, so will she set out the Government's plans for a funding settlement post 2020? We need a settlement that will ensure that people can access the public health services they need so that they can live healthier and longer lives. I hope that after this debate the Minister will see how important that is to our constituencies and local authorities, which are responsible for this area of work. That is why the Opposition are calling on the Government to publish impact assessments on public health spending cuts and stalling life expectancy. I look forward to the Minister's response. This is only her second or third time at the Dispatch Box—it is the first time we have faced each other across the Dispatch Box—and she is still finding her feet, but she will be

[Mrs Sharon Hodgson]

keen to make her mark. Now is her chance. I urge her to publish those impact assessments, then do the right thing: properly fund public health now, because people's lives really do depend on it.

6.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Seema Kennedy): It is a great pleasure to respond to this important debate, which has covered a wide range of issues, showing the depth of the passion shared by hon. Members across the House for public health.

I want to address some of the points made by hon. Members. I should like to begin with the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth), who opened the debate and began by mentioning towns such as Burnley and Blackpool. I was born in Blackburn, as the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) referred to. Like him, I am a slightly disappointed Blackburn Rovers fan, and I represent a Lancashire constituency. I share his concerns about health inequalities, which I see in my constituency. That is what motivates me in this job, and it is what motivates my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, which is why she set the ageing society grand challenge. The Government share the commitment to prevention and public health that the debate has highlighted, because the costs, both to individual lives and to the NHS, are simply too great to ignore.

I want to address some of the points that hon. Members have raised. My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Suella Braverman) spoke about her local services. I am looking forward to reading the report and wish her well as she becomes a mother.

The hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) spoke about local mental health provision and the experience of his young constituent. NHS England's planned spend on mental health in the year ending 2019 was just over £12 billion. For children's mental health services, it is nearly £7 billion—an increase of 5.6% on the previous year. I would like to reassure him that we are definitely not aiming for a one-size-fits-all service.¹

I can reassure my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) that we are absolutely committed to training more GPs. In September last year, we had the highest ever number of students in training. We are also committed to allied healthcare professionals and working to retain the GPs that we have as well as releasing them to give them more time for frontline care.

In response to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West (Eleanor Smith), let me say that this Government are absolutely committed to the NHS remaining free at the point of delivery. I would like to put to bed the myth that there is any aim towards privatisation. On the specific constituency case that she raised, I remind her that almost 90% of prescriptions are dispensed free of charge.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan) spoke with her usual passion. She paid tribute to Dame Marianne Griffiths, and I join her in paying tribute to everyone at Western Sussex Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

I can tell the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale that we do take prevention extremely seriously. I know that he and I have a meeting scheduled to discuss healthcare in his constituency. We have published our vision for prevention, setting out how we will put that at the heart of the health and social care system, and later this year, we will launch a Green Paper on prevention.

My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow), who is an assiduous parliamentarian as well as constituency Member of Parliament, talked about screening for bowel cancer—something that has touched her family. The long-term plan will modernise the bowel cancer screening programme to detect more cancers by lowering the starting age from 60 to 50. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) touched on mental health. I would like to reiterate again that that is at the heart of the long-term plan.

I had never noticed my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) being critical, but she is definitely a candid friend to the Government. I thank her for her work as a cancer nurse and for highlighting the improvements in the diagnosis of breast cancer, stroke and other diseases.

The hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) is a great champion for survivors of sexual abuse. I will take away the specific points that she raised and discuss them with the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), who is responsible for mental health, inequalities and suicide prevention.

My hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas), who is also a great champion for the healthcare of his constituents—as I know from the number of letters to him that I sign—spoke about podiatry and the importance of prevention in amputations.

The hon. Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams) is obviously, with his background in medicine, extremely passionate about public health. Like him, the Government are committed to early years provision. He mentioned the work that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is doing on this. Yes, there are inequalities in life expectancy, but it is as high as it has ever been in this country.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) on the work that she has done on highlighting the issue of menopause, which has not been raised in this Chamber nearly enough. I reiterate to the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) that reducing health inequalities remains central to our strategy for public health, and we continue to require councils to use their grant with a view to achieving that.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) that we need to resolve the uncertainty about Brexit, and I thank her for highlighting the importance of research.

To the hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies), all I will say is that the World Health Organisation said that our air quality strategy is an example for the world to follow. To the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), let me say that we are in no way complacent, and I draw her attention to the targeted lung health checks in Manchester, which are producing excellent results.

1. [Official Report, 16 May 2019, Vol. 660, c. 4MC.]

To the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), let me say that public health funding for 2020 onwards, including the local authority public health grant, will be considered carefully in the next spending review, in the light of all available evidence. To the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali), let me say that we are taking serious steps on obesity. I share the passion of the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) for improved health outcomes in the north; I represent a seat in the north-west, and she represents one in the north-east.

The most important thing to remember is that public health is about more than the health service and public health grant. It is about the whole of government. It is about more than a single pot of money. Even within local government, improving health is not all about the grant, because local authorities can use the whole range of their activity—including on transport, planning and the economy—to promote better health. Spending across the board in local government, central Government and the NHS can all be far more influential in improving and protecting health.

Equality issues remain central to our strategy for public health. Our overarching twin ambition is to raise healthy life expectancy while reducing the inequalities in life expectancies across different groups of the population. In its long-term plan, the NHS has already committed to strengthen action on prevention and health inequalities. All local health systems will be expected to set out in 2019 how they will reduce health inequalities. This Government's commitment to improving public health, working with the NHS, local authorities and others, is rock solid. We will set out further steps in the Green Paper, and I urge all Members to oppose the motion.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 230, Noes 286.

Division No. 415]

[6.56 pm

AYES

Abrahams, Debbie	Chapman, Jenny
Ali, Rushanara	Clwyd, rh Ann
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Coaker, Vernon
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Coffey, Ann
Ashworth, Jonathan	Cooper, Julie
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Cooper, rh Yvette
Barron, rh Sir Kevin	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Beckett, rh Margaret	Coyle, Neil
Benn, rh Hilary	Crausby, Sir David
Berger, Luciana (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Chris Leslie</i>)	Creagh, Mary
Betts, Mr Clive	Creasy, Stella
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Cruddas, Jon
Blomfield, Paul	Cryer, John
Brabin, Tracy	Cummins, Judith
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Cunningham, Alex
Brennan, Kevin	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Daby, Janet
Bryant, Chris	Dakin, Nic
Buck, Ms Karen	Davey, rh Sir Edward
Burden, Richard	David, Wayne
Burgon, Richard	Davies, Geraint
Butler, Dawn	De Cordova, Marsha
Byrne, rh Liam	De Piero, Gloria
Cadbury, Ruth	Debbonaire, Thangam
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Dent Coad, Emma
Carden, Dan	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Dodds, Anneliese
Champion, Sarah	Doughty, Stephen
	Dowd, Peter

Dromey, Jack	Lee, Karen
Duffield, Rosie	Leslie, Mr Chris
Eagle, Ms Angela	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Eagle, Maria	Lewis, Clive
Edwards, Jonathan	Lewis, Mr Ivan
Efford, Clive	Lloyd, Stephen
Elliott, Julie	Lloyd, Tony
Ellman, Dame Louise	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Elmore, Chris	Lucas, Caroline
Esterson, Bill	Lucas, Ian C.
Evans, Chris	Lynch, Holly
Farron, Tim	Madders, Justin
Field, rh Frank	Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Mahmood, Shabana
Fletcher, Colleen	Malhotra, Seema
Flint, rh Caroline	Marsden, Gordon
Fovargue, Yvonne	Martin, Sandy
Foxcroft, Vicky	Maskell, Rachael
Frith, James	Matheson, Christian
Furniss, Gill	McCabe, Steve
Gaffney, Hugh	McCarthy, Kerry
Gapes, Mike	McDonagh, Siobhain
Gardiner, Barry	McDonald, Andy
George, Ruth	McDonnell, rh John
Gill, Preet Kaur	McFadden, rh Mr Pat
Glindon, Mary	McGinn, Conor
Godsiff, Mr Roger	McGovern, Alison
Goodman, Helen	McInnes, Liz
Green, Kate	McKinnell, Catherine
Greenwood, Lilian	McMahon, Jim
Greenwood, Margaret	McMorris, Anna
Griffith, Nia	Mearns, Ian
Gwynne, Andrew	Miliband, rh Edward
Hamilton, Fabian	Moran, Layla
Hanson, rh David	Morris, Grahame
Hardy, Emma	Murray, Ian
Harman, rh Ms Harriet	Norris, Alex
Harris, Carolyn	Onn, Melanie
Hayes, Helen	Onwurah, Chi
Hayman, Sue	Osamor, Kate
Healey, rh John	Owen, Albert
Hendrick, Sir Mark	Peacock, Stephanie
Hill, Mike	Pearce, Teresa
Hillier, Meg	Pennycook, Matthew
Hobhouse, Wera	Perkins, Toby
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret	Phillipson, Bridget
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Pidcock, Laura
Hoey, Kate	Platt, Jo
Hollern, Kate	Pollard, Luke
Hopkins, Kelvin	Powell, Lucy
Howarth, rh Mr George	Qureshi, Yasmin
Huq, Dr Rupa	Rayner, Angela
Hussain, Imran	Reed, Mr Steve
Jardine, Christine	Rees, Christina
Jarvis, Dan	Reeves, Ellie
Johnson, Diana	Reeves, Rachel
Jones, Darren	Reynolds, Jonathan
Jones, Gerald	Rimmer, Ms Marie
Jones, rh Mr Kevan	Rodda, Matt
Jones, Ruth	Rowley, Danielle
Jones, Sarah	Ruane, Chris
Jones, Susan Elan	Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Kane, Mike	Ryan, rh Joan
Keeley, Barbara	Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Kendall, Liz	Shah, Naz
Khan, Afzal	Sharma, Mr Virendra
Killen, Ged	Sheerman, Mr Barry
Kinnock, Stephen	Sherriff, Paula
Kyle, Peter	Siddiq, Tulip (<i>Proxy vote cast by Vicky Foxcroft</i>)
Laird, Lesley	Skinner, Mr Dennis
Lammy, rh Mr David	Slaughter, Andy
Lavery, Ian	

Smith, Cat
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen

Trickett, Jon
 Twigg, Stephen
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Thelma
 Watson, Tom
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitfield, Martin
 Williams, Dr Paul
 Woodcock, John
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Liz Twist and
Bambos Charalambous

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Stephen
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Benyon, rh Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, Conor
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, Colin
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey

Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinanage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Dodds, rh Nigel
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, rh Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evnnett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Field, rh Mark
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 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
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Luke
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Bill
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris

Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Hair, Kirstene
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hermon, Lady
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kerr, Stephen
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Lancaster, rh Mark
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Liddington, rh Mr David
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel

Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Masterton, Paul
 Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McVey, rh Ms Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Milton, rh Anne
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, James
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 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
 Ross, Douglas
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Smith, Chloe (*Proxy vote cast by Jo Churchill*)
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John

Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, rh Rory
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 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

Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 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

Tellers for the Noes:

Mr Alister Jack and
 Wendy Morton

Question accordingly negated.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) does not need to raise his hand as though he were in a classroom. I can see him clearly, he is unmistakeable and we will come to him ere long.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I raised a point of order yesterday highlighting the fact that the annual report of the learning disabilities mortality review has not been published despite its being handed over by its authors on 1 March and being leaked in *The Sunday Times* this week. Now we have leaks not only of details from the report about the deaths of people with learning disabilities who had a do not resuscitate order placed on their care, but of the full recommendations of the report in the *Health Service Journal*.

It is a pity that the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy), has left her place before I have finished this point of order. Ministers do not seem to care about this report, which deals with the deaths of 4,300 people with learning disabilities.

Have you had notification that the Secretary of State has finally decided that this vital report is too important to have published by selective leaks, or has he indicated that he will come to the House tomorrow, as he should, to make a statement on this report?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order. The short answer is that I have received no indication from any Minister of an intention to come to the House to make an oral statement on this matter. I note what she says about leaks to the media of sections and parts, even substantial elements of the report. That is not conducive to the best public debate, it has to be said. I know not how those leaks occurred: it is not the first time and it will not be the last.

If the hon. Lady is concerned that these matters should be aired in the Chamber, there are options open to her and she will have to reflect on that. I certainly have no aversion whatever to a proper focus on that important matter, affecting very many vulnerable people indeed, in the Chamber. Knowing her as I do, I have a feeling that I will probably hear further from her.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. There has been a lot of speculation today about British Steel, which employs 4,000 people in my constituency and across the country. It is a significant business. In the light of that speculation, while I recognise the sensitivities of the situation, have the Government given any notice of an intention to update the House about what is going on?

Mr Speaker: No. I have received no recent indication. If the hon. Gentleman has in mind the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, I should, in fairness, say that that right hon. Gentleman is a most solicitous member of the Government. From time to time, as he judges appropriate, he does come to see me to apprise me of matters of which he thinks I need to be aware, sometimes as a prelude to a ministerial statement. In this case, in recent days—that is to say, this week—I have received no such indication. The hon. Gentleman may wish to conduct his own private discussions or make inquiries about Government intentions. He may thereby be satisfied. If he is not, and on a different subject but, in the same way as the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), he feels the Chamber has improperly been denied a chance to air the issue, he knows there is a recourse open to him.

Business without Debate

Mr Speaker: Before we come to motions 3 to 5, I should inform the House that I have considered the Russia (Sanctions) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 for certification under Standing Order No. 83P—I know the House was keenly attentive to the importance of my doing so—and I have decided that no certificate is required.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (AGRICULTURE)

That the draft Food and Feed Hygiene and Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 8 April, be approved.—(*Jo Churchill.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (CUSTOMS)

That the Trade etc. in Dual-Use Items and Firearms etc. (Amendment) (EU Exit) (No. 2) Regulations 2019 (S.I., 2019, No. 806), dated 4 April 2019, a copy of which was laid before this House on 4 April, be approved.—(*Jo Churchill.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (SANCTIONS)

That the Russia (Sanctions) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (S.I., 2019, No. 855), dated 10 April 2019, a copy of which was laid before this House on 11 April, be approved.—(*Jo Churchill.*)

The Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 15 May (Standing Order No. 41A).

PETITION

Green Deal Scheme

7.17 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): I rise to present a petition on behalf of those who have been adversely impacted by the green deal scheme. The presentation of this petition on behalf of constituents from Greenfield over to Baillieston follows excellent campaign work undertaken by my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), who has been dogged in his pursuit of this issue. Likewise, it follows the outstanding efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown), who is seeking to progress his Green Deal (Conduct of Home Energy and Lifestyle Management Ltd) Bill. My voice tonight is part of a wider effort by the SNP team at Westminster to seek justice for those constituents unfairly affected by the green deal.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Glasgow East

Declares that the Government-backed Green Deal Scheme has adversely affected residents of Glasgow East both financially and psychologically; further that many residents have, in good faith, invested their life savings or accrued several thousands of pounds of debt to pay for work that was carried out by companies approved by the Green Deal Scheme; further that in some cases the work including the installation of insulation and of solar panels, was incomplete; further that some were sub-standard and in many cases residents were given incorrect information which led them to believe that they would save or make money when in fact they have simply lost money; and further that in other cases the installer did not apply for building warrants and as a result they are unable to sell their properties, or have the peace of mind that their homes are safe to live in, or that the insurance policies residents continue to pay, are valid without a building warrant.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to compensate financially and protect people who have found themselves suffering in this way after signing up to this Government-backed scheme using Government-approved installers.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002452]

Crime and Antisocial Behaviour: Stockton South

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

7.20 pm

Dr Paul Williams (Stockton South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to have secured this, my first Adjournment debate. I wanted the debate because there is a problem in my constituency, and I am sure that the problem I hear about from my constituents is echoed in other parts of the country. As the representative of all my constituents, whether they voted for me or not, I want to put to the Government the problems they are describing to me. I hope the Minister is in listening mode for a while.

It is difficult to imagine what it is like to live in a community where residents are woken at night by people loudly bashing on the door looking for somewhere to buy drugs or where people are frightened that if they take their dog for a walk somebody will break into their home. It is difficult to understand the impact that being a victim of crime can have and how it can sap somebody's confidence. It is also difficult to understand the impact it can have on entire communities when people feel that their streets are not as safe as they used to be.

The area I represent is not one homogeneous area. Stockton South is a mixture of many different communities, some more affluent, some with higher levels of deprivation. Each community has its own characteristics, but there are common concerns. I have held several public meetings in response to the concerns of constituents and people have contacted me directly. Our local newspaper, *The Teesside Gazette*, is full of stories and, as in many other parts of the country, there are virtual communities on social media. An overwhelming number of people are describing what they perceive to be a rising tide of crime and antisocial behaviour.

First, I would like to tell some of those stories, look at what the numbers tell us, talk about what the police have told me about their response, and perhaps touch on the local authority response. I then want to put some specific asks to the Government to help the communities I represent.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on what I am sure will be the first of many Adjournment debates he leads in this place. Mine is the next-door constituency, and what he describes is replicated there. As a group of Tees MPs, we wrote to the Home Secretary on 13 February asking to meet him to discuss these issues, and he has yet to reply. Is my hon. Friend surprised that the Home Secretary is ignoring the MPs in Cleveland and does not seem to care about the people we represent?

Dr Williams: I thank my hon. Friend and neighbour for drawing attention to that. The fact that we did not receive a response to what we collectively thought was quite a reasonable request was one of my reasons for initiating the debate. I wanted to ensure that the Government were listening to people throughout the borough of Stockton-on-Tees who have a common set of concerns.

In Thornaby, there is a real public awareness of the rising levels of vandalism of public property. There has also been a spate of attacks on individuals in parts of

the town, which have made people really frightened. A 90-year-old woman told me recently that she had become frightened to leave her home. There are increasing numbers of burglaries and break-ins. Residents describe groups of young people who are being deliberately provocative, throwing stones and driving quad bikes around. Some of that is clearly antisocial behaviour, but some of it crosses the boundary into criminal activity.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on raising an issue which, as he has said, is important not just in his constituency, but in constituencies throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Street pastors have done some incredible work in my constituency. A group of churches have come together to address antisocial issues. Along with Government bodies and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, they have managed to reduce antisocial behaviour. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the best way of reducing crime and antisocial behaviour is to provide alternatives for young people, and that that means funding the churches and voluntary bodies which provide schemes and places for those young people to go, as well as relationships to discourage destructive behaviour?

Dr Williams: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point. Of course there is not just a criminal justice response to crime and antisocial behaviour. Many people, including those in voluntary and community sector organisations and schools, are working to build the capacity of our communities. However, there is also a need for an adequate police response.

In Ingleby Barwick, a great deal of attention has been paid to antisocial behaviour. Again, there have been attacks on individuals. People shopping at the local branch of Tesco have been subjected to unacceptable levels of intimidation and abuse. I recently met the Low Hartburn residents group. People are so concerned about the rising levels of property theft in that area that a group of concerned residents—who stress that they are not vigilantes—have formed a strong residents group. They organise activities such as playdays and community capacity-building, but they also have a rota, taking it in turns to patrol their estate at night. These are hard-working people who have jobs during the day. They are not doing this off their own bat—they are working with the police, and are taking plenty of necessary precautions—but they are having to enhance the community's response by organising their own street patrols.

In Parkfield and Oxbridge, I have heard testimony from the excellent local councillors, including Louise Baldock. She has told me about intolerable levels of antisocial behaviour. People have referred to a lot of abuse in the streets, many residents are worried about the high level of drug dealing in the streets, and there is street sex work. Even in the more affluent area of Hartburn, where I spent time with residents on Friday, there are high levels of car crime and shoplifting. I am sure that all that is being echoed in many other areas in Stockton South.

What I have related so far is a series of anecdotes, but the data is quite shocking. I asked the House of Commons Library about the figures for reported crime. I know that it has increased throughout the country—there has been a 31% increase throughout England and Wales,

although that may be due partly to increases in crime and partly to better reporting—but in Cleveland there has been a 55% increase, and in my constituency there was an 83% increase between 2011-12 and 2018-19. The perceptions of people on the street are clearly borne out by that data. That may be because there are some unique problems in Cleveland. We have the highest level of reported antisocial behaviour in the country, the second highest levels of domestic violence and the highest levels of drug abuse. We are an area of very high deprivation and have some serious and organised criminals involved in the supply of drugs. There are some serious urban problems in our area and a serious response is required, but in the period since 2011-12 there has been not just a real-terms cut, but a cash-terms reduction. Cleveland police force is £34 million worse off, and that is including a slight increase in funding last year, although for the area with the fourth highest reported crime rate in the country we had the second lowest level of increased funding. Since 2011-12 there has been a cash-terms reduction of £17 million in our police budget. That has meant that in a time of increased crime—an 83% increase—our police numbers have been slashed from 1,700 to 1,200; there are 500 fewer police and 50 fewer police community support officers.

Unfortunately, we have had several chief constables. One retired, one suddenly left, and we now have a brilliant new chief constable in Richard Lewis. I have listened to all of them and they have said that uniquely in Cleveland—many of them have worked in other parts of the country—the police just do not have the resources to respond to the levels of demand.

Alex Cunningham: We are very proud in Cleveland of the partnership work between the local authorities, voluntary organisations and others and our communities in trying to deal with some of the issues, but of course they need resources. We have seen tremendously large cuts to local authority funding in our area—50% in Stockton's case—and I know that my hon. Friend understands why our constituents are feeling so angry and frustrated when they do not see the action that they need in our communities.

Dr Williams: Again, my hon. Friend hits the nail on the head. We are seeing a great response from the local authority antisocial behaviour teams, but they tell us that they just do not have the resources they need to deal with this significant increase in crime and antisocial behaviour in our area.

I did not initially want to air some of this in public. One of the reasons why we wrote to the Home Secretary privately is that—I hope the Minister understands this—there is a genuine concern about keeping confidence in the police locally. I do not want to undermine public confidence in the ability of the police to do their job, but when the police are telling me that they do not have enough officers to police our area safely, and when we approach the Home Secretary privately to try to get a response and do not get one, I am afraid that there is no other way open to MPs than to air some of these problems in a public forum.

I want to compare Cleveland to some other areas. Nationally, police forces are funded at an average level of about £2,400 per crime; in Cleveland we get £2,140. Let us compare areas of similar sizes. Some might say that Cleveland is an area with a particularly small

[Dr Paul Williams]

population and that therefore it will not be funded at the levels of other areas, but Warwickshire is a similar size force and it gets £2,494 per crime as opposed to our £2,140. Let us compare areas with similar budgets. Gwent has a similar budget to the Cleveland force. It has to contend with 54,784 crimes a year and we have 61,982, so we have more crimes for a similar budget. Whichever way we cut the numbers, I believe the chief constable and the police when they say that they just do not have the resources to do the job that they need to do.

We have levels of crime that are 21% higher than the national average and that figure is rising, but even with the recent very small increases in funding—according to the House of Commons Library there has been a 3% increase in funding in real terms nationally—there is a 0% increase in Cleveland. Local people just do not understand why we are not getting the resources. There must be something wrong with the formula.

I have challenged the police and asked them what they are doing to reform. I have asked them what they could do to use their money in a better way. They have given me a long list of things that they are trying to do better. They have put extra resources into the force control room to try to get more timely responses; they have tried to get more police on to the frontline; they have tried to improve the levels of community policing and intelligence; they are trying to use technology; and they are trying to have a named police community support officer for every council ward. They are also conscious of the fact that, because of the rising levels of crime and the rising pressure on the police, their levels of sickness are very high. Around 100 of the 1,200 officers are off on long-term sick leave at the moment, which brings extra pressure.

The force is in a spiral of increasing problems but, despite that, all the police I meet are doing a remarkable job. Despite the historical problems with Cleveland police, there are high levels of trust in the police among the community. The individual police I meet are doing a brilliant job. I have to pay particular tribute to our Labour police and crime commissioner, Barry Coppinger, whose levels of engagement are phenomenal. He has attended hundreds of public meetings and gatherings and is a fine spokesman for the work of his team. He is doing the very best he can with the resources that he has.

I am afraid that I have to be a bit party political about this as well. We have a Tory Tees Valley Mayor. Oversight of the police is not the responsibility of the combined authority, but our Tory Tees Valley Mayor has taken it upon himself to make public pronouncements about Cleveland police, and his response to the woefully inadequate funding and the rising levels of need in the community has been to suggest that we abolish Cleveland police. That shows that he is really not listening to our communities. Our neighbouring forces in Durham and North Yorkshire have to contend largely with rural crime, but we have unique levels of urban crime, including serious organised crime, and our police have developed a unique level of expertise. It is clear to me that any kind of abolition or merger would split my constituency in two, with one half being policed by one force and the other half being policed by another. It would completely

dilute the police's effectiveness. Such a split would also mask the fundamental unfairness of the funding. Taking away the expertise of Cleveland police by following the Tory Tees Valley Mayor's suggestion of abolition would be a criminals' wet dream on Teesside. It would dilute the police's effectiveness and be entirely the wrong strategic response.

What would we like to see happening? We wrote to the Home Secretary to outline the rising levels of crime, the rising demands on the police, the increases in sexual offences and in children missing from home, and the massive increase in homicides, in the levels of domestic abuse and in the number of robberies. We know that this is not just about a criminal justice response, however. Indeed, there are some brilliant organisations working in my constituency to provide a community response. A lot of young people there have a very difficult start in life. Many of them are in households where they are exposed to adverse childhood experiences, including parental mental health problems, domestic violence and substance misuse. We have to invest in those young people and I try to bring representatives of the organisations making that investment to every public meeting that I go to. I must give a real shout-out to Nicola Garrett and Darren Iveson from the Five Lamps organisation in Thornaby, and to the Corner House Youth Project, which works across into the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) and does brilliant, sterling work helping vulnerable young people to find alternatives to crime. The work that our schools do is fantastic as well. There are many other organisations working hard in our community.

However, we have to face the facts here. The biggest problems felt by our communities are the lack of an adequate police presence, the fact that the police are not there to gather the intelligence that they used to and that the police response is not sufficient. I have challenged and listened to the police on that. I do not think that any force in the country would be able to deal with a 55% increase in crime over the past eight years—the statistic for Stockton South is 83%—given the massive cuts that Cleveland police have faced, which have led to the loss of 500 police officers and 50 PCSOs. Beyond anything else, I as the local representative of my community and the other Members of Parliament in the Tees Valley, particularly Labour Members, are asking the Government to consider the particular local issues and to see whether the police funding formula is the right one to deliver sufficient resources to help my constituents and my community to feel safe.

7.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): I thank the hon. Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams) for securing this important debate—his first Adjournment debate. I am grateful to him for his points, particularly the one about his letter to the Home Secretary. I am not aware of that letter, but I do not think that the hon. Gentleman would expect me to be, given the number of letters that the Home Office receives weekly, let alone annually. However, should he ever have a similar communication in future, he should feel free to raise the matter directly with me and I will endeavour to ensure that he gets a response. We will look into the matter and I am sure that we will respond.

Alex Cunningham: I thank the Minister for giving way and for her warm words about her responding to letters, but will she do us a wee favour, go and bang on the Home Secretary's door tomorrow and ask, "Did you get this letter? Did you get the two or three reminders that were sent? Will you now respond?"

Victoria Atkins: If the hon. Gentleman had been listening, he would have heard me say that officials and I will look into the matter because we want to ensure that colleagues' letters receive a response.

The hon. Member for Stockton South made many points, but I will first refer to the overall national picture of crime. The independent Office for National Statistics is clear that the likelihood of being a victim of crime remains low, but we are not complacent. We know that there has been a genuine increase in serious violent crimes, and a recent YouGov poll showed that crime was a more important issue to the public than health for the first time. We are determined to tackle all forms of crime and we are taking decisive action in a number of areas.

The hon. Gentleman made particular reference to serious violence. The measures that we are taking include £17.7 million for 29 projects endorsed by police and crime commissioners under the early intervention youth fund—part of the £22 million that has been committed overall—and a new £3.6 million national county lines co-ordination centre led by the National Police Chiefs' Council and the National Crime Agency, which launched last September. In the few months that the centre has been operating, it has seen more than 1,000 arrests and over 1,300 vulnerable people safeguarded, which perhaps underlines the fact that many of the crimes that the police now have to deal with involve not only criminality, with serious organised crime gangs and so on, but the manipulation of vulnerable people. Tackling that forms part of our approach under the serious violence strategy.

The Government are also investing in a new national police capability to tackle gang-related activity on social media, which is a new, 21st-century methodology that gangs are using, and we are in the middle of strengthening legislation on firearms, knives and corrosive substances through the Offensive Weapons Bill, which I hope will receive Royal Assent this week. We are also launching a consultation on a new legal duty to underpin a public health approach to tackling serious violence.

I would not want anyone to think that the Home Office does not take the concerns of the north-east seriously when it comes to crime. I was in Darlington last week at a serious violence engagement event for the north-east. I spoke to a hall full of local people from all manner of agencies—education, healthcare, local government, trading standards and so on, as well as the police—about what we can do locally to ensure that the approach to tackling serious violence is as co-ordinated and effective as possible.

I am sure the hon. Gentleman will be pleased to hear that Cleveland is also receiving more than £546,000 through the early intervention youth fund to support the development of early intervention programmes aimed at young people at risk of engaging in criminality, including serious violence and knife crime. We are also taking action to address the drivers of such crime. For example, we recognise the devastating impact that illicit drugs can have on individuals and communities, which is why the Home Secretary has commissioned

an independent review of drugs, in which Professor Dame Carol Black is looking at drug use in the 21st century and the ways in which drugs are fuelling, for example, serious violence. We look forward to the review's initial findings in the summer.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned antisocial behaviour and described its wearing effect on local communities. We recognise the impact it can have on people and communities and on people's enjoyment of their communities. We reformed the tools and powers available to local areas to tackle antisocial behaviour through the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. Those tools and powers are designed to enable local agencies to respond to such behaviours, to stop them escalating and to prevent them from reoccurring.

Both the police and, on some occasions, local councils can use a range of powers to help members of the public with antisocial behaviour. They include court orders to stop the behaviour of the most destructive people, powers to close premises that are causing nuisance or disorder, and powers to stop antisocial behaviour in public places. The community trigger and other measures enable the public to feed back to the police and the local council when they think antisocial behaviour is not being dealt with as they would like.

We have published statutory guidance on this to help local areas, and we have updated it to reflect feedback from professionals and to remind them of the importance of proportionality and transparency in the use of some of these powers, which are very varied. These are strong powers that can be used, and we keep them under review through a national strategic board that brings together representatives from key agencies and from across Government to consider our approach and to identify any developing issues.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned police funding and—I almost hesitate, because I know hon. Members know this—I will give a little history lesson on why very difficult decisions had to be made at the beginning of this decade. We inherited a terrible economic mess and had to make very difficult decisions not just in policing but in a number of areas to live within our means and to try to repair some of the damage. It is precisely because of that stewardship that we are now in a better position financially and we are able to increase police funding, as we did last year, thus ensuring, with the help of police and crime commissioners, that there is more money for local police forces, counter-terrorism and those officers who tackle serious and organised crime. Nationally, funding will increase by more than £1 billion in 2019-20, including, as I say, with the help of council tax, extra funding for pensions costs and the serious violence fund announced by the Chancellor in the spring statement. Interestingly, this funding is already enabling the police to recruit to fill key gaps and to meet the financial pressures they face next year.

Cleveland police will receive an increase of £7.3 million next year, to a total figure of £132.7 million. That is an increase of nearly 6%. It is a shame the hon. Gentleman did not feel able to support the Government giving that £7 million more to Cleveland police, but I am sure that Cleveland's PCC will use it wisely. He asked me a pertinent question at the serious violence engagement event on Thursday. I hope that the hon. Gentleman and his neighbour, the hon. Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham), will lobby the PCC to spend that money on more officers.

[Victoria Atkins]

7.50 pm

I note the time. I am delighted that the hon. Member for Stockton South has been able to secure this debate. I very much look forward to discussing this with him further.

House adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 9(7)).

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 14 May 2019

[IAN PAISLEY *in the Chair*]

One Public Estate Programme

9.30 am

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

That this House has considered One Public Estate.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for allowing me to bring forward this debate. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Mr Paisley.

I have secured this debate because I believe it is important to review programmes and policies and, as far as I can see, there has been very little scrutiny of the One Public Estate programme since its launch some six years ago in 2013. It was launched by the coalition Government, largely in response to their priority of reducing the deficit. Although I acknowledge that ambition, my great fear is that we are witnessing a wholesale asset stripping of the public estate with very little public or central Government scrutiny.

However, I appreciate that the programme's aim was just as much to seek to join up central Government, local government and other partners to make better use of public assets and their land. The idea was that by public partners sharing space, running costs could be reduced and surplus assets sold to generate money or released for other purposes to create new jobs or homes. In fact, the programme had three core aims: to create efficiencies, generating capital receipts and reducing costs; to create local economic growth, creating new jobs and homes; and to deliver more integrated, customer-focused services, providing citizens with better access to Government.

My interest in securing the debate was motivated by my own time as a councillor on Warwickshire County Council, and by a local project involving new offices for Warwick District Council, my local authority, which I believe could have made use of the One Public Estate programme. It is also motivated by my wider interest, which many will know of, in housing issues and particularly social housing. I will outline the aims of the programme when it was first launched, provide my own assessment of its success and perhaps unpick some of its failures, particularly in relation to housing.

Launching the policy in 2014, Francis Maude, who was a Minister in the Cabinet Office in the years 2010 to 2015, outlined the impetus for the programme thus:

"In the absence of a comprehensive, coordinated strategy, central departments and their arms-length bodies all did their own thing."

He continued:

"They did it without talking to each other and without thinking about their local partners.

Because no one was looking at the bigger picture, departments would take on expensive new leases when government freeholds remained under-used—or where local authority accommodation was available just down the road."

I will come back to that point and illustrate it with a local example. Later in my speech I will also return to what Mr Maude was saying in 2014, as I think his words were particularly significant. They are certainly eerily apposite to the case of Warwick District Council, my local authority, and its proposed self-described new headquarters building in the centre of Leamington.

There was merit in Mr Maude's approach, and I applaud his thinking at the time. For example, the notion of providing services in one place as opposed to several could better serve the public by providing easier access to local government and other public services. The obvious example would be a jobcentre sharing space with a council's welfare and housing team.

In its initial trialling in 2013, the programme focused on 12 councils. It has since expanded rapidly so that just over 300 councils now participate, representing 95% of all English local authorities. The One Public Estate programme also works with 13 Government Departments and hundreds of health and blue light organisations. It works by providing a combination of central Government grant funding directly to partnerships, which have to bid for it, and expertise that local authorities and other public bodies do not always possess.

The purpose of the funding is to cover up-front costs associated with getting a project under way and to unlock those potential assets, for example through remediation works on land that could be used for housing. One Public Estate has also formed a partnership with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to jointly administer the Government's land release programme, which is designed to release land for 160,000 homes on Government land and a further 160,000 on local government land by 2020. That was formulated back in 2017.

There have been some successes through the programme. In my assessment, the aims of One Public Estate are, in the main, laudable. As someone who spent part of my career bringing change to an organisation, I wholeheartedly support the programme's aim to rationalise the use of public assets to reduce the cost to the taxpayer, and to provide Government services in a more joined-up and accessible way. In fact, shortly after the programme's national launch, I proposed a "one Warwickshire estate" programme as a county councillor. I could see that the county and district councils in my community could make much better use of the land and buildings they owned to serve each other's needs.

Across the country, there have clearly been some successes, albeit limited ones. The most impressive is that to date the programme has created 5,700 jobs, and the latest phase is expected to create a further 14,000 new jobs. That is a tangible benefit for people up and down the country. To date, it is estimated that running costs associated with partner projects have been reduced by £24 million, and the new phase is expected to save taxpayers £37 million in running costs. However, I point out that, while any saving to the taxpayer is positive, £24 million over five years is relatively small beer compared with the overall cost of Government.

There are individual cases that will bring big benefits to their local communities. Looking through the various materials available on the programme, I see the development of public sector hubs, if done in the right way, as a positive step forward. The West Suffolk partnership is currently developing such a hub, which will have space

[*Matt Western*]

for a school, leisure facilities including a swimming pool and health centre, children's centre, public library, jobcentre and citizen's advice bureau, as well as space for Suffolk police, West Suffolk Council and Suffolk County Council. That will surely benefit how the local community interacts with the public sector, and the project is expected to reduce running costs by £4 million to boot.

Another example is in Cornwall, where the police, fire and ambulance services have co-located in a new joint headquarters in Hayle, saving £500,000 a year on running costs and releasing two sites for redevelopment. The new facility has enabled the emergency services to reach many more people within the target response time. Since the success of that first tri-light co-location, Cornwall partners have progressed to a number of further blue light property co-locations and piloted emergency services collaboration, with tri-service offices being rolled out across the county.

I mentioned that Warwick District Council, in my area, has been seeking to build itself a new office. I do not believe that is necessary, because there is ample vacant or void space in the county council offices, just two miles up the road. I will come back to that a little bit later.

There have also been failures of the programme. Perhaps the greatest failing of all has been the wholesale disposal of public land, ignoring the greatest crisis of all—the need to deliver much-needed public housing. That is my greatest concern because, to paraphrase, “They don’t make land any more,” and, together with its people, public land is a community’s greatest asset.

We are in the midst of a serious housing crisis: 277,000 people are homeless and 1,157,000 households are currently on the housing waiting list. There is a clear and urgent need to house people who are at the sharp end of this crisis, but we also hear from older constituents who are renting privately and unable to afford their rent—a problem that will only increase. It is estimated that by 2040 up to one third of 60-year-olds will be renting privately. We also know that many younger people are trapped in the private rented sector.

One of the major barriers to providing housing is land. Sky-high land prices are preventing local authorities from gaining access to land to build on, and those prices are incentivising cash-strapped councils to sell off the land they own rather than build on it.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. He talks about social housing, and there are five major cartels in this country that the Government should tackle. They get involved in what I call land banking, for want of a better term: they get outline planning permission, and then they sit on the land until it becomes more valuable. Then, of course, house prices in the private sector go through the roof. Does he agree that that is one of the big problems that should be tackled?

Matt Western: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point: this is an oligopoly, with just a few players controlling our land. I increasingly see local authorities coming to arrangements with the big players and developers, and that prevents land from being used wisely to deliver the sort of housing that we need.

With such a colossal social crisis before us, we should use all suitable public land to build high-quality social rented council housing, without exception—not 50% here or 40% there, but 100% of such land. I fear—with good reason, it seems—that the One Public Estate programme was designed more to incentivise the public sector to sell its precious land as part of a national asset-stripping programme than to use the opportunity so afforded to design in a more efficient delivery of public services or facilitate the building of social rented housing, which would be of most social benefit to most communities.

A relatively small number of homes have been delivered by the OPE so far: just 303, which is a failure in itself. Overall, the land released will enable the building of a further 2,550 homes, with an estimated 10,000 more homes over the next five years. It worries me that I cannot find the data on how many of those homes will be social rented, or even affordable—I suspect most are not—or how much of the land has been released to local authorities to build council housing; I suspect most has not. It would be helpful if the Minister provided the data today.

I do know, however, that the Government’s estate strategy revealed that around £2 billion has already been generated from selling more than 1,000 buildings in the last four years, with £164 million in capital receipts from land and property sales raised as part of the OPE. How much of that land could have been suitable for delivering the social rented council housing we desperately need? In truth, any such need, or means of facility to meet that need, has been fundamentally undermined by the prevailing attitude that public sector assets and land are best released to the private sector. I think it is fair to say that that was the view of what is now seen as a surprisingly neoliberal coalition Government. In the speech that I referred to earlier, Francis Maude went on to say that

“we want to release property back onto the market”,

and that the Government

“identified assets which could be released between now and 2020, generating £5 billion for the taxpayer.”

To be fair, it appears that this Government’s priorities have changed from those of the coalition Government. The Prime Minister has claimed that austerity is over, although the public are yet to see any evidence of that. She has also claimed that she wishes to solve the housing crisis, naming it the Government’s No. 1 domestic priority. Indeed, the borrowing cap has been reformed so that councils can begin building council housing at scale again, but a cap should never have been imposed in the first instance. I therefore urge the Minister to look again at how the One Public Estate programme operates, in terms of releasing public land, and to shift its priorities so that public land that is suitable for the development of social rented council housing is prioritised for that purpose, instead of being flogged off to the highest bidder.

The defence estate optimisation programme provides a very good example of the potential of OPE, but also its failings. The Ministry of Defence currently accounts for 2% of the UK’s land mass. The Government recognise that many of those sites could be better used, particularly for housing, and the Ministry of Defence therefore plans to release around 90 of its most expensive sites before 2040, potentially releasing land for 55,000 homes. That relies on linking up the Ministry with the relevant

local authorities and providing them with the up-front cost and expertise needed to make the most of the release of those sites. The OPE is well placed to fulfil that role; indeed, it is already involved in discussions relating to 12 of the sites.

However, if we dig slightly deeper, we see that the opportunity for mass social rented housing programmes on that land is being totally missed. For example, St George's barracks in Rutland is due to close in 2021, and the master plan that has been developed provides for 2,200 homes as part of a new garden village. The OPE programme was awarded £175,000 in December 2017 for project management, consultation, surveys and master planning of the barracks site—so far, so good. However, when we delve into the master plan, we see that only 30% of the homes will be affordable. Worse still, of those, 50% will be affordable rent, which we all know is not that affordable; 35% will be starter homes or other affordable home ownership products; and 15% will be rent to buy. It appears that none will be social-rented housing—a prime example of a fantastic opportunity missed for OPE and genuinely affordable housing.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I spoke to the Minister this morning before the debate. Does the hon. Gentleman believe it is important that there is a purpose behind the sale of any land, such as saving money when Departments come together? Equally important, as he outlined, is the need to ensure that, whatever land becomes available, there is a social housing requirement to give those who do not have the same assets the opportunity to buy or rent houses. In Northern Ireland, we had a suggestion—not a rule—that developers should set aside 10% of land for social housing. Does he feel that the Government should look at something more objective for the mainland, with land set aside in law for social housing? Does he think that might be a way of retaining land for social housing? People cannot get housing if we do not give them the opportunity to do so.

Ian Paisley (in the Chair): Order. If Members wish to make speeches, will they please make an application to do so? The Chair of the debate will happily accommodate them.

Matt Western: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention—I think it was an intervention—and he makes a valid point. There is a huge need to legislate for this, as I have identified, with 1.2 million people in homelessness. We have a massive social crisis because of the land banking that is going on across the country, as my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) said. We saw that yesteryear with commercial land, when the big supermarkets just took up options, and now we see it with housing developers and home builders, who have a huge number of options across the country, in Northern Ireland and here on the mainland. They control the prices, the roll-out and the build of housing in this country, and they allow to be built what is viable for them, in view of the profitability that they want to achieve.

In Amsterdam, all housing projects have to deliver 80% social housing. Whether it is 10% or 40%, or whatever the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)

said, we have to choose, politically, the right figure. I want the figure to be 100%, which is the way the Dutch authorities are looking to go in Amsterdam. That is what we need, because we have such a crisis. The Shelter report from January on the need for social housing identified that we need to build 3 million social rented properties in the next 20 years—155,000 every year for the next 20 years. That is why we should use all this land to realise its greatest value, which has to be in its social value, not simply in the financial receipt.

To summarise, let me be clear: I support the overall aims of the One Public Estate programme. It has been important in trying to achieve a change in the mindset of those in the various public sector authorities and our Ministries to try to deliver better outcomes. Its simple approach of seeking to establish a partnership model across the sector was, and remains, right. The simple idea of mapping the public estate and understanding, through audit, what is out there and what we have that local authorities and others can use; the establishment of a strong governance mechanism, with representation across the public sector, which is vital in driving delivery; and the engagement of public sector partners as early as possible, to ensure that a project meets the needs of local communities, are all creditable and right. When delivered effectively, it can produce savings to the taxpayer and, most importantly, improve local services, but I am absolutely not convinced that that is happening as widely or as openly as was originally hoped.

I can only draw on my own experience in Warwickshire and with my local authority, Warwick District Council, where there has been no real appetite to exhaust the options of sharing assets. We still have in Warwickshire a police headquarters and a fire headquarters, and both are on prime land. There is considerable opportunity for a master plan to improve the delivery of services while enabling the best use of assets for the public purse. The Suffolk example that I gave earlier is a positive example of what can be achieved.

I think, however, that there are examples across the country of asset stripping, and of the wholesale industrial sell-off of land. My fear is that there is not, through the Public Accounts Committee or through this place generally, proper scrutiny of what is going on, even though billions of pounds of public assets are in play. I would urge the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy to be more closely involved.

In my own investigations, I realised that one particular company was involved with my local council, Warwick District Council. Called PSP—Public Sector Plc—it is, I discovered, involved with 22 different authorities across the UK. I understand that it has not followed a procurement process, yet it is advising and involved in the disposal of these assets. Surely CIPFA and others should be looking at that. I believe that the Government Property Agency should be looking at it, and so should the Public Accounts Committee.

We should focus on the ambition, which is the utilisation of the assets for the maximum possible benefit in our communities, and on how we realise true social value. In practice, that means a shift in the programme from delivering as much money as possible—the highest receipt—through the sale of assets, to releasing land for local authorities to deliver the best services, the best

[*Matt Western*]

joined-up practice and high-quality social rented council housing so that we can finally get to grips with our housing crisis.

I look forward to hearing the contributions of other hon. Members and that of the Minister, but I urge us all to think about our most pressing need, which is to deliver low-rent social housing. Only public land can deliver that.

9.52 am

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) on such a superb and powerful opening to the debate. In particular, he made the case for social housing and the importance of 100% social housing and affordable housing on the sites released by Government. If he will excuse me, I am going to take a slightly different journey and talk about the opportunities for release of public land in relation to creating jobs, which is an essential part of creating the fairer society that we want to see.

This speech will be an unashamed plug for Plymouth. As many people who have heard me speak in this place will know, I am very proud to be a Janner, very proud to be from Plymouth, and the experience that Plymouth has had, the journey that it has been on, can tell us a lot about One Public Estate and how it fits with other Government programmes and, in particular, the Government hubs programme, which I think has a good opportunity to create jobs in my part of the world.

I was intending to spend a bit of time talking about how fabulous the far south-west is, until I saw the new Minister in his place. I believe that, as the hon. Member for Torbay, he may have an inkling of just how fantastic a part of the world the far south-west and, in particular, south Devon is. I know that he knows Plymouth very well.

I want the Government to start realising at a faster pace their ambition to move jobs out of central London and into the regions, in particular those regions that have missed out on many of the large Government relocations in the past. The far south-west, and Devon and Cornwall in particular, is one of those areas with an appetite for greater investment. There is a willing and skilled workforce who can support our public sector objectives, and there is an opportunity, using the lower land costs, to realise benefits for the taxpayer in terms of not only output, but economic activity and cost to the taxpayer.

We know that, on average, good-quality, affordable business premises in Plymouth and the far south-west are about a third cheaper than similar properties in many parts of the south-east. Considerable savings can be made when we look at costs in central London in particular. I think that the principles behind the One Public Estate strategy support moving more jobs into the regions. Programmes that channel funding and support through councils to deliver ambitious property-based projects tend to work best when there is opportunity, land and a real willingness and drive to do that. The opportunity to work more with local councils should be

a thread running through this debate, because from the initial small cohort of councils when the One Public Estate strategy was first formed, we now have, as my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington said, nearly all English local authorities involved, and entrepreneurial, innovative local councils are driving forward very interesting and beneficial property development.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that he is now going down a route that is particularly advantageous for other parts of the United Kingdom, in terms of not just developing social housing but the economic benefits that can be derived by Government looking at disposing of surplus land—land that will not be required over the next 10 or 20 years—but that that requires intensive consultation with local communities to arrive at the conclusion that he and I seem to draw?

Luke Pollard: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The important points are what Government land is disposed of, how it is disposed of and where the benefits of that disposal flow. We have seen in Plymouth, a city with a very large military pedigree and current military role, that many of our former armed forces bases have been sold off, but the benefits of the sale have been taken to the Exchequer in London and not delivered to the communities that previously gained employment and investment and a sense of identity from those military bases. I think that there is an opportunity to use much of the surplus land, which is owned by a cohort of public authorities—ranging from the Ministry of Defence and all the weird and wonderful MOD agencies, through to Plymouth City Council and different parts of the Government estate—and to bring services together. If the Government are to realise their ambition of moving from 800 to 200 Government offices by 2023, the idea of creating a Government hub in the far south-west, in Plymouth, where we have already shown, through the Land Registry and previously the Child Support Agency, that civil service and public service jobs can thrive, is a good opportunity.

We lost out on the Marine Management Organisation towards the end of 2010, and many of us in the far south-west still talk about how we lost out on the wealth tax agency in 1979. We were scuppered by the election of a Tory Government who perhaps were not too keen on creating a wealth tax agency—who would have known?—but there is now a real opportunity, and if you will forgive me, Mr Paisley, I will talk for a few moments about Plymouth's One Public Estate journey.

The unlocking of South Yard in Devonport has been an incredible success. That surplus land owned by the Ministry of Defence was not being used for Royal Navy purposes. It has been repurposed as Oceansgate and, through the One Public Estate programme, is creating new marine jobs. Plymouth has a huge opportunity in marine science and marine engineering, and Oceansgate is helping to unlock that. It is taking far too long to overcome the logistical barriers between the detail of what the MOD might want and what businesses might want, but that challenge can be overcome.

OPE 3, 4 and 5—the funding streams—have helped us to develop our integrated health and wellbeing hubs. There is huge potential here. We have spoken about

some of the big, aggregated services, but GP surgeries, mental health support, sexual health testing and social care can all come together at a much smaller, micro level. Indeed, I would encourage the Minister to have a word with his new colleague the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy), about the super-hub project. Plymouth has applied for funding from the Department of Health and Social Care for that project, which would bring sexual health testing, an eight-to-12-chair dental surgery—enabling dental students from Plymouth's superb dental school to learn and help to treat people in some of the poorest communities in the city, right next to the city centre—directly employed GP surgeries, mental health support and health and wellbeing services all into one building, at Colin Campbell Court, which the Minister may know well. There is a huge opportunity there. Part of the One Public Estate strategy has to be to mobilise and motivate other Departments to make decisions that might be slightly off their usual funding streams if there is an opportunity from doing so.

The other aspect that I would like to mention relates to the better defence estate. My hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington spoke passionately about some of its successes and some of its failures, and we have had a similar journey in Plymouth. There is the success of relocating the Royal Marines from Royal Marines Turnchapel. Releasing that land and creating what is now a world-class centre for autonomous marine engineering has been a huge success. The new base at Royal Marines Tamar, at the very north of Devonport, has been an incredible success for the Royal Marines. It gives quick and easy access to the Tamar and, through that, to Plymouth Sound and to the training facilities at HMS Raleigh and a superb new state-of-the-art facility for our Royal Marines there.

However, there have also been failures from One Public Estate, and that has largely also been about the Royal Marines, in relation to the closure of Stonehouse barracks. There has been an attempt to rationalise that defence estate by closing the spiritual home of the Royal Marines—the only purpose-built barracks for the Royal Marines that are still in use. Those barracks are not fit for purpose. There is no hot running water in many of the accommodation blocks; the showers and the heating do not work. We should not accept that for our Royal Marines when they are at home. Many of them would accept that when on deployment, but not at home.

Now that we have seen the Government U-turn on their commitment to build a superbase in Plymouth, which would have brought the Royal Marines to our city, I would be grateful if the Minister encouraged his colleagues in the Ministry of Defence to look at how the programme for relocating the 3 Commando Brigade from Stonehouse barracks to a new purpose-built facility can be accelerated. The new date of 2028 means that our Royal Marines will be waiting a long time to have hot water in their accommodation. I think we would all agree that that is unacceptable.

There is an opportunity to create a new Government hub in Plymouth, bringing together civil service and public service jobs from the centre of London to create a new, superb facility in Plymouth. As the Minister will know, Plymouth is a centre that can create jobs not only within Plymouth and the PL postcode boundary, but

for the wider Plymouth travel-to-work area—or perhaps the greater Torbay area, depending on one's perspective—to help us create wider economic benefits for our region. There are many failings of the One Public Estate strategy.

Jim Shannon: In Northern Ireland a very different approach has been taken. The Government policy is to turn former Army barracks into intergenerational places, where the community and the economy can come together, where businesses can build and where councils can be involved. That is all happening on Army bases. In other words, the benefactors are the communities of all sides. That was an opportunity we have used in Northern Ireland. Perhaps they could do something similar where the hon. Gentleman lives?

Ian Paisley (in the Chair): Order. I feel that the hon. Gentleman has a speech waiting to get out of him today. I am tempted to put him on the notice paper, whether he wants to or not.

Luke Pollard: I take what the hon. Gentleman has said. In Plymouth, although we are better known for the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines, we do have an Army base at the Royal Citadel. One of my frequent concerns about the defence disposal programme is that the MOD maps have a red line drawn around the site, and that is the land chosen to be disposed of. We need to take a much more holistic approach and ask about the needs of the wider community beyond that red line and what benefits can be accrued for it, especially when it comes to disposing of Ministry of Defence bases, with which the local community's identity and employment opportunities are often so intricately involved. I encourage the Minister to speak to his MOD colleagues about that.

Although One Public Estate has had many failures, it has also had some successes. I encourage the Minister to keep tweaking those elements that are not quite right and also to unblock the decision-making process that is delaying the relocation of civil service and public service jobs from central London to the regions. My sense is that there are decisions waiting to be made and announced that could have a profound and positive economic effect on the regions, especially in the far south-west. I encourage the Minister in his new job to give the cage a bit of a rattle, to see if we can accelerate some of those decisions, because there are jobs to be created, value to be restored and money to be saved for the taxpayer. I also encourage the Minister to look at that wider opportunity of creating more affordable homes and decent jobs.

10.3 am

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) for opening the debate in the way that he did, looking at not only his local perspective, but the national perspective of One Public Estate. It is always a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard). I concur with him about the opportunities the regions provide in departmental change and bringing those vital jobs into the region. I look at York and its connectivity: with the upgrade of the east coast main line, it will be just over an hour and a half out of

[*Rachael Maskell*]

London—and what a fantastic place to live, rather than in the heart of this city, in order to facilitate many of those vital public functions.

Today, I want to reflect on some of the disposals of public land that we have seen in York and highlight a particular problem, which I trust the Minister will look at. First, to give a tour d'horizon on what has been happening, we have seen the disposal of many public land opportunities in York, and, unfortunately, it being placed in the wrong hands as a result of that. For example, Strensall barracks and Imphal barracks have been earmarked for closure under the better defence estate strategy, by 2024 and 2031 respectively, but the Government need to remind themselves that the Army has resided in York for over 1,000 years and that those sites provide vital jobs not only for the armed forces, but for civilians—the people of our city. Over 600 civilian jobs will be lost as a result of those closures. Just up the road, RAF Linton-on-Ouse is also earmarked for closure.

Such land is then put into the local plan, but it will not come forward within the time framework. Therefore, there is real concern about how this is being used to lever in the local plan, as opposed to looking at the real challenges of the local housing environment in particular. The council has earmarked most of this land for housing, but not the vital social housing that my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington mentioned and that we desperately need in York, which has had one of the lowest levels of social housing build in the country. Instead, the land is being earmarked for the developers, who clearly just want to make a profit and to take advantage of those opportunities.

In addition, we have seen the closure of the post office in our city, which again is a detrimental step, and I do not believe that that is going too well for the Post Office, as we forewarned. The York Central site is the biggest development site across the whole of Europe. It is a brownfield site that has lain dormant for 30 years. We are eager to see it developed, but, regrettably, the council handed over power and control to Network Rail, which clearly is disposing of as much land as possible. We just need to remind ourselves of the sell-off recently, which was identified as a financial loss by the Public Accounts Committee. Over 2,100 luxury flats are being proposed for the site, but that is not what our city needs, because the housing crisis in York is around family housing and social housing, which are hardly getting a look in at the site.

I ask the Minister to look at this issue—I will be meeting with his colleague to discuss it—because the site's economic opportunity is being lost, sixfold or sevenfold. In York, we have a low-wage and quite insecure economy, so to throw away that opportunity in the heart of our city, right next to the railway station, is a serious detriment. Therefore, we have asked for the decision to be called in and are waiting for a response from the Department. Clearly, we want to see the maximum economic opportunity being brought to our city, as well as housing need being addressed. On the transportation front, too, using current data in the analysis would have helped to show how we need to change what has been proposed.

I want to focus on Bootham Park Hospital in York, which opened in 1777 and closed in 2015—the doors were shut only three days after the inspection. That caused much harm in our city. It was a mental health hospital, but I concur that the site itself may not be suitable for modern-day provision of mental health services. However, I would like the Minister to respond on what happened to that site.

The local authority was working with the local trust, the clinical commissioning group, the sustainability and transformation partnership and other public services, which came on board to formulate what opportunity that site could provide for our city. Analysis was undertaken, particularly looking at the opportunity around healthcare, but also wider services. For instance, the police and crime commissioner identified that this would be an ideal location to place a women's unit in our city.

I have to say that the progress of One Public Estate in realising the site's potential was slow, but the local authority was even slower in identifying, with NHS Property Services, that it wanted to utilise the site for the benefit of the city centre. Much of the site cannot be developed, because under its trust status it has to remain as parkland, but land at the back of the site can be developed. Needless to say, the beautiful building is listed, but in need of much repair.

The site for the clinical commissioning group costs £100,000 a year just to maintain and keep open. Those charges are to the detriment of the strapped-for-cash clinical commissioning group, which is one of the worst-funded in the country, so it is eager to move the process forward. However, the NHS Property Services timescales for the disposal of the site did not meet the One Public Estate process, so my plea to the Minister is to ensure that there is synergy in the timescales that are being executed in how sites are developed and the opportunity that realises for the city.

From my meetings with the former Health Minister, the right hon. Member for North East Cambridgeshire (Stephen Barclay), it seems that NHS Property Services determined that it wanted to dispose of that site at the earliest opportunity. However, it would not wait for One Public Estate's fully worked-up proposals. Therefore, it disposed of the site to a private developer, which is going to build—guess what?—more luxury apartments in the heart of our city. The developer is also looking to build a hotel and high-value older people's accommodation, as opposed to addressing urgent need.

The site is uniquely placed next to our acute hospital, which is on a cramped campus without room for expansion. The hospital is bursting at the seams and has been challenged by winter crises. The only opportunity for that hospital to expand is the Bootham Park Hospital site. Indeed, it had ambitions to do so to provide better access to the site and to provide other vital services, such as physiotherapy. Furthermore, it proposed to extend hospital parking facilities and other services on to the site.

Vitality, the site was an opportunity to provide housing for key workers, which has been identified as a real need. We have more than 500 vacancies for NHS staff in the city, and that crisis is worsening. York's expensive property prices are one reason for that, so the opportunity to provide key worker housing on a site in close proximity to the acute hospital was necessary, but the loss of another opportunity means that the acute hospital's

agency bill will be higher. As my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington said, the financing with respect to the disposal of such sites does not come back to the city; it goes to Departments, so there is no benefit to York. We will not see that money again, even though we have a real crisis around health services.

I have looked at the evidence base behind the One Public Estate bid. The York Teaching Hospital, the Humber, Coast and Vale sustainability and transformation partnership, Vale of York CCG, York Medical Group and the city council were looking at the opportunity to utilise the site for public benefit, but that has been denied and overridden, and it has been sold to a private developer. That will certainly not enhance our city, because it will put more stresses on the public services in our city, not reduce them.

The opportunity that has been passed up was for the development of 147 homes, which York needed; 52 key worker houses; a physio suite, which I mentioned; medical training; a research centre; a 70-bed care home; 60 assisted living and supported living apartments; a children's nursery, which our hospital does not have and which would have been vital; public parking for use at the acute hospital; and a new public park for York in the heart of our city, where there is one of the highest levels of premature mortality in the city and where people should have the opportunity of some open green space.

Going back 100 years in York's history to the time of Joseph Rowntree and others, there was real recognition of how to build a humane city and move it forward, but those opportunities are being passed up due to the greed of private developers that want to maximise their profits and cram the most expensive properties into the heart of the city. As I have explained, the people of York do not have the resources to purchase those properties, so they are being pushed further and further away from the city. Therefore, the social engineering that is taking place is to the detriment of local people across the city.

The city is becoming hollowed out, as private apartments are being built. Some people perhaps depend on utilising our public services at weekends, but we cannot afford the people to work in those public services. Therefore, the whole city is being put out of kilter and skewed with respect to needs. With the connectivity that I mentioned, it is clear that people now see York as being in the commuting zone of London and cities across the country, which puts more stress on our city.

My request to the Minister is that he look at the situation with regard to Bootham Park Hospital, where one Department is not talking to another and the local need is not being addressed. A massive public consultation exercise is happening about the Bootham Park Hospital site and on the York Central site, although we have not got to that point in the process with Imphal barracks. The Government say that they respond to and recognise the value of the voice of the community, so why is that voice being completely ignored through the disposal of such sites? I believe it needs to come forward.

In York, we have launched a "Public Land for Public Good" campaign. We need to ensure that there is a public good test in all planning decisions, so there is an enhancement of the way that land, which we know is incredibly precious, is utilised, as opposed to giving profit to developers. Frankly, the people of our city are angry about that, because they are losing out on the opportunity for vital jobs and services, and even a

home. I ask the Minister to respond to those points, and I trust that he will take them back to his Department and that we will see real change.

10.16 am

Jo Platt (Leigh) (Lab/Co-op): It is a great honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) for securing the debate and making an excellent case, which stems from his vast experience in local government in his area and as a member of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee. I also thank my hon. Friends the Members for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) and for York Central (Rachael Maskell) for their excellent contributions, which demonstrated the vast reach of the public estate strategy and its local effects.

On the face of it, the One Public Estate programme appears to be a positive, sensible strategy to reduce waste and get the most out of our public assets, as I expect the Minister will say. Its stated goal of unlocking land to increase house building is commendable, as estimates have put the number of new homes needed in England at between 240,000 and 340,000 per year, but worryingly, on recent estimates, the Government's target of 300,000 homes annually is already under threat and could take 15 years to achieve. Let us not forget that over the last two years fewer new social rented homes have been built than at any time since the second world war.

To face that challenge, central Government must take a sustainable and transformational approach to resourcing local authorities to provide the homes we desperately need, but the Conservatives have comprehensively failed to do that. The strategy, which is effectively austerity by the back door, sells public land and property for quick cash under the illusion of helping to solve the housing crisis. It is not only disingenuous, but kicks the funding can down the road, rather than confronting the serious realities head on.

I say that the policy is disingenuous because the Government's figures show that One Public Estate has released land for the development of just over 3,000 new homes, and the public land for housing programme has released land with capacity for fewer than 40,000 homes. That is some way short of the programme's ambition to release surplus public sector land for at least 160,000 homes by 2020, just one year away.

The idea that this strategy and programmes such as One Public Estate are even scratching the surface of the housing crisis is total fantasy, yet the bigger question remains unanswered: why are public land and property being handed over to private developers in the first place and why are they being sold at a discounted price? Shockingly, analysis by the National Audit Office shows that of the 1,500 or so sites released by Government between April 2015 and March 2018, 12% were released for £1 or less. Let me get to the central point: such is the scale of the challenge, and the consistent failure of the market to tackle it, that we must look at empowering local authorities and housing associations to use public land to build the affordable housing this country desperately needs. Not only is that the best strategy for tackling the housing crisis, but it provides a way for the public to share in any rise in land value, as the Institute for Public

[Jo Platt]

Policy Research and others have pointed out. The Opposition oppose the strategy of flogging off public assets for developers to provide insufficient housing.

The Government must be called out for missing their own targets. I ask the Minister, how many of these homes built on public land are affordable? When it comes to central Government land sales, remarkably, the Cabinet Office does not analyse data at the programme level to assess the use to which the land is subsequently put, but let me help the Minister out. Thanks to research by the New Economics Foundation we know that only 20% of new homes built on public land will be affordable. That is simply not good enough.

We know that one of the main reasons that this figure is so low is the fact that developers are able to exploit section 106 loopholes and ride roughshod over desperate councils, leaving the public ripped off. We must also ask why local authorities are signing up to programmes such as One Public Estate, because they know such programmes will reduce the land and property they use for essential services, which are assets that might not be needed today, but may well be needed tomorrow. Indeed, much of the land and property sold under One Public Estate and other programmes is needed, despite the rhetoric around reducing waste. As the National Audit Office report said, many sites identified for disposal are still being used by public bodies to provide services.

How have we got here? Ultimately, because for almost a decade our hard-working local authorities have been forced to implement the Tory austerity agenda. Under the Conservatives, local authorities have faced a reduction to core funding from the Government of nearly £16 billion since 2010. That means councils will have lost 60p of every £1 that the last Labour Government provided to spend on local services. With a £3.1 billion shortfall in funding, many councils are funding essential services or redundancies by the quick sale of their property portfolio for good. The scale of this is staggering.

Research by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism found that £2.8 billion-worth of local authority-owned assets were sold between 2014 and 2018. In 2016, the Government said that they expected local authorities to sell assets with a value of £11.7 billion by the end of this Parliament. That same year, the Government passed legislation to allow local authorities to invest the proceeds of assets sold by April 2019 in transforming frontline services. Just how low will this Government stoop? They have decided that the right way to fund social care, youth services, libraries, bin collections and road repairs is not by reversing their tax cuts for millionaires or clamping down on tax avoiders, but by forcing local authorities to sell their assets—assets owned by the public—while further inflating private developers' profit margins.

If we needed yet another reason to show that this is a Government for the few and not for the many, here we are. For the public, this is a ticking time bomb until the day local authorities have sold assets they will one day need. The housing crisis remains and local authorities have run out of family silver to sell to raise funds. The Tories know exactly what they are doing: forcing councils to implement austerity, leaving them no choice but to sell public assets such as libraries, youth centres and playing fields—assets our most disadvantaged people rely on—to fund vital services.

One Public Estate is part of a strategy that has been rumbling on for many years in different forms. Local government now owns just 40% of the land it owned a few decades ago and the NHS has seen its estate reduce by 70%. As our population grows, as demand is loaded on to local authorities and as our housing crisis deepens, what will this Government say when they have run out of public assets to sell, and their great housing remedy has produced only a few thousand extra affordable homes? I suspect they will not say much at all.

One thing is blindingly clear: this scheme and others like it do little for families who are desperate to exercise their right to an affordable home or for those who rely on public services. They do very little for our councils, which deserve fair funding, not schemes to encourage asset stripping. Our message to the Government is clear: stop messing about, confront these big issues head on, own up and admit that this strategy is really austerity masquerading as partnership and a house building strategy.

The public deserve far better. They deserve a Government on their side, standing up for the public good, building homes, funding and improving their public services, and unashamedly putting the many in this country first. We will make those honest, bold and fair decisions to fund our councils and build the homes we need. We have that plan; it is fully costed, fully transparent and exactly what the next Labour Government will deliver.

Ian Paisley (in the Chair): I call the Minister. You have lots of time to answer all these questions.

10.26 am

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Kevin Foster): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley. At the start of my response to a debate, I usually say that I will allow a couple of minutes at the end for the Member who secured it to speak, but I suspect I will be able to allow slightly more than that on this occasion.

This debate has been marked more by quality than by quantity of speakers. The speech made by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Leigh (Jo Platt), started so well. She made a point of saying that the scheme was a positive one, and that we share the goal of seeing the public sector work together. Few of us would think it was a good idea to spend money on bricks and mortar, rather than on delivering public services. Her speech went a bit awry after that, however.

Local councils have been doing a lot of these projects for some time, and we do not compel local councils to take part in them, as I will come on to say in a minute. The scheme that the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) has been particularly exercised about, which is being undertaken by his local district council, is not part of the One Public Estate programme. There is no compulsion to take part.

Some of the closing comments sit strangely with my memories of the period between 2008 and 2010, when I was the deputy leader of Coventry City Council and dealing with the Labour Government, which seemed equally keen on the idea that public land could be released. To be fair, the previous Labour council had released land to fund certain regeneration projects; we also saw that during preparations made by the then

Department for Communities and Local Government, which sought to take about 20% out of local government funding following 2010. Most of us were not surprised when the spending review that was due in 2009 was kicked back to after the general election; we can all conclude the reasons for that.

I move on to the other contributions to the debate, and I have to start with the speech made by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard). As always, he made a passionate pitch for my home town and birthplace of Plymouth. He is right to say that moving Government jobs out of London does not just have an economic impact; it is about a change of perception. A civil service that is almost entirely based in London and the south-east creates a perception about issues and about the rest of the country; it may not give the idea of one civil service for one United Kingdom.

Over many years, various organisations have operated successfully outside London and the south-east, including the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in Swansea. We can see the opportunity that Government hubs bring. For example, while some operations are already located in Cardiff, the Wales Office is looking at how it can be part of a hub opposite Cardiff station, to show that the Government are at the heart of Cardiff, not on an estate outside the city centre. That says a lot about our ambition as well; I expect it is an ambition that will be shared by Governments, whatever their colour, over the next 10 or 20 years. To be clear, such a Government will govern the whole Union, and not just run the whole nation from London.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to cite the appetite of a skilled workforce in south Devon; it stretches into not just the PL postcodes but even into the TQ postcodes. He is right that, bluntly, the region offers the Government opportunities to get more money into delivery of service than into paying the exorbitant costs of property in central London.

In addition—this is a point that is sometimes forgotten—when Government buildings are released in London, within a short period of time there are usually more jobs and higher-than-average salaries being paid on that same footprint. Therefore, the process does not do London's economy down; in many ways, it provides the opportunity that London's private economy needs to grow, in the same way as public money benefits the regions. That is one thing that sometimes gets lost in the debate. Although there is the idea that jobs are going out of London, the space that is released normally provides an opportunity to create jobs in London.

Regarding the release of Ministry of Defence land, the hon. Gentleman cited Turnchapel—I am certainly looking forward to visiting it at some point, to see the automation there—and other places, such as Royal William Yard. My gran was a Stonehouse kid. Thirty years ago, Stonehouse was a shadow of what it had once been; it was a very sad place. Royal William Yard was coming to the end of its time as a victualing yard that was no longer needed by the Royal Navy. The release of Royal William Yard for redevelopment has not just led to its regeneration, but, as he will know, spurred a regeneration of the area around it. Gone are the days when semi-derelict industrial buildings made up the city's red light district. Now the area is a real beacon of hope, aspiration and investment.

I recognise the hon. Gentleman's concern about what will happen with Stonehouse barracks and, of course, the iconic Citadel. I think he will agree that although those facilities are historic and iconic, we would not want to run a modern war-fighting operation from them. As he mentioned, what our troops will accept in times of combat or conflict is very different from what we should expect them to put up with in times of peace. We are working to deliver a solution that works not only for the military but, as is the case with Royal William Yard, for the community that surrounds a base. Clearly, that is something that my colleagues in the MOD will only be too interested to continue talking to him about.

The hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), as always, made a passionate case for her city. She made the point that, with modern connections, York is now 90 minutes from London, so the argument that moving jobs out of London makes them remote is no longer valid.

Ultimately, it is for local councils to make local planning decisions. I am aware that the hon. Lady is not the biggest fan of her local council; having listened to a number of her speeches over the last couple of years, I think it is fair to say that. She can use that point to challenge her local council both here and locally, and ultimately it is for local voters to make their decisions based on what they think of their local council.

I heard what the hon. Lady said about the hospital site that she referred to. I am happy to look at the site further to see how we can ensure that Government Departments work together. The goal of One Public Estate is to treat the public estate as one public estate, and not for different Departments to reach conflicting outcomes. The site that she mentions is probably one for us to look at, perhaps after this debate and perhaps with my colleague the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Oliver Dowden)—he is the Minister for implementation—who has direct responsibility for this policy area. If there are challenges, we can consider them. As the hon. Lady said, in this instance the sale has already been made and that is probably the end of that, but we can perhaps consider this issue for the future. We are keen that Government Departments view themselves as part of a whole, not just as individual operations.

I come now to the main part of my speech. I thank the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington for securing this debate on One Public Estate and giving hon. Members the opportunity to reflect on this vital programme. I particularly liked the fact that he gave the example of Devon and Cornwall, where we have the joint response hub. That project is about not just bringing different services together, but considering how they can work together with co-responders, and particularly looking at areas where the police and the fire service struggle. For example, the fire service struggles to recruit retained firefighters, which might have been easier 40 or 50 years ago but is now harder because of changes in employment patterns and in how people live their lives. That project considers how such services can work together and deliver a better outcome for all three emergency services, including ambulances, by uniting and working together.

As the hon. Gentleman touched on, that project combining police and the fire service saves £500,000 a year on running costs and it has released two sites for

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redevelopment. However, it has also enabled the emergency services to reach more people within their target response times. The process is not just about delivering a financial output; it is also about delivering better public services.

As has been made clear, One Public Estate has successfully forged new partnerships across the public sector, showing that collaboration is the key to achieving success. The strapline for the latest Government estate strategy is

“a public estate for public benefit”.

This programme demonstrates how property can be a catalyst for achieving a wide range of benefits, including housing, jobs and more integrated public services.

As I mentioned a moment ago, I am aware of the hon. Gentleman’s campaign against Warwick District Council’s plans to build new offices alongside a new multi-storey car park and apartments, and to redevelop its current Riverside House site for private housing. I also recall him raising the issue in a previous Westminster Hall debate, in January 2018; on that occasion, if I recall correctly, I sat in the Parliamentary Private Secretary’s spot. In that debate, he said that One Public Estate was “a genuine and sincere ambition to get authorities around the table to review all public assets and decide how they can best be used for the future delivery of services.”—[*Official Report*, 10 January 2018; Vol. 634, c. 109WH.]

The hon. Gentleman is right that One Public Estate has brought hundreds of public sector partners to the table. He is also right that partners review all public assets to identify opportunities to deliver additional new homes, jobs and efficiency savings, and that communities across the country are enjoying the benefits of this programme, which uses partnerships to yield greater results.

Currently, One Public Estate is supporting five projects in the Connecting Warwickshire One Public Estate Partnership. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, Riverside House was not put forward as part of the partnership’s proposals to One Public Estate. As I have touched on, One Public Estate is not a compulsory scheme for local councils. It is also important to note that the programme has never sought to override local or national statutory duties, governance or requirements. The programme is designed to have the flexibility to support proposals from partnerships within a broad set of programme objectives. One Public Estate’s ability to tailor solutions that work for all partners involved is central to its success.

One Public Estate is about helping partnerships to thrive, but it is also a partnership itself, between the Office of Government Property in the Cabinet Office and the Local Government Association. As the hon. Gentleman mentioned, it began in 2013 as a pilot in 12 areas, testing a fairly novel idea for Government—working collectively on property. We set out to discover whether laying the groundwork for collaboration, and providing seed funding and practical advice for public sector partners, would unlock significant additional benefits for both local communities and the taxpayer. That has clearly been the case—each year the programme has grown, as organisations have seen what can be achieved, formed new partnerships and put forward ambitious proposals.

Central to the One Public Estate approach is its focus on partnership. As has been referred to, it is a partnership between central and local government, whereby the Office of Government Property and the LGA act together as neutral brokers among partners. Regional programme managers in the team also provide support and challenge. Those joining the programme must also form their own cross-public sector partnership, bringing together central and local government, alongside other national and local partners, including the NHS, the police, the fire service, local enterprise partnerships and others. Thirdly, projects must be delivered in partnership by multiple public sector partners.

The formula is already reaping rewards. Today, as the hon. Gentleman highlighted, One Public Estate collaborates with over 95% of English local authorities, 13 major Government Departments, and hundreds of wider public sector partners, working in 78 official partnerships. Together, these partnerships are delivering over 600 projects across England, ranging from co-locating services, so that they are under one roof, to releasing surplus land for housing and town centre regeneration.

These organisations have come together to achieve more than they could alone, and to make better use of the public estate for public benefit. So far, the programme has generated £163 million in capital receipts, saved taxpayers £24 million in running costs, created 5,745 new jobs and released land for 3,336 new homes.

However, that is just the beginning, especially when it comes to housing, which is the Government’s top domestic priority. The problem of insufficient housing in this country is not a recent one; it goes back decades and involves numerous contributing factors. We could debate the origins of the housing shortage for hours, with each one of us arguing about our own party’s record, but today I will speak about a few of the ways in which this Government have acted to address this crucial issue through One Public Estate.

With housing, One Public Estate helps to create a pipeline of land, de-risking projects and making them investment-ready. The projects may then secure finance from Government housing initiatives, such as the accelerated construction programme or the housing infrastructure fund, or from other sources.

One Public Estate also plays its part in promoting modern methods of construction to local authorities and across Government, and furthering knowledge of this emerging market. It has organised factory site visits, facilitated meetings between One Public Estate partners and offsite providers, partnered with the University of Liverpool to examine the barriers, and co-sponsored the offsite village at the Chartered Institute of Housing’s 2018 conference, to further public sector knowledge of this emerging market. The programme has also allocated funding to partnerships to take forward vital research on modern methods of construction in delivering housing targets.

In 2017, the programme partnered with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to deliver the £45 million local authority land release fund. This capital funding, coupled with One Public Estate’s regionally-based team providing practical support, is supporting councils to unlock land for an additional 7,000 homes.

I have seen the impact of this programme at first hand. In Torbay, three projects successfully gained nearly £4 million of funding from the land release fund and, between them, Victoria Square, Preston Down Road and Collaton St Mary will see hundreds of houses built, with some available for social rent. I want to be clear that the percentage of affordable housing on each site is a matter for the local council, with its plans and its planning consents. As with any other site, it will have to make its own local determination about what the challenges are, for example if a site is contaminated. This is about supporting local councils in delivering their ambitions, not the Government directing, top down.

Interestingly, One Public Estate is also supporting the development of plans for a new health hub in Paignton, providing a modern, purpose-built facility better able to meet the needs of the local community and releasing surplus land for enhanced public and community use. It is remarkably similar to the project cited by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport and, hopefully, in the spirit of things, there can be learning between the two. The project in Paignton is looking to release a hub that is currently based in the much-loved Victorian hospital there. I have spoken in support of the building several times, but it was constructed just after the era of Queen Victoria and is not the place for 21st-century medicine to be well provided.

Luke Pollard: In a health hub, we bring together different strands that come from very different funding streams—not only from the Department of Health and Social Care, but from social care providers and from across the Government estate—and it might be worth looking at whether there is a better formula or model that can encourage that great collaboration. At the moment, it works in some places, where partners are working together already, but not in others, where there is a greater distance. I think there is a model of best practice that could be encouraged, and I ask the Minister to look at that.

Kevin Foster: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his constructive and instructive intervention. Because we have an integrated care organisation in Torbay, one of the advantages is that there is no difference between the local authority's budget and the NHS budget for social care, but I agree that there is a need to look at how we can bring partners together. A particular issue is where there are not just NHS and local authority services but GPs who are independent businesses—the great compromise from 1948—who then have to decide whether to move their service, potentially from a building of which they have the freehold and in which they feel very confident. Even if the GPs accept that the building is not the place in which to be delivering the best examples of 21st-century medicine—for example, if it is a converted house that does not have a lift to the first floor, restricting the ability of an increasingly elderly population to access all the services provided—it is about the certainty that can be provided when they take the leap and come into a building of which they are a tenant or a leaseholder, rather than a freeholder.

Again, it is about being clear about the partnership approach and ensuring that the building is not seen as belonging to the council, in Torbay's case, or to the NHS, in Plymouth's, but is seen as one that all partners

have a shared interest in, with the main goal being a better service for the public and for those who access the services, and providing a sustainable future.

The hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington mentioned that One Public Estate has invested £665,000 to support the Connecting Warwickshire Partnership in his area to deliver five projects across health, regeneration and housing agendas: the co-location of services in Warwick town centre, the regeneration of Nuneaton town centre, a review of service provision from the site of the George Eliot Hospital, the transformation of Rugby town centre, and the development of a strategic housing pipeline to deliver affordable homes in north Warwickshire, utilising offsite modular construction. The Connecting Warwickshire Partnership expects the five projects to generate £35 million of capital receipts, cut running costs by £2 million, release land for about 1,000 homes and create 500 jobs.

Another example is in Brent, where One Public Estate is bringing together Brent Council, London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust, the University of Westminster and social housing provider Network Homes to redevelop the Northwick Park area, creating jobs and delivering affordable homes, including, crucially, given the comments made about key workers in this debate, for NHS staff. One Public Estate revived an earlier proposal to develop the hospital site in isolation, and provided support and challenge that could result in 1,600 homes, which is about double the number planned by the partners operating alone.

The hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington touched on the project in Rutland, where One Public Estate has awarded £175,000 and facilitated a memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Defence and Rutland County Council to develop 300 hectares of surplus land at St George's barracks into a new garden village, including delivering up to 3,000 homes by 2032. It is right that we work in partnership with the local council.

Perhaps where I differ from the hon. Gentleman is that although I support the move to remove some of the caps—over the past few years we have started to see a slow revival in the building of council homes, compared with the period between 1997 and 2010—I do not necessarily think that it is for the Government to dictate that that construction should be the sort of mass-build estates we saw in the past. That is a choice for local councils, but certainly from my own experience in local government it is better when we have mixed communities rather than going back to the days when we built an estate on the edge of town as our pure provision of social housing.

Rachael Maskell: Is not the problem that local authorities may have their plans—it is absolutely right that they lead—but there is a collision course with the national determination of Departments? That is the piece that needs to be fixed.

Kevin Foster: My response to the hon. Lady's point is that I am certainly happy to look at the instance in her constituency of what I think was described as NHS Property Services operating to one timetable and One Public Estate operating to another. As I say though, One Public Estate is about co-operation rather than necessarily about the Government looking to direct that

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a council must be part of it, as we touched on with the Warwick District Council project—that is not part of One Public Estate. Speaking as someone who believes quite a lot in local government, I would be loth for this to go down the path of direction from the centre.

Rachael Maskell: The other determinant, of course, is finances. Although Government Departments are trying to reap as much resource from the land as they possibly can, and that is why it is being handed over to developers, local authorities are really cash-strapped in how they can develop that land. Will the Minister also look at that collision course, when he goes back to the Department?

Kevin Foster: We have given a range of flexibility to local authorities to look at how they can develop, but ultimately they can act as a bank. My own local council is helping to bring forward a significant development, admittedly on private land but with clear guarantees and protections around the taxpayer interest in lending the money and actually making a profit. There are opportunities for local authorities to take forward developments; it is for each of them in each instance to decide whether they wish to use those opportunities. Regarding the idea that the programme is motivated purely by the need to make savings, I touch first on the fact that a plan was being formulated under the last Labour Government to make significant cuts to local government funding post-2010 and, secondly, on how the programme is helping to bolster local government finances by delivering the ability to work together with a view to saving money. Therefore, I do not necessarily recognise that the two are in conflict; in fact, the picture is quite the opposite.

Rachael Maskell: Will the Minister give way?

Kevin Foster: I have given way twice to the hon. Lady, so I will do so again very briefly, but I will make this the last time.

Rachael Maskell: The point I was making is that Government Departments are taking that resource into their national funds—into their own budgets—as opposed to delivering benefit to local communities. There are, therefore, different interests at play when it comes to the resourcing of developments.

Kevin Foster: The Government are spending significant amounts via, for example, the housing infrastructure fund, to which eligible sites can bid, and the land release fund. I have touched on how the latter is releasing local authority land where authorities do not have the potential resource, or where it would be uneconomical for them to develop it on their own. In the Paignton example, the fund is paying to put a sewer into a site that would have been too expensive to bring forward, or where social housing would have been taken out to fund the infrastructure.

The idea that money disappears off into a central hole is not accurate, but we hope that One Public Estate encourages the parties to work together for the wider financial benefit of the public sector. In many instances, that will mean delivering a co-operative plan in the

long-term interest of the Government Department concerned. Again, I or the Minister with responsibility for implementation, my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere, will happily meet to discuss the target timeline of NHS Property Services versus the timeline of the One Public Estate bid, and see whether we can make some progress on that issue in future developments.

The programme's original aim was to deliver 45 co-locations for the NHS, the police and the fire service by 2020. Today, the Government estate strategy hopes to quadruple that goal, setting bold new ambitions to facilitate 200 co-locations by 2020 and 250 by 2022. We can therefore see that One Public Estate is already delivering. Partnerships with projects under way expect to generate £615 million in capital receipts and £158 million in running cost savings, create 44,000 jobs, and release land for 25,000 homes by 2020. That is a tremendous amount of success in a relatively short time. In February, my colleague the Minister with responsibility for implementation announced the outcome of the programme's seventh application round, a total of £15 million in funding. That is expected to support a further 10,000 new homes and 14,000 jobs over the next five years.

Since it began in 2013, One Public Estate has awarded £60 million to support projects and partnerships. The programme does not fully fund schemes; however, it facilitates laying the groundwork for future projects through feasibility studies, options appraisals and master planning. It can also help projects deliver at a faster pace by funding dedicated programme management. At the same time, and as we have touched on, we recognise our investment can bring about significant savings for some authorities, so we have introduced an element of repayable grants. In phase 7, which was the most recent, about £3.5 million of the £15 million funding available was awarded as repayable grants. Those will be repaid within a three-year period and, crucially, reinvested to enhance the future impact of the One Public Estate programme.

I again commend the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington on having secured a debate on the One Public Estate programme. As we have discussed, that programme has developed rapidly and is already having a significant impact on collaboration across the public sector. I particularly thank the Local Government Association for their excellent partnership with my Department in leading the programme, and pay tribute to the 95% of local authorities and many other partners that have chosen to take part in the programme. I am sure that Members will join me in wishing the partnerships well as they collaborate to deliver new homes, jobs, and improvements to public services in communities.

For many of us, the greatest reward in many communities will be seeing people achieve the desire that the Government regard as a key ambition for so many: owning their own home—having a place that they call home and that is theirs for as long as they wish it to be. That will remain a firm aspiration of this Government. Of course, we will support the development of social housing and deliver as much as we can, but none of us should ignore the fact that many people still hold the core aspiration of owning their own home. Too many people feel that aspiration slipping away from them, and we want to see it brought back to them, so they can enjoy it in the same way as their parents did.

10.53 am

Matt Western: I thank the Minister; I was getting a little nervous that he was not going to give me enough time to respond. At one stage, I thought I might have a few minutes more, but it is no matter. I thank Members for their contributions, which have been of supreme quality. This has been a healthy and valuable debate, and I give my sincere thanks to my hon. Friends the Members for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) and for York Central (Rachael Maskell), as well as the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Jo Platt). I also thank the Minister for his comments.

It is quite clear that huge regional opportunities are being presented here; that is perhaps not an oversight, but something that there has not been enough focus on. That is one of the great learnings from this debate. This is also about the pace of what is being delivered across the various projects and the priority being given to the local economy, entrepreneurial development and opportunity, as well as the key priority of housing, whether social or other. As everyone will have heard this morning, my sincere priority, which is shared by Opposition Members, is greater social housing.

How have we got here? As has been discussed, there has been a 60% cut in local authority budgets, which has put those authorities under huge pressure. My thoughts are with all those who have had to endure those cuts and work to the best of their ability to deliver the services that our communities depend on.

What we have seen, not just through One Public Estate but more generally, is a huge sell-off of our public assets, the greatest since the 1980s. As someone who used to work in a finance department, my great fear is about the lack of scrutiny in the process provided for by the Government. There seems to be no central co-ordination, and I believe that this country is being asset-stripped on a previously unseen scale. The public are vaguely aware of what is going on; yes, billions of pounds are being released, but I am not sure that the Public Accounts Committee has got involved in this issue. The Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee should also look at this topic to scrutinise what is happening, including the involvement of private sector developers and house builders, and who is actually benefiting from those huge sell-offs.

My hon. Friend the Member for York Central talked about the test of public good, which is a terrific idea; it is something that should be learned from this debate. Likewise, we need to learn what is best practice for the delivery of health hubs around the country, as there seems to be a mixed approach in what goes on. The Minister is right about the one public estate, or lack of one, in the work being done in my local area. As I said earlier, “one Warwickshire estate” was accepted

unanimously in Warwickshire, but somehow it has not been delivered with my local authority. There has been a lack of consultation with the public, and—going back to the test of public good—when we see more than 9,000 people in our local area signing a petition to say they are against a project, we have to ask, “In whose interest is that project?”

We have land, and it is needed; the question is how the use of that land and those assets is prioritised. The fact that the land is being sold to private developers in a very opaque way, lacking transparency, is of the greatest concern to local people and communities. As I said throughout my speech and as others repeated in their contributions, there is a need for social housing, and the Government are missing their own target. Only 6,500 social rented properties were built last year in this country, which is a travesty given the huge housing crisis that we face. As was reported this morning, this country has the second greatest inequality in the world; only the United States of America is more unequal. As my hon. Friend the Member for York Central said in her speech, that inequality is evident in her constituency. There is no need for any more luxury apartments on the scale being proposed; we are denying ourselves social justice in our communities, and impacting on the economies of those areas.

We have heard that the Cabinet Office does not even monitor the delivery of these projects, or of the housing. We hear about hospitals existing on cramped sites. The Minister will be familiar with University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire and just how cramped and unfit for purpose its site is. We should be thinking much more in the round, as we should when it comes to the provision of libraries in our communities.

Thinking back to 2010 and the years before, the Labour Government had a series of regional development agencies across the country that provided great joined-up thinking about the delivery of infrastructure, healthcare, hospitals or whatever, and saw the big picture. My fear is that One Public Estate is much more on the micro level. Likewise, the previous Labour Government had regional spatial strategies for the delivery of housing, linked to those services and the infrastructure. Those strategies were done away with, which I think was a huge error of the incoming coalition Government in 2010. This is all about the bigger picture, but what are the priorities? I have repeatedly stressed the need for more social housing.

Finally, I once more thank everyone for their contributions; it has been a terrific debate about something incredibly important. Billions of pounds of assets have been disposed of. I thank the LGA and the House of Commons Library for their help and their contributions, and I thank you, Mr Paisley, for chairing.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Immigration Applications: Fee Structure

11 am

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the fee structure for immigration applications.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley. Rather than sitting in front of you as Chair, this time I am standing before you. I was first alerted to the subject of this debate after a constituent wrote to me about how a surplus charge was foisted on her when sponsoring her non-European economic area spouse's application for settlement. Rather than simply charging an up-front fee of £388—that is the actual administration cost—the Home Office opted to slap on an additional arbitrary fee of £1,135. Effectively, the Government are making a 300% profit on my constituents' "luxury" purchase of their right to live together in the place they call home.

I am grateful to my constituents for drawing the matter to my attention. Public politics is dominated by the superficial and bogus appeal of "Here today, gone tomorrow" braggarts, shysters and snake oil salesmen, but that is just part of what democracy is about. It is also about concerned and determined citizens taking an active interest in the workings of Government, taking their responsibilities seriously, working with their elected representatives and, when the Government are in their opinion wanting, holding them to account.

Significantly, a report by David Bolt, the independent chief inspector of borders and immigration, attractively entitled, "An inspection of the policies and practices of the Home Office's Borders, Immigration and Citizenship Systems relating to charging and fees June 2018-January 2019", published on 4 April this year, outlined the costs of different immigration applications, including short-stay visit visas and settlement schemes, which is the matter I am concerned with today. The report calculates the surplus for each application type. The surplus is the difference between the 2018-19 fee and the actual estimated processing costs. When applying from outside the country for settlement through the family route, the surplus stands at £1,135, as my constituent noted. That is the surplus, but the actual cost is higher. Anybody would understandably be angry to discover that they were being effectively subjected to arbitrary and to my mind unjustified taxation. They are paying an excessive fee that is very much over the odds for something that should be their right.

The report by the chief inspector also directly addresses the point that short-stay visitor visas are being subsidised by other immigration applications. Despite being higher in price than originally planned—the Home Office had initially intended a 2% increase in 2018—the fee for a tourist visa was £37 below the unit cost. My constituent was paying three times more than the unit cost. My constituent was even angrier about having to pay a spouse settlement fee of £1,523 on discovering that the unit cost was £388. That was apparently in order to subsidise the tourist visa system.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this issue for consideration in Westminster Hall. As he said, the increase in fees is astronomical. Does he share my concern on behalf of

those who are already working to get a wage to bring their partner and their children to the country? These fees add extra financial stress to their capability and ability to bring their families to this country and reunite. Does he agree that we need appropriate fees that do not keep people's families out of this country?

Hywel Williams: That is certainly the conclusion I have drawn in this particular case. I will refer later in my speech to the income threshold that is applied, which acts differentially in different parts of the country, and surely that pertains to Northern Ireland as it does to north-west Wales.

According to the Minister, the subsidy for the 2.5 million short-term visas issued each year for tourists costs in the region of £90 million per annum. While I accept that tourism is vital to the UK—it certainly is to Wales and my part of north Wales—and I understand the principle of making the UK as accessible as possible to tourists, I do not agree with making non-EEA spouses and other migrants shoulder the burden, particularly when the fee is four times what it should be, as compared with the real cost.

I was in business before I became an MP. Had I charged a fee for a service I was providing that was four times my costs, that would have amounted to profiteering, even allowing for a reasonable profit. Slightly tangentially, does the Minister have information to hand on where those tourists who apply for subsidised short-term visas end up visiting in the UK? Whose economy are we subsidising? Who benefits? Of course, the vast majority of tourists visit London. In fact—this will interest you, Mr Paisley, and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)—there were four times as many visits to London as there were to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland combined. According to the Office for National Statistics and VisitBritain, almost 20 million tourists visited London in 2017. If we compare that with the 372,000 who visited Cardiff, hon. Members can see the point I am making. Who benefits from the subsidy, and who benefits disproportionately?

The Home Office has set itself the target of the immigration system becoming self-funding. Any below-cost offers would need to be balanced elsewhere within the system, either through fees that were higher than unit cost for other application types or through cost-saving efficiencies, or perhaps both. The principle of self-funding seems to disproportionately penalise some of those who interact with the system. After all, they are paying more than they would reasonably expect. The report recommends that the Home Office runs a wide-ranging public consultation on charging for borders, immigration and citizenship system functions to be completed and published in time to inform the 2019 comprehensive spending review, which I understand we are still waiting for. I wholeheartedly agree that an overhaul and a comprehensive review are needed to avoid the continuation of what I see as gross overcharging, especially if BICS continues with its self-funding ambition.

In response to the report's recommendation, the Home Office has said it will be reviewing the ambition in the context of the 2019 comprehensive spending review. I understand that that is pending. I have no idea when it is due or, for that matter, when the Minister will be reviewing it, so perhaps she can inform us. The Home Office expects there to be greater linkage on the basis of

three key principles in the setting of all fees: providing funding stability, instilling fairness throughout the system, and promoting prosperity and UK interests. I have no problem with those principles; the problem is with the application of the system in instilling fairness, because I do not think it is fair.

I have written to the Minister asking for a meeting to discuss the charging framework for visa and immigration services, but perhaps she can answer a few of my questions in this debate and we can avoid using her valuable time for a meeting. What progress has she made on reviewing the self-funding ambition, especially in line with the principle of instilling fairness throughout the system? Will she commit to holding a comprehensive review, as the chief inspector recommends?

In a previous Westminster Hall debate, the Minister stated:

“The charging framework for visa and immigration services delivered £1.35 billion of income in the last financial year, 2017-18. That helped to fund more than £620 million of costs associated with other immigration system functions”.—[*Official Report*, 4 September 2018; Vol. 646, c. 20WH.]

It seems to my constituent, and I agree with her, that the British Government treat some parts of the immigration system as a profit-making wheeze, churning out and charging people according to their net financial worth, when what really matters is people's rights and their dignity—people's right to live together as a couple. If the Government are intent on using business-like jargon, what has the Minister's Department done to promote cost-saving efficiencies—the other part of what I mentioned earlier—as a strategy for the future? It seems an obvious avenue worth exploring.

When constituents of mine are subjected to fees four times the unit cost, the system is obviously fundamentally flawed. For many people, the process of bringing over a spouse from abroad to live together here in the UK is complicated, arduous and costly. For the British Government, however, immigration bureaucracy has become quite the money spinner. Such a policy fits neatly with the Government's unjust £30,000 immigration threshold, which I mentioned earlier in response to an intervention. It has a clear differential impact on areas of low wages, such as in my Arfon constituency. A £30,000 annual income might seem reasonable here in London, but in Arfon it is a small fortune that many people cannot even hope to achieve. The £30,000 threshold and the fee structure have been thrust on us by an Executive that know the price of something, but have no idea of the actual value, reducing everything, even the institution of marriage that they purport to support, to bean counting.

For the Government to charge spousal immigration applicants for administration costs is at best a burden, but to profiteer from it is unconscionable. The Home Office is pricing out couples who cannot afford an inflated charge of £1,523. The Immigration Minister must take a long, hard look at the visa fee structure system. We need an immigration system that abolishes arbitrary charges and instead treats people with the dignity that they deserve and to which they have a right.

11.14 am

The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley. I thank the hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams)

for securing this debate on the fee structure for immigration applications. I have listened carefully to his comments and can assure him that I am in no doubt about his strength of feeling on the topic, and I am of course aware of representations made by other Members, both in previous debates and in writing and through written questions. Before I respond to the specific points that he has raised today, I want to set out the current landscape for the fees that we charge for visa, immigration and nationality services.

The Immigration Act 2014 approved by Parliament set out the governing factors that must be given regard to when setting fee levels: the costs of administering the service; the benefits that are likely to accrue to the applicant upon a successful outcome; the costs of operating other parts of the immigration system; the promotion of economic growth; fees charged by or on behalf of Governments of other countries for comparable functions; and any international agreement. That is important because not only do those factors play an important role in our nation's ability to fund the borders, immigration and citizenship system, but they are the only matters that can be taken into consideration when setting such fees.

In addition, there is a further layer of fees legislation by way of an order that sets the fee maxima that could ever be charged, which is laid in Parliament subject to affirmative resolution procedures. Finally, individual fee levels are then set out in regulations that are presented to Parliament and subjected to the negative procedure. I emphasise that as it is important to recognise that the Home Office cannot amend fee levels without first obtaining the approval of Whitehall and Parliament. A comprehensive system rightly ensures that there are a number of checks and balances in place to ensure that there is proper parliamentary oversight of the fee regime.

Fee levels are calculated in line with managing public money principles and the powers set out in the Immigration Act to reflect the value that people get from the services they receive. The powers that were agreed with Parliament in 2014 bring significant benefit to the borders, immigration and citizenship system and to the UK in the form of effective and secure border and immigration functions, reduced general taxation and the promotion of economic growth.

I recognise that there is significant interest in how fees are calculated, and we publish details of fee levels and estimated unit costs, as well as background information, on gov.uk to cover what is included and excluded from unit cost calculation. It is important to recognise the significance of the charging framework in funding visa and immigration services. For example, in the financial year 2017-18, £1.35 billion of income was delivered, which helped to fund the costs associated with other immigration system functions. That helped to maintain their effectiveness and security, and investment in ongoing service improvement.

Setting fees at such a level, putting the onus to pay on those who benefit from the services, reduces the burden on the Exchequer and on the general taxpayers of this country. A responsible Government have to balance the books. The loss of income resulting from any reduction in specific fees or drastic changes to policy would need to be balanced by rises elsewhere, or an additional taxpayer contribution. The Government remain focused on driving efficiencies throughout the system and on improving services. Our fee levels allow us to attract the

[Caroline Nokes]

brightest and best to the UK while enabling the Home Office to work towards its ambition of a self-financing borders, immigration and citizenship system.

Our fees are competitive. They compare favourably with key competitor countries and offer good value, particularly when considering the benefits and entitlements of a successful application. We expect future spending reviews—the hon. Gentleman referred to this—to influence our approach on fees, but we will want to ensure that, overall, we strike the right balance between funding the system, instilling fairness and promoting prosperity and UK interests.

The hon. Gentleman raised the chief inspector's recently published report on the Home Office borders, immigration and citizenship system's policies and practices relating to charging and fees. We certainly welcomed the recommendations made by the independent chief inspector of borders and immigration, and accepted the majority of them. Our published response sets out in detail which recommendations the Home Office has and has not accepted and why, so I will not go through them now. We recognise that improvements can be made across the system in increasing the transparency in how we charge and the service standards that our customers can expect where we charge a fee.

We expect the forthcoming spending review to influence our approach on fees, but we will want to ensure that, overall, we provide funding stability, instil fairness and promote prosperity and UK interests.

The hon. Gentleman raised some specific points. I will talk briefly about the income threshold. There is a level of confusion regarding the proposals in the Government's White Paper, published last December, which spoke of the future borders and immigration system—not scheduled to come into play until January 2021—and which referred to a £30,000 threshold. That is not for a spousal visa, but for people seeking to come to the UK to work under the equivalent of our current tier 2 system.

That figure was not plucked out of thin air arbitrarily by the Government, or thrust upon us, as the hon. Gentleman suggested; it came from a long and detailed piece of research carried out by the independent Migration Advisory Committee. When the committee's report was published last September and incorporated into our White Paper last December, we made it very clear that that would commence a year of engagement on this subject.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be pleased—perhaps relieved—to learn that over the last five months or so, Home Office officials have undertaken more than 70 separate events, in every region and nation of the United Kingdom and across every sector of industry. I have taken the time to speak to Scottish and Welsh Ministers, and at meetings with members of the civil service of Northern Ireland.

When we consider the future border and immigration system, it matters that we listen to voices from across the United Kingdom and across industry, and understand how we can interact as between the suggestion of expert economists that a £30,000 threshold for a tier 2 visa was about right and the concerns of certain sectors of industry. Of course, different parts of the United Kingdom have average salary levels that are different from those in, say, London and the south-east.

That is an important ongoing piece of work. I am sure that Members will be delighted to hear—there are two Members from Northern Ireland and one from Wales in the Chamber—that this summer I will again spend time in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, listening to the voices of those devolved nations and industries operating within them.

Importantly, the salary threshold for those wishing to bring a spouse and/or dependants into the country is not set at £30,000. The eligibility threshold to apply for a spousal visa is set at £18,600. That is designed to ensure that families can support themselves financially, and we ask for evidence that the sponsor can meet a minimum income threshold. There are additional requirements depending on the number of children. If the spouse has one child, the threshold rises to £22,400, and then by £2,400 per additional child.

The principle was to ensure that there was no dependency on our benefits system, and the threshold was set at a level at which people could be expected to be able to participate fully in society, and integrate into our communities. We in the Home Office, alongside the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, continue to play an important part in ensuring that our system enables people to integrate into communities and play a full role in society. The principle has, of course, been consistently upheld by the courts, and has been tested rigorously.

As the hon. Gentleman alluded to, I have committed to keeping fees for visa, immigration and nationality services under review, and to take account of the issues raised in today's debate and previous ones, in the light of the independent chief inspector's recommendations. The Government are committed to ensuring that we have an effective border and immigration system that is not a burden on the Exchequer and the country's general taxpayers. Decisions on how the system is funded are complicated and require a number of factors to be carefully balanced, as I have set out. However, I reiterate that the Government remain entirely dedicated to maintaining support for the vulnerable who come into contact with the immigration system, ensuring that they are treated fairly and humanely.

Question put and agreed to.

11.24 am

Sitting suspended.

Shared Prosperity Fund

[SIR DAVID CRAUSBY *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the UK shared prosperity fund.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I am pleased to see so many colleagues present to debate an issue that will affect all corners of the United Kingdom and all our communities.

There has been considerable discussion and debate, especially within the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Ireland devolved Administrations, about the shared prosperity fund. Many of us have raised it formally with Ministers in written and oral questions, meetings and correspondence with the Government over the past year. However, it is right that today we take the opportunity to lead a national debate that seeks to heal the divisions in our country—divisions that were laid bare by Brexit but whose seeds were sown long before. Today is an opportunity to look at an important issue through the eyes of our communities, rather than through the prism of party politics.

The Government must respond to three key challenges: to accept that they cannot leave local areas facing major financial uncertainty, to signal that they trust devolved Administrations, mayoral combined authorities and local authorities to know their communities best, and to commit to a clear timetable for action. I speak not only as the Member for Barnsley Central, but as elected Mayor of the Sheffield city region—a unique position that gives me a unique perspective.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate; I apologise that before too long I will have to leave it to chair a meeting. Is it not disappointing that, despite the promise to consult on the shared prosperity fund by the end of last year, we still do not know its terms or the amounts involved? Secondly, should the Government not make a simple promise that no area will be worse off if we leave the EU than if we had stayed in?

Dan Jarvis: I agree. I will make those points later in my speech.

I have seen at first hand what local areas can do when they come together to drive economic growth, but also how they can be limited and constrained by the powers and resources available to them. European or Government funding can often come with limitations that inhibit creative thinking, making it difficult to deliver significant structural changes.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. When I was leader of Coventry City Council a long time ago, we badly needed regional aid, which at that time came from Europe. One thing that investors asked was what our skills, transport systems and so forth were like. If we could not answer those questions, sometimes we did not get the aid, and as a consequence we lobbied for regional aid for a couple of years. It is very important that we get some guarantees out of the Government,

because whether we happen to live in Wales, Scotland or the west midlands, we need real answers. If we do not get them, investment will fall, costing us jobs. This is a very serious situation; I cannot stress that enough.

Dan Jarvis: My hon. Friend speaks with great authority on these matters. He has put his finger on the nub of the issue, which is that decisions that will have an impact on local communities are best made by those communities themselves. Through the devolution agenda, the Government have a very exciting opportunity to devolve not just decision making, but the powers and resources required to deliver those decisions.

I was expressing frustration about the criteria that are sometimes applied to pots of funding. Central Government funding in particular can often be short-term or pit places against one another. Sadly, at times it can be driven by political short-termism, by pork barrel politics or by who shouts loudest and longest. Under such circumstances, it is hard to plan for the future, and it can be more difficult to be strategic.

From 2020 onwards, the funding allocated to regions from the European Union will come to an end. From 2021, so will the funding allocated through the local growth fund programme. Together, the programmes have totalled billions of pounds of investment. The European funding element in the current programme alone has been worth €207 million for the Sheffield city region, €796 million for Yorkshire and the Humber, €513 million for Northern Ireland, €895 million for Scotland and €2.413 billion for Wales.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): In the highlands, the European structural funds were awarded on properly assessed need for roads, harbours and suchlike. That funding was fantastic in halting continuing depopulation, that great curse of the highlands. If we get this wrong—if we do not get something proper in place of the funding—I fear that that ghost will haunt the highlands once again.

Dan Jarvis: The hon. Gentleman makes a valuable point.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): My hon. Friend mentioned the timing for the funding running out and the possibility of taking a strategic view of funding for the future. Does he agree that the delay in publishing the consultation makes it even more difficult for people throughout the UK to think about strategic funding for the future and delivering projects for our communities?

Dan Jarvis: Yes, I do. My hon. Friend makes an incredibly important point.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): My hon. Friend rightly noted that in previous schemes that we have had in this country, assisted areas were pitted against one another. The European structural funds were just that—they were structural. They allowed us to invest in infrastructure, but also, importantly, in social projects. That dimension must not be lost.

Dan Jarvis: My hon. Friend makes an important point, which I will address in just a moment.

[*Dan Jarvis*]

If we remained in the European Union, research produced by the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions suggests that UK regions would receive €13 billion under the future EU cohesion programme.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. He is making a powerful case, but as one of three Cornish MPs present, I have to note that he omitted Cornwall from his list of regions of the UK that have benefited significantly from regional growth funds and from European funds. It is important that we have this debate and that we encourage the Government to publish the consultation, but it is also important that we should work right now, as we are doing in Cornwall, on how to spend regional growth funds to the benefit of our communities. We do not have to wait for the consultation to come out; we can all work with our local authorities and businesses to shape the future funding arrangements. Will the hon. Gentleman encourage colleagues in this Chamber to work together to ensure that we learn from the lessons of the past and have funds that work for our areas?

Sir David Crausby (in the Chair): Order. Interventions should be short.

Dan Jarvis: I hope very much that this debate will provide an opportunity for hon. Members to make points that they have sought to make for some time. On Cornwall specifically, if the hon. Lady bears with me for no more than a few seconds, she will, I hope, be pleased with what I am about to say.

I was saying that certain areas with a specific interest in the work of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions were due to get an even greater proportional increase: South Yorkshire, Tees Valley and Durham, Lincolnshire, southern Scotland, parts of outer London, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, west Wales and the valleys.

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): And Devon.

Dan Jarvis: And Devon—I am grateful for that intervention.

Let me move back from Devon and Cornwall to South Yorkshire for just a moment. In South Yorkshire, we would have seen an increase from €117 per head to more than €500 per head. It is therefore my view that any future shared prosperity fund needs to replace the funds on the basis of what would have been received, had the referendum result been different.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): On the question of how funds are allocated, does my hon. Friend agree that if there is any combination of needs-based formulae and competition, allocation on the basis of need should overwhelmingly be the most important factor to be taken into consideration?

Dan Jarvis: I do agree. My hon. Friend makes a very important point, and I will say more about that later.

When it comes to the funding criteria for the shared prosperity fund, it is important to understand that resources previously received support some of the most vulnerable in our society, through projects delivered by

charities from Mencap and the Salvation Army through to local and voluntary community organisations, such as South Yorkshire Housing and Sheffield Futures, in my patch—organisations rooted in our communities, born out of need and surviving in some cases by the skin of their teeth. The resources also support investment in high-profile, multimillion-pound research and innovation schemes. They unlock town and city regeneration. They provide business support and finance in urban and rural areas. They deliver sustainable development projects that support the low-carbon agenda. Taken together, these local growth and European funds have been the glue that holds our communities together.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Jake Berry): I will be brief, as I know many others want to speak. Will the hon. Gentleman expand on that? Many of the areas he listed as the biggest beneficiaries of European structural funds were also areas that voted to leave the European Union. I was surprised to hear him say that we should have the same system, had the referendum result been different. Will he say why he thinks that people in many of those areas voted in such high numbers to leave?

Dan Jarvis: I do not think that that is an unreasonable question. We can have a debate if we like, although perhaps on another occasion, about why it was that people decided they wanted to leave the European Union. For many, it was because they felt that their local areas were not receiving the benefits that other, more affluent parts of the country were. This is a very good opportunity for the Government to seek to heal some of those divisions and invest in some of the communities that feel left behind. The United Kingdom shared prosperity fund must be designed and delivered so as to deliver on the aspirations of the communities such as the one that I am proud to represent. Those funds have previously done an incredibly important job in providing the glue that holds some of our communities together, creating new jobs, and in supporting disadvantaged and hard-to-reach communities that have often been neglected.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): The Employment Related Services Association has highlighted the very point that my hon. Friend makes—that these initiatives and organisations support people furthest away from the labour market. I used to be a Connexions manager and would draw down some of that funding to help young people who were not in education, employment or training. Does my hon. Friend agree that 2020 is just around the corner and people are getting desperate to plan and deliver those programmes?

Dan Jarvis: I do, and furthermore there is a real opportunity to place these resources in town halls and in mayoral combined authorities—in people who have their own democratic mandate to take decisions and allocate the resources in the most effective and efficient way.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): I commend my hon. Friend on securing this debate. He will know that, apart from Cornwall, the north-east and the Tees Valley are the areas that have received the most funding from the European regional

development fund and social fund. He will also know that by the Government's own economic analysis, those areas are also set to suffer most from the impact of any Brexit outcome, however delivered. Is it not incumbent upon the Government to take this opportunity not only to match up to the promises that have been made on that funding, regardless of our departure from the European Union, but to do that in a fair and properly targeted way, so that it gets to the areas that need it most—the areas suffering from poverty and low living standards—regardless of our patchwork of local devolution?

Dan Jarvis: My hon. Friend is exactly right; she makes a powerful point. This is a big opportunity for this Government and the next Government to invest money in our regional economies. I said at the outset that I hoped we would see this debate through the eyes of our communities and what is in their best interest, not through the prism of party politics. There will be a range of different views about Brexit and what it may or may not mean for our country, but I hope there is a unanimity of view on wanting to do the best for our country, whatever happens. We want to invest money wisely and effectively in the regions and nations of our country. If we are serious about doing that, the shared prosperity fund is an incredibly important element and ingredient in it, but we have to design it in the right way. We have to get the criteria right. We have to make sure that the formula in place is agreed by the regions and nations. That is why we need to get on with the consultation and make some progress.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): It seems to me that, for one reason or another, moneys that have come from Europe—or that we have put in and that have come back to us from Europe—and moneys that a number of Governments have allocated have not dealt with the inequity in our country between north and south or between cities and towns. Does my hon. Friend agree that, whatever else happens in the future, unless there is an offer for our smaller towns and communities, no fund will match the expectations of those communities, or the demoralisation that they feel at how they have been treated by national Government and, for that matter, city government?

Dan Jarvis: As always, my right hon. Friend makes an important point. I hope that what is starting to emerge as a consensus in this place is that whatever happens over the next few weeks, months and years, business as usual and the way we have done our politics previously are not going to cut it. This is an opportunity to look at how we invest in our regional communities and to empower decision making at a regional and local level. That is not a silver bullet solution—it will not necessarily address all the challenges that we face—but it has to be part of the solution to many of the concerns that our constituents have.

My right hon. Friend provokes me to make another point. This country has one of the most centralised systems of public finance, policy making and political control of all the OECD nations. *The Guardian*—I am not sure whether the Minister is a regular reader—reported that local government in this country controls only 1.6% of GDP. That figure is 6% in France, 11% in Germany and 16% in Sweden, yet local government

delivers around a quarter of all public services. The inevitable consequence is that decisions, however well meaning, do not always adequately reflect the needs or opportunities of local areas.

The issue is no more acute than in the way that successive Governments have decided where to prioritise investment. I have made this point many times before: when it comes to spending on transport infrastructure, the gap between more affluent areas, such as London and the south-east of England, and the north is particularly stark. Despite the work of the Minister and those in Government supporting the northern powerhouse, it is still the case that, since the northern powerhouse was introduced by the Government in 2014, public transport investment per person has been three times higher in London than in Yorkshire and the Humber.

It is no surprise that that is the case. However Herculean the efforts of individual Ministers, the rules of engagement are stacked against us. The inequalities are built into the criteria of the Treasury Green Book model, which favours infrastructure development in more affluent areas, meeting existing demand rather than stimulating latent potential. In the words of my friend and neighbour, the Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham—himself a former Chief Secretary to the Treasury—the Government have

“a tendency to shovel more and more into the areas that are already doing well.”

We see that in transport investment and other Government programmes.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for securing this debate. Does he acknowledge that it is not just the north that suffers this problem? Some areas in the south-west have exactly the same difficulty. Does he agree that the Treasury should have other mechanisms, rather than looking at just the economic benefits? Perhaps it could look at the social benefits of putting money into areas such as his and mine.

Dan Jarvis: I absolutely agree, and I always try to choose my words very carefully. Not for one moment will Labour try to pit the north against the south, or different parts of the country against each other. I absolutely accept that there are different needs in the remoter regions of our United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to make the point that there are areas of deprivation in the south, south-west and south-east, and indeed in London, just as there are in the north. That is why it is so important that we take this opportunity to get the design of this fund right, so that every corner of the country will be best placed to benefit from it.

I was about to make the point that in 1960 the UK had the highest levels of productivity in Europe. Now, though, a French worker produces, on average, more by the end of Thursday than a worker in the UK does by the end of the week. In the UK, the gap between the richest and poorest regions is around 150%, which is almost twice as large as in France and three quarters larger than in Germany. Such gaps in wealth distribution and productivity are neither normal nor inevitable, but for some of our most deprived regions they are increasing. The consequences of public policies and investment decisions entrench the economic and social divide. If we fix that, the prize will be huge.

[Dan Jarvis]

Looking at the north of England, Transport for the North's "Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review" suggests that we could add £97 billion to our economy by 2025, which is over and above business-as-usual levels. Over the same period, we could add 850,000 jobs, which is also over and above business-as-usual levels. We can do that by focusing on what we are good at. In South Yorkshire, the same qualities that fired the world's first industrial revolution now power our 21st-century advanced manufacturing and engineering story. Companies such as Rolls-Royce, Boeing and McLaren have chosen our region because we are in the vanguard of developing new materials and solutions to real-life manufacturing and engineering problems. This must be the start of our economic transformation, not the end. To go further, we must have the tools and resources.

Anne Marie Morris: Many valuable points have been made, but the points the hon. Gentleman is now making refer to prosperity. One of his colleagues asked earlier whether we are looking at meeting need or at driving prosperity and productivity—those two things almost conflict. My concern is about how much of this fund will be delivered through local enterprise partnerships, which will be looking competitively at growth, and how much will be delivered through local government, which will effectively be looking much more at need. Is the hon. Gentleman also concerned about ensuring that both issues are addressed? This concerns not just the areas where we will drive productivity; we need to get other areas up to at least a basic level, so that the need is at least average.

Dan Jarvis: The hon. Lady asks the right questions, and the point of the debate is precisely to flush out these kinds of question. That is precisely why we need to have this consultation, so that collectively we can have that debate and put in place an arrangement—a formula or criteria—that serves our country in the way that I hope we would all want it to be served.

I was making some observations about the challenges that specifically relate to poor connectivity, issues regarding skills, and productivity. Owing to devolution, and hopefully to the design of this fund, I am hugely positive about our ability at a regional and local level to address some of these challenges. Change is afoot, and there is growing recognition that the answers to these issues do not lie just in Whitehall or Westminster. The recent election of the North of Tyne Mayor—I know the Minister is quite enthusiastic about that recent election—means there are nine metro Mayors across England. They represent 20.7 million people, which is 37% of the population of England.

We are adding our voice to that of our friends and colleagues in devolved Administrations in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales in calling for greater freedoms and resources to help us do our jobs. This is a powerful voice and one that, to be fair, I believe the Government listen to. The Government have made place central to their industrial strategy, recognising that no one size fits all, that each and every part of the UK has a different set of opportunities, and that different approaches are required to develop them.

Over the coming months, many of us will be working with the Government to develop our local industrial strategies—joint agreements that set out how central

Government and local government will work together to grow our economy. With the creation of powerful sub-national transport bodies such as Transport for the North, we increasingly have the capacity, capability and voice to effect real change. Taken together, these new models of governance, the growing recognition of the importance of place, and an acceptance that the status quo cannot be allowed to persist suggest a brighter future.

That brings me back to the shared prosperity fund, which has to be part of the solution. With some frustration, I say that despite many interventions in the House—through written questions and correspondence with the Department—and despite many promises that consultation would take place, we do not yet have clarity on how much funding will be available, what activities will be eligible for support or who will take the decisions about how the money is spent. We know that the new fund will be a central pillar of the Chancellor's spending review, and that Departments will be working on the development of the fund. On that basis, we have not been sitting idly by, waiting to be asked. Indeed, I commend the work of the all-party parliamentary group on post-Brexit funding, and the analysis and contributions of colleagues in local and regional government who have been addressing these issues.

I have set out my four guiding principles on which I think the fund should be developed, which are as follows. First, the annual budget for the UK's shared prosperity fund should be no less in real terms than both the EU and local growth funding streams it replaces. It must guarantee that regions will not be worse off because of Brexit, in the funding available for regional development beyond 2020. Moreover, that should be a baseline rather than a cap.

Secondly, there should be no competitive bidding element. Instead, an open and transparent process must be put in place that strikes a balance between targeting areas of need and rebalancing our economy, and supporting economies that have the greatest potential to grow.

Thirdly, the fund must be fully devolved to those areas that have in place robust, democratically accountable governance models, including devolved Administrations, combined authorities and mayoralities. It must be up to local areas how best to invest this money, be it on skills, helping the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, infrastructure investment, employment or support and education. Fourthly, the funding must be stretched over multiple years, beyond the vagaries of spending reviews and parliamentary cycles.

I want to take this opportunity to implore the Government to untie the hands of our local areas—to trust that we know our communities and can develop, appraise and deliver projects on time, on budget and in line with local need and opportunity. The year-by-year drip-feed of central Government funding for local economic growth has to end. The imposition of priorities and projects has to end. The competing against, rather than collaborating with, our partners for funding has to end.

The shared prosperity fund will be a litmus test for this Government on their commitment to devolution; it will be the proof of the pudding. The central question is whether we all have the courage and the conviction to let go of powers and resources that for too long have sat in Westminster and Whitehall. If we want to tackle the scourge of regional inequalities and create a country

that works for all, let us be bold. Let us ensure that the shared prosperity fund does what it says on the tin: enable all our communities to share in this country's economic growth, and prosper.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sir David Crausby (in the Chair): Order. I ask Members to limit their contributions to three minutes. That includes any interventions, so if Members do not want to lose time, they should not give way.

2.59 pm

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): In my constituency of Newton Abbot, workplace earnings are 78% of the national average; we have a higher percentage of people on carer's allowance or disability allowance; we have three lower layer super output areas, or neighbourhoods, in the 20 most deprived areas of the country; and 40% of our jobs are part time, compared with the national average of 32.5%. How will a shared prosperity fund address all that? In Devon more broadly, productivity is 17% lower than the UK average, fewer people go on to higher education, 24%—almost 25%—of people are over 65, and 5% of people live in the most deprived wards in the country. We are disproportionately endeavouring to support small and medium-sized enterprises, farming and fishermen. It is therefore very important that support for that type of community is there for us, as it has been in the past.

Since 2014, in Devon we have had 29,000 new homes and 28,000 new business accommodation sites, £183,000 has been invested in infrastructure for broadband, and 2,000 new start-ups and 5,000 new training places have been established. However, we need clarity about how each individual area will get its share of the “cake” and what the criteria will be. We must ensure that there is an appropriate balance between dealing with competition to increase productivity, and accepting that some areas will never reach the Government target. We need to address their need to get them to the base starting point.

We need to be clear. Are we delivering through the LEPs and their industrial strategy? The LEPs certainly think we are, but my concern with that is that it is very competitive, and I cannot see that it will focus on needs. Or is it going to go through local government? That is not my understanding at the moment, but I think that at least some of it should. Clarity would be very much appreciated.

Devon has EU transition status, and we have 11 neighbourhoods in the 25% most deprived areas of the country. My concern is that if we start measuring productivity in those areas, we are measuring economic contribution divided by the number of individuals, rather than the number of workers. That means that we will always do worse. It is crucial that we look at the productivity question differently in rural and coastal areas. My ask for the Minister is that there should be a ring-fenced pot for rural and coastal communities so that, when we focus on the need of SMEs, we look at farmers and fishing. In particular, we should look at raising education and skill levels, because without that we can never get pay up, and investment in infrastructure, which at the moment is well below the national average. The requirement is always for match funding. It is a nice idea, but it does not work in a poor area.

3.2 pm

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on securing this important debate.

The communities I serve are among the poorest parts of the European Union. According to Eurostat, we have a GDP ratio of only 68% of the EU average, whereas the corresponding figure down here in London—the richest part of the European Union by a country mile—is 614%. There are several reasons for that grotesque difference, but British Government policy is a key factor. Public spending per head in London is higher than it is in Wales, while infrastructure spending in London dwarfs the crumbs offered to my country. The trickle-down economics pursued by successive British Governments has failed the communities I serve.

Wales is not alone. Nine of the 10 poorest parts of northern Europe are within the British state. Every single nation and region within the British state, apart from London and the south-east of England, runs a deficit to the UK Treasury. The UK has a chronic under-productivity problem, as many hon. Members have already said. The easiest way to tackle that would be to target investment at the poorest parts of the British state.

My county of Carmarthenshire has hugely benefited from European structural funds. During the 2014-2020 programme, EU funds have so far assisted 611 enterprises, created 130 enterprises, generated 884 jobs, supported 877 people into work and helped 3,557 people to gain qualifications. Of all the nations and regions in the British state, west Wales and the valleys has the most to lose.

In the absence of any commitment from the British Government, Plaid Cymru has produced its own model for post-EU regional funding. Our approach is based on a few simple principles. First, we should receive not a penny less than what would have been available through future funding, as the people of Wales were promised during the referendum campaign. Secondly, decisions about Welsh funding should be made in Wales. A power grab of any nature that undermines the Welsh constitution will be met with fury. I hope the British Government are alive to the problems that they are brewing for themselves in my country.

Thirdly, the new framework must be ready to take over seamlessly from the end of EU structural funds. Fourthly, funds should be pre-allocated and not subjected to a competitive bidding process, which would inevitably mean that the poorest parts of the British state lose out. Finally, we believe that the programme funding in Wales should continue to meet the goals of European structural funds, including streams relating to employability and economic development.

3.5 pm

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on securing this debate. There is no question but that European structural funds have played a huge role in many of our regions and constituencies—in fact, the building in which my constituency office is located was built on the back of European money—so it is really important that we get to grips with this new fund.

[Paul Masterton]

The hon. Gentleman drew out a lot of the difficulties and conflicting ideas very well. One of the difficulties is that we all have a slightly different idea of what the prosperity fund should be trying to target, how it should look and what sorts of projects would fit into it. That is one of the reasons why we need the Government to move much more quickly and set out their view of how it should look.

Although EU structural funds have some real benefits and strong points, we have an opportunity to do things a bit differently. The pre-allocation over a seven-year period is too inflexible for what we will need. We need more flexibility so we can react more quickly to what is happening in the economy and to local areas. We must also look at how funding is allocated, and we should have a discussion about exactly how we will do that. I do not want the UK prosperity fund to become effectively an England-only fund, with money passed on under the Barnett formula to the devolved nations under the current funding formulae, which are not ring-fenced. That money could be used for things that are completely unrelated to the aims and purposes of the prosperity fund or to plug holes in other budgets. That is not a political point about a Conservative UK Government and an SNP Scottish Government; that problem will exist whoever is in power in either location.

If we are serious about using the UK shared prosperity fund to reduce inequalities among communities across the four nations, we must ensure that each and every part of the United Kingdom can benefit from it fairly. The Barnett formula is a pretty good argument that the devolved nations would actually lose out, rather than gain, under that arrangement. I hope the Minister agrees that that means that the UK prosperity fund should be operated as a single fund, based on need and not on where people live in the UK.

The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) gave a good example of how European funds have been very good in the highlands and have been targeted. If that were just a block of money that went to the Scottish Government as part of the Budget, there is no guarantee that a penny of it would reach the highlands or be targeted at the initiatives that have benefited under European arrangements.

I hope we will get a few answers from the Minister about the timing, what shape the Government think the structural fund will be, and how much money might be put in. I look forward to the introduction of the fund, because it is hugely important, but we absolutely must get it right, for all the reasons that the hon. Member for Barnsley Central set out.

3.8 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on securing this debate, which is, I hope, an important opportunity for us to influence the way billions of pounds will be spent.

I think the point about maintaining minimum levels of expenditure is absolutely right, but if we simply adopt a carbon copy of the old EU scheme, we will have failed. What is the point of replacing a bureaucratic,

unaccountable system with another bureaucratic, unaccountable system? That means that we must move away from the current regional format. It most definitely should not be run by and from Whitehall. It needs to be embedded in local communities and run by people from and accountable to the communities, and that means the local councils.

Let us take one example of what is wrong now. My town centre in Ellesmere Port has been struggling for a long time. Like many other northern towns, the rise of the internet and changes in shopping habits have led to shops closing down on a weekly basis. We need a new approach that regenerates the town centre, restores civic pride and gives people a positive reason to visit their high street and spend their money there. I am pleased that my local authority has bid for funding from the future high streets fund, but, realistically, if every town centre that bids gets a slice of the pie, there will never be enough to go round. The sums that we need for a truly transformative approach will not come from one pot alone. When a lot of the town centre is in private ownership, as mine is, there is a limit to what the public sector can physically do, but if the shared prosperity pot was operated in tandem with other funding pots, as the LGA suggests, there would be an opportunity for an integrated and creative approach that could lead to better outcomes for both funds.

We have spent a lot of time in here talking about what people meant when they voted leave, but not nearly enough about why they voted leave. We talk to ourselves, but not to the communities who voted leave. When will they be asked for their opinion and what their priorities are? When will they truly be given the opportunity to shape their own destinies? When will they be able to take back control? People already feel as though they do not have the power to make decisions about the most important things in their lives—whether a local hospital should stay open, where a new school might go or even how often the buses run—and the consequences are there for us all to see.

We need to think big and empower local communities. We do not need more crumbs from the table. Can we not see that people are fed up to the teeth with the patronising approach, not least because it clearly does not work for the vast majority? Power flows towards London. Wealth flows upwards into the hands of the elite. A Westminster handout on Westminster terms will not change that, and the sooner we realise that business as usual is not going to cut it, the better.

Our country is undergoing massive changes now, but with future automation the changes will accelerate and impact even more on those who can least afford it. We need to find a way to give communities responsibility and the power to shape their own futures.

3.11 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on securing this debate. I agreed with many of the points that he made in his very good opening speech.

I represent a Cornish constituency. It is well known—it has already been mentioned in this debate—that Cornwall has been one of the biggest recipients of European economic support funding. Yet as the Minister pointed

out, Cornwall voted by a fairly substantial majority to leave the EU. There are reasons for that. It is largely because of the way in which European regional development funding has been spent in Cornwall, and there is a view that much of it has been wasted. During the past 20 years, Cornwall has received almost £1 billion of European funding, yet it has not achieved anywhere near what it was set up to achieve. In 2000, when the programme began, Cornish GDP was at 75% of the European average. The latest assessment is that we are at 68% of the European average, so despite three rounds of ERDF funding and almost £1 billion, we have fallen behind the rest of Europe.

There are good reasons for that: the European programmes are over-bureaucratic and difficult to access. In fact, the people in Cornwall who are most upset that we are leaving the EU are the consultants who have made a small fortune out of advising Cornish businesses on how to apply for European grants. They are the most upset people because their gravy train is coming to an end. Also, the programme has been far too prescriptive. We have been part of a centralised European programme that has not allowed people in Cornwall—the businesses and the local authority—to invest the money in the things that Cornwall really needs.

The shared prosperity fund is a brilliant opportunity for us to get it right. We can have a programme that is much more fit for purpose, less expensive to run, less bureaucratic and far more easily accessible to the businesses that need to access it in Cornwall. As many Members have said this afternoon, we have to grasp the opportunity to get a programme that is fit for purpose and delivers investment into our most deprived areas and really does the job.

Some things are absolutely essential, as other Members have mentioned. Whatever fund is put in place has to be locally administered, because local people know better what local areas need. It has to be more easily accessible and less bureaucratic, and there has to be a single dedicated pot for places such as Cornwall so that we are not put in a position where we have to be competitive and therefore miss out. I urge the Minister to do all that he can to ensure that the consultation is brought forward as soon as possible.

3.15 pm

Jo Platt (Leigh) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on securing this important debate. It comes at a crucial time, as we leave the European Union, but we must realise that the existing fundamental imbalance of investment, decision making and power across the country is a major reason that we saw the Brexit vote. For too long, Westminster has held the purse strings, made the decisions and held power over our communities. Is it any wonder that northern towns such as the one I represent feel isolated from the economic progress of our cities and isolated from the decisions that impact their daily lives?

For the constituents of Leigh, such isolation is not only metaphorical, but literal. My town has no rail connectivity. Decisions made in this place mean that my constituents struggle to access the employment, educational and social opportunities of our nearby cities, while outside investment is effectively blocked from flowing

into our towns. My constituents in Leigh are left believing that, after nine years of Tory austerity, the country does not work for them. That is why it is important that the shared prosperity fund not only replaces vital EU funding, but restores their faith in our communities, gives them a voice, a stake in society and empowers them to transform local economies for the 21st-century economy.

At the heart of the debate is not just a matter of replacing funding, but instilling a sense of agency in our communities. We must therefore adopt a place-based approach, putting our constituents at the heart of transforming their areas and not leaving them to feel that they are receiving a pity handout. Gone should be the days when a selected elite decide what is best for our local area. We must instead empower and entrust those whom the decisions impact the most.

One great example of how the current system is failing can be seen in the digital and cyber worlds. The Centre for Towns has found that 55% of digital jobs are in the south-east of England, with just 12% in the north. It is a tragedy. The only way we will reunite our country after years of austerity and Brexit-induced division is by empowering, entrusting and investing in our communities. We in this place must let local areas take back control to make the decisions that transform their towns while restoring their damaged trust and confidence in a society that should work for them.

3.17 pm

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): Cornwall has been a net beneficiary of objective 1 and convergence funding, as we have heard from other Members, for the past 20 years. If we step away from the coastal towns that many people visit on holiday, we find pockets of rural deprivation that successive Governments have found difficult to identify. Although the moneys that have flowed into Cornwall have been welcome, there have been challenges with how the money has been administered. I want to raise those challenges with the Minister today in the hope that we can avoid them when we allocate the shared prosperity fund.

Cornwall was a net recipient of almost £1 billion over 20 years. Although there have been some noteworthy allocations of the cash—probably the most important and successful was the roll-out of superfast broadband across Cornwall—much of the money was allocated to buildings and industrial parks. Without a strategic investment plan, the net result over the past 20 years has not really moved the dial. Much of the failure came from the application process and does not reflect any lack of will by the people administering the funds. Most of the businesses in North Cornwall are small family businesses employing between five and 10 people. They generally work six days a week, 10 hours a day, and did not have compliance teams that could pore over complex and onerous forms. There was therefore a tendency for the bigger companies and charities to put in their bids, and because they had the time and the resources, they were able to make the applications that the small businesses were unable to.

One stat that struck me was in a recent cost-benefit analysis of the objective 1 funding: for every £250,000 that was spent, Cornwall was the net beneficiary of one job. That fundamentally illustrates why small businesses were unable to access the money when that is exactly

[Scott Mann]

where it needs to go. Can we simplify the application process to make the shared prosperity fund easier to access? The countryside productivity small grants scheme, a similar fund, is administered by DEFRA, which is simpler and much more straightforward.

We are still waiting. After assurances that the funding criteria would be in place, we are still in the dark. I encourage the Minister to lay out the fund as soon as is practical, so that Cornwall can benefit. Cornwall has seen historic growth over the last five years. Unemployment is at record lows and tourism in the county is booming off the back of great weather and the devaluation of the pound.

Many of the small businesses in North Cornwall are exporting for the first time, but we need to start investing in people. Young people growing up and going through secondary education and college will now work until they are 80 and will have at least four careers in their lifetimes. The Government need to invest in those young people in college and give them a future by moving the dial on their social mobility.

In summary, we need a more straightforward process, quicker allocation and the apprenticeships and investment in skills that our young people need.

3.20 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on bringing this issue to the Chamber. I am sure that I am not the only one who longs for a prosperous UK. I, alongside 17.4 million others, believe that that means a UK outside the EU. The vote must be respected and if integrity, honesty and simple human decency have anything to do with it, we will leave.

To replace the EU structural fund, which is reputedly worth £2.4 billion annually, we must continue to reduce inequalities between communities. There must be wise consideration to decide how the UK shared prosperity fund will be formed and distributed. In the past, that was done by identifying the priorities and objectives, the amount of money to be allocated, the method of allocation between countries and regions of the UK—the hon. Member for Barnsley Central said that the fund should be driven regionally, which is correct—the model by which funding will be allocated, whether pre-allocating an amount for a country or region or inviting competitive bids from across the UK, the length of the planning period, and deciding who administers the funds and whether they are controlled from Westminster or by the devolved Administrations. Clearly, neither should be involved; it should be done by devolved authorities or local councils depending on the issue.

It is time for me to put my spoke in. I firmly believe that the fund must be administered at a regional level and, at the very least, to the same level of support as before. Brexit was not an attempt to save a single penny but to manage every penny to greatest effect. That is what we must try to do in the short time available.

The European structural investment fund consisted of four moneys coming from the EU: the European regional development fund, the European social fund, the European maritime and fisheries fund and the European agricultural fund for rural development. Of those, the

ERDF and ESF account for over 60% of ESI funding over the programming period of 2014 to 2020—they are very important to my constituency of Strangford.

Strangford, through the fisheries fund and others, has certainly seen improvements to businesses and communities that would be left to languish were money distributed per capita. Although we received only 10% of EMFF money for Northern Ireland for our fleets and communities, clearly that level of support must continue at the very least.

Simply put, our fishing community, including suppliers, producers and all the rest, could not make the needed improvements to fleets or diversification in the communities to help sustainability without the fund. I believe that the same level of money must be delivered, and I stand today to speak for the communities who rely on the fund.

We need a regional hands-on approach that helps those in need to continue or enhance what they are already doing. That opportunity must be seized so that local people can make local decisions and local differences with their own funding. It is time to get the fund in place and make it accessible to those who can use it for business that will impact the local economy in the local community.

3.24 pm

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on securing this timely debate. Interestingly, we have had two debates on this matter in the last two weeks, and I feel that more will come.

My constituency of Ogmore relies enormously on regional development funding from the European Union, whether it goes towards supporting businesses, opening the new train station in Llanharan, or the future redevelopment of the much-loved Maesteg town hall. Those projects really matter to my constituents, so it is important that the Minister understands that all hon. Members across the House need decisions to be made. We need to know when the consultation will start and—as soon as possible—how much assurance we can give to our communities that those funds will continue and will not be means-tested or business-led, but distributed on the basis of need.

Some of the poorest communities, including my own, need the funding to continue beyond 2020. The Government's austerity drive over the last nine years has meant that the Welsh Government have lost almost £1 billion in investment. That is £4 billion in real terms. The £680 million that is delivered to Wales through membership of the European Union is hugely important to communities up and down Wales.

Much of the work done with the European funding that is given to communities across Wales is done with the support of the Welsh Labour Government. Over the last 18 months to two years, we have been told many times that consultations will start, but they do not. We ask questions of Ministers, but they do not have the answers. I have asked Ministers in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Treasury and the Wales Office, and no one seems to have any answers about when the funding will start, how it will be allocated and, importantly, how it will be managed.

Every hon. Member here has made it clear that it is extremely important that decisions are made locally by devolved institutions, mayoralities, councils or whatever it may be. A key point is that the Tory Government must not use this matter to rewrite the devolution settlement of the United Kingdom. It is absolutely pivotal to any forward planning for a shared prosperity fund that future decisions are made by the Welsh Labour Government, so that they can provide certainty to business, local authorities and further and higher education institutions.

At the moment, nothing from the UK Government suggests that those decisions will be made locally. In fact, Conservative Back Benchers frequently say that perhaps the Welsh Government can be bypassed and the money delivered directly to Welsh local authorities. That simply cannot be allowed to happen. We have a devolution settlement for Wales that must be respected. It is extremely important that those decisions are made locally, and that the funds target the most deprived communities across Wales and the United Kingdom.

3.27 pm

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on securing this debate.

In the 1980s, when the Thatcher Government broke the industries on which our economy was built—steel and coal—we faced really tough times in South Yorkshire. We sunk to become one of the poorest regions in Europe, and because of that, the EU stepped in with funding. In reply to some of the comments that have been made, I say that that funding responded to what we asked for locally and funded programmes that were delivered by local organisations.

European structural funds were key to rebuilding our economy. Objective 1 funding provided £820 million to more than 250 organisations and 650 projects, from major projects such as the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre, which has become a national flagship for industrial innovation, to small community initiatives that reskill people. The economy grew by 8.5%.

Shamefully, under Government policy since 2010, regional inequality has grown again. We are back where we were before: below 75% of the average gross domestic product of the EU and one of the poorest regions in Europe—formally designated a “less developed region” along with Tees Valley and Durham, Lincolnshire, west Wales and Cornwall, which have been mentioned.

On those regions, the February report from Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe, which my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central mentioned, stated this for 2021 to 2027:

“All five of these regions would stand to receive EU support in excess of 500 euros per capita for the seven-year period.”

That would mean £605 million for South Yorkshire.

I was puzzled by the Minister’s intervention, as he seemed to suggest that because those areas voted leave they should not expect to receive that funding. That is not what they were promised in the referendum campaign, nor was it what they were promised subsequently.

Jake Berry: Nor was that what I said.

Paul Blomfield: The Minister is chuntering from a sedentary position, but I hope he will respond to the question that I am about to ask.

To cast our minds back, we were promised that we would not be worse off, and in February I wrote to the Secretary of State, asking him to commit to providing the £605 million that we would have received had the country remained a member of the European Union. Replying on behalf of the Secretary of State, the Minister sidestepped the question and instead told me about a stakeholder event in Huddersfield—I am sure it was very useful. Today, I again ask that simple question: will the Government commit to providing regional development funding that is equivalent to the money we would have received from the European Union as less developed regions—yes or no?

3.30 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on an outstanding speech and on securing this debate. As things stand, we still do not know how much funding will be available, how it will be divided across the country, what activities will be eligible for support and who will decide how the money is spent. But this is not just about money—there is a real fear that it will be not only a financial grab, but a power grab, and that the Westminster Government will use this opportunity to reduce funding for the areas that need it most, and to claw back powers that sit naturally with devolved Administrations and other local areas.

Those deep-seated concerns led to the creation of the all-party group for post-Brexit funding for nations, regions and local areas, which I am truly proud to chair. Our wide-ranging review of 80 organisations across the UK heard clear and unanimous representations that the UK’s shared prosperity fund must comprise not a single penny less in real terms than the EU and UK funding streams it replaces. Westminster must not use Brexit as an opportunity to short-change the poorest parts of the UK. Equally, the UK Government must not prevent local areas from having appropriate control over the funds.

Although it is disappointing that the Minister has so far refused to meet our group, last month officers from our APPG met the Secretary of State for Wales to make those points, and last week they met the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Both meetings were conducted in a positive and constructive spirit, but it is shocking that there is still no sign of the public consultation on the SPF being launched any time soon. In fact, there was a suggestion that the consultation may be delayed until the comprehensive spending review in the autumn. Given that the CSR will include information on the funding of the SPF, I am not sure how the relevant bodies are supposed to contribute meaningfully, when the horse will have already bolted. I assure the Minister, however, that our APPG will be watching carefully to ensure there is no sleight of hand from the Government on that point.

We need a guarantee that the SPF budget will not be a penny less than current and projected EU funding, and that the devolution settlement will be fully respected. We need clarity about when the SPF consultation will be published. The great advantage of the current system

[Stephen Kinnock]

is that it is data driven and evidence based, thus guarding against pork barrel politics. There is a fundamental worry that the SPF will become a politicised slush fund, with a Conservative Government using it to buy votes in marginal seats. I hope that the Minister's response today reassures us that our constituencies will not be left short-changed by a sleight of hand in Westminster.

3.33 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on securing this important and timely debate. We have all been waiting far too long for details on this matter. The hon. Gentleman spoke about looking through the eyes of communities, and his challenges to the Minister were repeated by many others in the Chamber. We must respect the devolved Parliaments and ensure that badly needed regional aid is in place. The hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) intervened to speak about the dangers of listening to who shouts the loudest, and of pork barrel decision making.

The hon. Member for Barnsley Central mentioned data from the conference of peripheral maritime regions—I must declare an interest because, as a former leader of Highland Council, I am a former vice-president of that body—and the data were very detailed. He highlighted €895 million for Scotland in this spending round, including €180 million for the highlands and islands. For the Minister's benefit, I remind hon. Members that both that country and that region voted in great numbers to remain in the European Union.

The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) spoke about the funding being used to challenge depopulation, as well as other issues that have gone unaddressed by Westminster Governments for many years. Indeed, one symbol of European funding joins our two constituencies. After decades of no or little investment in the highlands and islands, the Kessock bridge that now spans our constituencies was made possible only by EU funding—something people in the highlands are very much aware of.

The hon. Member for Barnsley Central spoke about supporting the most vulnerable, and he mentioned the need for regeneration and business support, and the low-carbon agenda that comes with such funding. In response to an intervention, he recognised that people are becoming desperate for information, which is true—people are desperate to find out where such support will now come from. The devolved Administrations must be told what the money will be, how it will be used and how it will work. Currently, they do not have clarity about how much money there is, when it will be allocated and to whom, or how the system will work.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about the guiding principles of there being no less money than already exists, that the regions must not be worse off and that the system should be fully devolved. This funding must go beyond parliamentary cycles and spending reviews.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Drew Hendry: I will not as there is not much time and I have a lot to say.

The hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) spoke about Westminster's failings, and the feeling in his communities about Westminster's trickledown economics. He mentioned the benefits of EU funding in education, jobs and innovation, and said that his area requires not a penny less than was promised. There should not be a power grab. That would not be acceptable to the people of Wales, or indeed of Scotland.

The hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton) took great pains to try to support his Government—he even had to call for them to move on—and raised concerns about this being an England-only fund. For different reasons, I have the same concerns, because if we look back into history, we see what happened in the highlands and islands before we were members of the European Union.

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) said that this must not be a Westminster handout on Westminster terms as that will not cut it, and I completely agree. The hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), along with other Members from Cornwall, seemed to argue that European funds have somehow been negative for the area. I know they were talking about the details, but I think people will find that hard to understand.

The hon. Member for Leigh (Jo Platt) spoke about the imbalance of investment, and said that for too long Westminster had held the purse strings and the power. She is absolutely right, and that must be respected when the scheme is introduced. Although the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and I do not agree on everything, he said that this funding must be devolved and at the same level as before, and he listed the improvements that have been made in his constituency with EU funding.

The hon. Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore) spoke about how funding matters in his community, and how important it is across Wales, including the fact that it is devolved. This scheme must not be used as an opportunity to rewrite the devolution settlement; devolution must be respected. The hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) repeated the call for this not to be a power grab. It will not surprise you, Sir David, to hear that I agree with that sentiment.

Communities and charities have been waiting years to find out what funding will be available post Brexit, and we urgently need the details of this so-called prosperity fund. Since joining the EU in 1973, Scotland has benefited from European structural fund money to the tune of billions. Those funds have been used to support getting people into work and out of poverty, to improve their education and skills, and for investment in our infrastructure and communities. The European regional development fund promotes balanced development across the EU, and the European social fund invests in employment-related projects.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has repeatedly promised to publish full details on the consultation. On 15 November 2018, Wales Office Ministers told MPs that a full consultation would be published before the end of the year. We are six months on, and there is nothing to be seen. If Brexit

is drawing the Government's business and long-term planning to a halt, they should revoke article 50—not the concept of long-term planning.

I do not have much time and I want to make sure that the other Front-Bench speaker and the Minister have the opportunity to contribute, so I will wrap up with these words, although there is much more I could say on this subject. Where is the post-Brexit funding? Communities and charities want to know where it is and they need the details urgently. When is it to be revealed? Will it respect the devolution settlement and prove not to be just another power grab?

It is not good enough that this Government are tied in knots and uncertain of the future. If the UK Government's long-term planning has ground to a halt, they must get past that and get the details to people and communities of how the money will be distributed. We already know that Brexit will cost Scottish communities millions, so they need details on funding urgently. Our people cannot be left behind by a Government who are too chaotic to get out the details of how they will support communities.

3.41 pm

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on securing this important and timely debate.

We heard from the Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), who expressed real frustration at the lack of a consultation. We expected that before Christmas but it is still not here. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), who restated a position that I firmly believe in: we should use this opportunity to reset and recast how that fund can be used. He spoke about the importance of town centres and how people feel about the future direction of their town, and the ability to include people in a more active way on decisions that affect their lives.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Jo Platt) said that far too often power is held away from local people. With the best will in the world, decisions made about what is right for local areas are for nothing if local people are not involved and feel that they have no agency or control over the future direction of the place where they live. My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmire (Chris Elmore) talked about the importance of targeting the fund on the basis of need, and the importance of respecting our devolved nations. They cannot be bypassed—they have to be front and centre in whatever new settlement comes forward. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) said how much regional inequalities have increased since 2010 because of successive decisions made by the current Government.

Finally, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) spoke about the perception that this is not just about money, but is a power grab by Government to retain as much power as they can centrally and not distribute it anywhere. I congratulate him on his work on this issue in the all-party parliamentary group for post-Brexit funding for nations, regions and local areas,

which holds the Government to account and works in partnership to try to create a new way forward that provides an alternative.

The importance of EU structural funds has been set out in the debate, but it is worth highlighting again the importance of the £17.2 billion of investment directed at some of the most significant regions that have not shared the capital's booming fortunes. The EU regional development fund has focused £655 million on supporting small and medium-sized enterprises. It has supported research and innovation with £342 million and invested £197 million towards a low-carbon economy. The EU social fund tackles head-on the barriers preventing people in towns such as mine from accessing the labour market and decent, well-paid and secure jobs. Almost £1 billion has been spent on developing an inclusive labour market, with more than £333 million further to develop new skills that are vital for accessing jobs and vital for the future of our economy.

There are very real concerns about the Government's intent in this agenda. We have heard not just concerns about the places that people represent, but a significant amount of distrust in the background motives of the Government. There is little wonder why: we have seen nearly a decade of austerity targeted at the most deprived communities, where vital public services have been taken away from areas that could least afford it and that have seen the biggest cuts. The evidence tells us that the Government are not in the game of sticking up for the most deprived communities—the very people we represent in this place. Left to their own devices, what would the Government do with the opportunity to recast the fund, and what might that mean for the communities we represent?

The same is true of education funding, skills funding and further education funding, all of which are under chronic pressure. The same continues to be true of UK capital investment spend, where our regions are held back by a failure to invest in growth. We have seen that on transport investment and housing investment; across almost every line of central Government, capital investment favours the capital of the UK. What about our regions? If we want the UK to be the best that it can be, every one of our regions must be the best that it can be—not just the cities and city regions, but our towns.

There is real fear that what might follow is a competitive process that pitches one area against the next, with rules dictated by a centralising Government who do not want to give power away and have always neglected our towns and our most deprived communities. We might see that the rules are doubly stacked up against getting the money to the very communities and people who ought to be beneficiaries.

Today, the Minister can put some meat on the bones. He can explain why there has been a significant delay in the consultation. He can outline what a future fund might look like: how will local people have agency and be involved? How will we make sure that our towns benefit as much as our cities do? How can we make sure that this is not a pot of money in isolation, but a wholly different approach to how Government spend their money—not just favouring the capital and doing it the easiest way possible, but making sure that every part of the UK gets the money that it needs?

Why has this taken so long? We are nearly three years in from the EU referendum. Had we left on 29 March, we would have been six weeks out of the European

[*Jim McMahon*]

Union, but there is not even a programme in place for spending the money that should go to our regions post Brexit. The Government might have been saved by a temporary relief, but at some point they will have to put pen to paper and set out exactly what they have in mind, and make sure that local people are included. I hope that the Minister takes from this debate the fact that there is a great deal of interest, and that the MPs who have spoken are not going away. They will come back if answers do not come forward.

3.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Jake Berry): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I start in the traditional way by congratulating the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on an excellent speech. As with so many things that we do together, with our shared passion to drive forward the economy of the northern powerhouse, there was very little I disagreed with in his speech, although there were a few things I will mention if I get the opportunity. Many Members asked similar questions, so before I deal with individual contributions I will address some of the more general points.

Let us be realistic about this debate: Members have picked me up on my saying that many areas that voted leave have been recipients of EU structural funds. One of my jobs in Government is administering many EU structural funds, and some Opposition Members may have done that job during the Labour Government. Those funds are hugely bureaucratic, and they do not target many of the things that we are desperate, across the Chamber, to drive in every constituency—including mine in east Lancashire, which is a deprived area in the north of England. Those funds are often inefficient. Although we have heard about some of the brilliant things they have done, such as supporting Mencap, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned, they have been hugely inefficient in many places.

My hon. Friends the Members for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) and for North Cornwall (Scott Mann) made interesting points about how some of those funds have been wasted in Cornwall. I suspect that may be part of the reason—although I would be the first to accept that the picture is very complicated—why 68% of the people who live in Barnsley and 60% of the people who live in Oldham voted to leave the European Union. We in this place have to address some of people's deep frustrations about inequality, which traditionally have not been addressed or targeted by European structural funds.

We keep referring to European structural funds as European money. Let us be absolutely clear: this is British taxpayers' money, which is given to the European Union and then, after a large percentage of it has been removed, returned to our country.

Paul Blomfield: Will the Minister give way?

Jake Berry: I will not, sorry—there have been many interventions.

That is why, looking to the future, in our 2017 general election manifesto, my party—the Conservative party—said we would come forward with a new UK shared prosperity

fund that would be designed to reduce inequalities between communities across the four nations of our United Kingdom and target productivity. That was reiterated by my right hon. Friend the Communities Secretary in a written ministerial statement in July 2018 laying out some of the foundations of the UK shared prosperity fund.

The Government accept that tackling inequality is absolutely something we need to grip in this country. The hon. Member for Leigh (Jo Platt) mentioned that Leigh, which I know well—it is just down the road from my constituency—does not have a railway station. It is not the case that there was a railway station there that was closed by a Conservative Government; that is a sign of decades of under-investment in northern transport infrastructure by successive Governments. The UK shared prosperity fund should seek to challenge some of the inequalities that we see north, south, east and west across the United Kingdom.

Stephen Kerr: The Minister has mentioned inequalities several times. I want to be absolutely clear that the Government are committed to ensuring that the shared prosperity fund is led by need and, in respect of Scotland specifically, that the money is not Barnettised. It may be ring-fenced, but it must not be Barnettised.

Jake Berry: I am not able to give that commitment today, because we are going to have an active consultation.

Stephen Kinnock: When?

Jake Berry: If Members give me the opportunity to say when, I may try to provide an answer. One of the points we heard was that we must respect the devolution settlement across our United Kingdom. For me, as the Minister with responsibility for the northern powerhouse and devolution, that means respecting the devolution settlements that this Government have brought forward, by which I mean mayoral devolution in England, which now covers 48% of the north of England.

Jim McMahon: I understand why the Minister does not want to go down the cul-de-sac of the Barnett formula, but can he confirm that no region will be worse off than it is under the current programme?

Jake Berry: As the hon. Gentleman knows and I was just about to say, the quantum of the UK shared prosperity fund will be determined as part of the comprehensive spending review. That is the appropriate time for the Government to make commitments of the sort he seeks. However, he and the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) are correct that the Government must come forward with their consultation—I am clear that this must happen—before the comprehensive spending review to enable areas to contribute to that consultation.

We have not been sitting on our hands, as people who have listened to the debate may think. We have already engaged with more than 500 stakeholders. We have had 25 official-level engagements across the country, including with our counterparts in the devolved Administrations. In addition, in my role as Minister for the northern powerhouse, I have engaged with mayors. I have talked to them specifically about how we can work together to

provide evidence to the consultation that demonstrates that, as so many people have said, the impetus for investment of the UK shared prosperity fund should come from our regions rather than being directed out of Whitehall.

Having listened to contributions to the debate, I think everyone believes that it would be nice if that happened. The point is that by working with our metro Mayors, our local enterprise partnerships and authorities across England—that is certainly my role as English Minister for local growth—to create the evidence base, we can move beyond thinking that it would be nice to proving that it is how we will get the biggest return on investment. There is work ongoing in my Department, in advance of the consultation, to ensure that that hugely important argument is made, and won, when my dear chums in the Treasury are making decisions about how the money should be distributed following the consultation. I hope that answers some of the questions that Members asked. My response to the main question is that the consultation will start very shortly.

Let me move on to some of the specific points that were made. On public transport investment, Members may not have seen the most up-to-date figures, which are available on the Treasury website. They show that transport capital expenditure is higher per capita in the north of England than in London. People often talk about total capital expenditure across the north of England versus London. There are some parts of the north of England where very few people live, so it is much more realistic to talk about capital expenditure per capita, and it is higher per capita in the north of England.

Many colleagues talked about the weakness of Green Book calculations for making investment decisions, which I think is acknowledged across the House. That is why the Government came forward with a rebalancing formula in the industrial strategy. That formula looks at areas that are less developed, depending on how we define that, and at factoring future growth into Green Book calculations. Changes have been made recently to ensure that community benefit is also included in such calculations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris) commented on the ring-fencing of coastal money. By the end of the current spending period, the Government will have invested £200 million directly in coastal communities through our coastal communities fund, which is about driving prosperity on our coasts. The UK shared prosperity fund must not be viewed on its own as the only support the Government give to drive regional growth. We have contributed £53 million to part of the exciting growth deal in the

highlands and islands, which has resulted in things such as the north coast 500 route, which I hope to visit this summer, prospering.

Drew Hendry *rose—*

Jake Berry: I will let the hon. Gentleman advise me about the best place to stay.

Drew Hendry: I am grateful to the Minister for raising that money for the Inverness city region deal. Will he go a step further and match 50:50 the commitment of the Scottish Government, who put considerably more money into that deal than the UK Government did?

Jake Berry: We will have to look at how much new money the Scottish Government have committed. Since we have talked repeatedly about devolution, particularly from a Scottish viewpoint, I note that the Smith commission agreement, which was signed by all parties in Edinburgh, contains a commitment by the Scottish Government to look at further devolution to local councils in Scotland. Devolution does not stop in Edinburgh, but I understand that no progress has been made on that.

I could go on, and I would like to, but I want to give the hon. Member for Barnsley Central the customary time to conclude the debate. I hope that colleagues do not doubt the Government's commitment not just to devolution, but to regional growth. The UK shared prosperity fund, which we will consult fully on shortly, will continue that commitment to driving productivity and growth everywhere.

3.58 pm

Dan Jarvis: I am grateful for the opportunity to debate this important issue, and I thank everyone who contributed; we heard from people representing every corner of the United Kingdom. The debate teased out some big and important, but in some cases still unanswered, questions. There is an urgent requirement for clarity about the design of the fund—how it will work and how it will be administered. There is also a need to guarantee that, at the very least, our communities will not be worse off. That is the right thing to do, not least because, at this very difficult time for our country, if we want it to be both successful and united, we need to ensure that we get rid of the systemic inequalities between our regions and our nations. If we are serious about doing that, the shared prosperity fund will have a very important role to play. Let us get on with it and work out how we are going to do it.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the UK shared prosperity fund.

Medical Aesthetics Industry: Regulation

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered regulation of the aesthetics industry.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I am again grateful to lead a debate on this issue, which is becoming more pressing and may affect many of our constituents. The previous debate on this topic was successful, and I thank those who took part and contributed. I also mention my constituent, Rachael Knappier, who has been brave enough to tell her story and who initially brought this issue to my attention.

As some Members will remember, Rachael received a lip filler from an unregulated beautician, who accidentally injected it into her artery, causing a trauma to her lip. In January, I raised this with the Prime Minister at Prime Minister's questions. Since then, some progress has been made by the Government and I welcome the announcement made today, but more progress is required. Following my championing of the issue, I am glad that the Government have begun to act. The Department of Health and Social Care is today launching a campaign to encourage consumers to seek professional advice when considering having procedures such as Botox, dermal fillers and cosmetic surgery.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. As he rightly says, there is need for a tightening of the regulations. In the media, there are children as young as 15 with botched lip fillers and injections; we need to do more to protect those children.

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we must ensure that only medically-trained professionals, with a duty of care provided by their professional boards, carry out these procedures, under very strict regulations?

Alberto Costa: The hon. Gentleman is correct. We need to ensure that we have appropriate regulation with these procedures, or similar types of procedure. He is right to raise this issue on behalf of his constituents.

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman for securing this important debate. He will be aware of its importance as he is a vice-chair—along with my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) and me—of the all-party parliamentary group on beauty, wellbeing and aesthetics. Does he agree that any new regulations that come forward need to consider non-medical regulation? We need to ensure we have properly qualified beauticians, with recognised qualifications, to carry out these procedures.

Alberto Costa: The hon. Lady is correct. I pay tribute to her and to the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) for setting up the new all-party parliamentary group on beauty, wellbeing and aesthetics, along with me. I look forward to her interventions at meetings of that all-party group; I know she has a great deal of knowledge of this area. I agree that we do

not want to stifle the beauty industry—we want it to grow and be successful—but we all want to protect our constituents.

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on setting up the APPG. I am the chair of the APPG on the hair industry and I am keenly interested in this development. A possible solution to the problem has been put forward by the British Association of Beauty Therapy and Cosmetology. It appreciates the concerns about mandatory registration, but thinks that a regulatory framework, led by the Government, would be difficult to implement and that the voluntary self-regulatory framework is not working either. BABTAC believes that the time has come for the Government to institute a mandatory regulatory framework that would be self-governing and would include BABTAC and the Royal College of Surgeons. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with that?

Alberto Costa: I agree. The hon. Gentleman has been doing sterling work on behalf of his constituents in related matters with his sister-APPG, and we wish him every success with that. He is right that we have to look at the issue in the round and include professionals who are experts in the field, who contribute to our economy and who themselves want a properly regulated beauty industry.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way; he is on a bit of roll with interventions.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work he has done. A professional from a skin clinic in Ribble Valley came to see me at my surgery on Saturday. He told me that somebody could administer Botox—actually inject something into someone's face—without proper certificates and perhaps even without proper training. He showed me photographs of instances where, sadly, the treatment had gone badly wrong. It is the NHS that has to pick up the misery, and in some cases it is far too late. I congratulate him on what he is doing, but we must get change in the system before more tragedy and misery occur.

Alberto Costa: My hon. Friend is correct. I am sorry to learn of the incidents he heard about from his constituent at his surgery. I had a similar matter. Indeed, that is what prompted me to champion this issue, along with other hon. Members.

I pay tribute to the Minister at this early stage of the debate. The welcome moves that she has introduced today, by coincidence, are exactly the sort of moves we want; they are on the right path. Today, we are arguing for more, and I am confident she is in listening mode.

Save Face, a Government-approved register for accredited practitioners, highlighted in its audit report last year that it had received just under 1,000 complaints about unregistered practitioners. This register is not compulsory and there are thousands of practitioners who have chosen not to sign up. The mark of a professional is someone who is regulated, qualified and licensed. They do not need to be a medic or a nurse to be able to be regulated, qualified or licensed to practise in this field. In the private sector, professionals such as solicitors—I declare an interest, as I am a solicitor—are regulated,

have to be qualified and have to have an annual licence. Most importantly, they are obligated to carry professional indemnity insurance. That marks out those who are professionals and those who are not. That is why we urgently need a professional regulatory body for this industry.

Let me give a simple example. As a nation of animal lovers, we would not consider taking a cat, a dog or even a hamster to an unregulated vet to have an injection. Therefore, why are we allowing our constituents to have the option of going to someone who is unregulated to have potential poison injected into them, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans) mentioned?

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): My hon. Friend makes some good points about the need for better regulation. The challenge is about who we would be regulating, how we would set up a new body and how indemnity insurance would work for people working in the cosmetics industry. We know that healthcare professionals who do cosmetics have indemnity insurance; they have a regulated body they can be held accountable to. Would it not be better, as the Keogh review looked at, to have other practitioners responsible to healthcare professionals, so they had the oversight of healthcare professionals, who would make sure they were engaging in their practices correctly? Is that not an easier way to put into place quickly and effectively something that could actually deal with the issue of regulation?

Alberto Costa: My hon. Friend, in his time as the relevant Minister in this area, contributed enormously to this field, and I pay tribute to the work he has done in pushing for regulation of the industry.

I am not sure how to answer my hon. Friend's point, because regulation takes many different forms. I think we would all argue that we want a healthy, thriving, competitive beauty industry. We do not want to strangle it or place an unnecessary obstacle before the business. We seek to achieve a safe beauty industry, where our constituents can approach any beautician of their choice, safe in the knowledge that these individuals have been properly trained and are qualified and regulated. I am certainly up for having the debate on whether they should be regulated by the General Medical Council, the overarching regulator of healthcare professionals or some other regulatory body, but regulation is the key.

I would also like to highlight the distinct difference between Botox and dermal fillers. Botox is a prescription-only medicine that can be prescribed only by a regulated healthcare professional, such as somebody regulated by the GMC. However, there is a loophole. At present, the prescriber is able to delegate the administration of the injections to another person, which unfortunately creates a way for people who are perhaps not regulated at all to administer the product. On the point my hon. Friend made a moment ago, if we were to have a regulatory body that somehow was able to delegate to others, we would have to ensure that those to whom the administration of the procedure was delegated were suitably trained to administer the procedures.

It is evident that these procedures are becoming more popular, and social media has an influence: so many young people are having procedures such as dermal

fillers and Botox that that is almost normalising them. Given that the procedures are so widely seen on social media, they are being viewed by young people as equivalent to, for example, having one's hair cut, as they are just as accessible. I have heard that people will say, "I'm just going out to have my lips done," just as we might say, "I'm just popping out to have my hair done." The normalisation of a procedure that can result in trauma should be looked at carefully.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Freyja Medical, in my constituency, provides an excellent service, but it also pointed out to me the important role that it sees Parliament performing in highlighting the impact and consequences of some of the very poor work that is carried out on individuals. I would certainly like to join the all-party parliamentary group, and I think one of the most important things we must do is get the message out to people on how dangerous the administration of these products can be.

Alberto Costa: I agree entirely, and I encourage the hon. Gentleman to join both the excellent APPG of the hon. Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally), and that set up by the hon. Members for Swansea East and for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) and me. They are complementary APPGs and we would welcome the hon. Gentleman's interest and expertise.

I mentioned a moment ago that this debate should not centre on the conversation about medics or non-medics carrying out these procedures; I believe it is fine for properly qualified and regulated beauticians to be able to offer them. I also highlight the fact that people who receive botched fillers often end up having to go to our national health service to pick up the pieces, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley mentioned a moment ago, so that ultimately the taxpayer has to foot the bill.

As the Keogh review concluded:

"Dermal fillers are a particular cause for concern as anyone can set themselves up as a practitioner, with no requirement for knowledge, training or previous experience."

In February 2014, it was made illegal to offer dermal fillers without training, but the training has not been clearly defined, and some of those who may be qualified to give lip fillers may not have the necessary training to be able to dissolve them or identify when something has gone wrong. We have met or heard from beauticians who would argue that they are properly trained or qualified, but in some instances they can be trained or qualified only for one part of the procedure, and not necessarily for when things go wrong. Surely, anyone carrying out these procedures should be able to identify when things have gone wrong and remedy them immediately.

The British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons would like to see the development of clinical guidelines on the use of dermal fillers. The Royal College of Surgeons has also expressed that it would like to see dermal fillers classified as a prescription-only medicine. Serious complications of cosmetic procedures can include infection, nerve damage, blindness, blood clots and scarring. That links to what the Government have helpfully announced today, as the campaign will help to inform consumers of those risks. They are also recommending that consumers go to a regulated healthcare professional.

[Alberto Costa]

The medical director at NHS England, Professor Stephen Powis, has said that professionals who provide procedures such as fillers should be encouraged to join the new Joint Council for Cosmetic Practitioners. That is very sensible, as it has been set up to assist members of the public, although it is not obligatory. We also face the surrounding issue of body dysmorphia and mental health. Professor Powis has also argued that practitioners should be officially registered and trained to identify people who may be suffering from a body image or other mental health-related issue.

Social media is a powerful tool for young people to look at and to share their experiences. Platforms such as Instagram and Facebook are often used as a principal source of information when people are researching fillers and Botox. I argue that that should not be the case: education on those matters should ideally be face to face when someone is having the procedures, with a trained and regulated practitioner.

Rather surprisingly, there is no age restriction on cosmetic procedures, and I argue that we should have one. The Nuffield Council on Bioethics recommended that children under 18 should not be able to have these procedures unless there was an overriding medical reason for them to do so. As a comparison, the law as it stands in England is that if someone wants to use a sunbed, they must be over 18. I mentioned unregulated vets earlier; we would not consider taking a valued pet to an unregulated vet to have an injection, so why would anyone let, for example, their 16-year-old daughter have someone unregulated inject something potentially poisonous into her face? I invite the Government to consider age restrictions.

The other point I will make is about the content of many dermal fillers. There is a total lack of regulation on the content—that is, the chemical ingredients. According to the British College of Aesthetic Medicine, there are more than 60 dermal fillers available in the UK market alone. It should shock us that we often do not know the content of those fillers and what poisons they may well contain that might have a negative impact on someone's body.

I believe that urgent regulation is required to protect consumers—our constituents. The steps that the Minister and her Department have taken today are very welcome indeed, but we must do more. I look forward to the Minister's comments, because I am confident that she is looking into this.

John Mc Nally: People who put their life savings into investing in their businesses need reassurance that their investment is protected and not undermined by poorly-trained practitioners, because we all make assumptions—seemingly unfounded ones—that those businesses all operate legally and above board. I must bring to the attention of hon. Members the fact that I have met with the insurance companies, which are deeply concerned about the lack of regulation in this particular business. I wonder whether the Minister will comment on how businesses could be better insured and how we could make this a viable business that would not be undermined by other people.

Alberto Costa: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, because this goes to the heart of what professional indemnity insurance is. One of the principal points of

regulation is that a consumer knows that, if the professional is negligent, as people often are—people make mistakes—they will not be suing a man or woman of straw; that professional will have professional indemnity insurance behind them. That is the right form of protection in our society, in addition to qualifications and training.

I am pleased to champion this issue, along with the hon. Members present. I once again encourage the Government to continue doing the right thing, and to lead us to a situation in which we have a properly functioning and regulated beauty industry.

4.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): It is a pleasure to be here this afternoon during Mental Health Awareness Week, for which the theme is body image, so it is particularly appropriate that we are discussing this issue again, thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for—I can never remember.

Alberto Costa: South Leicestershire.

Jackie Doyle-Price: Thanks very much—my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa). I am pleased that the all-party parliamentary group has been established since we last debated the issue in this place, and I thank the hon. Member for Swansea West—

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): East.

Jackie Doyle-Price: I thank the hon. Members for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris)—I never know my east from my west—and for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) for joining that group. It is great to have the hon. Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally) here, who obviously takes a keen interest in these matters.

Carolyn Harris: I apologise, Mr Owen; I tried to get here earlier. May I first congratulate the Department on today's announcement? Our all-party parliamentary group's inquiry is the first to assess the current regulation of non-surgical cosmetic procedures and its adequacy in ensuring customer safety. I offer the Minister the opportunity to come and to talk to us and hear the inquiry's findings.

Jackie Doyle-Price: I accept that invitation most gratefully, and I look forward to hearing the conclusions. The time is right for us to take action on this, and I am grateful for the support of Members from across the House in wanting to do that and to do the right thing, with the intention of protecting consumers, which is obviously central to us, but also ensuring a system of regulation that is proportionate for the industry. We need to make sure that we balance both of those.

We have not really given the industry enough attention, given the speed with which it has grown. We increasingly see examples of consumers receiving poor treatment; my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire referred to his constituent, to whom I am grateful for sharing her story. We need to make everyone much more aware of the risk because, as he says, people think it is just like having a haircut; it is becoming extremely normal to have what are poisons injected into the face.

We need to make sure that everyone is aware of the risk before they undertake such a procedure, so that they can make an informed judgment.

John Mc Nally: I am not taking exception to the idea of it being just like having a haircut, but I have been involved in the business of hair salons for more than 50 years and have run salons, and it is not just like having a haircut. There is a similarity in terms of the investment put into any business, which is long term in some cases. When somebody comes along who has not properly trained and has little knowledge, there will be consequences of what they practise. In my all-party parliamentary group's inquiries, we have come across modern-day slavery, trafficking, money laundering and all sorts of things, which just builds the case for a mandatory regulatory framework.

Jackie Doyle-Price: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, because when we talk about these examples, there is a danger that people can apply that prejudice to the entire industry. It is in the interests of everyone involved in this industry to welcome regulation, not least to celebrate the professionalism of what they do. There are some very reputable practitioners out there who are not actually in the medical industry. For example, semi-permanent make-up—a surgical procedure that does not involve any invasion—clearly does not require as strident regulation as what we are talking about with injectables, but it is the same industry, and we need to ensure an adequate registration system.

Judith Cummins: I very much welcome the Minister's announcement today. On training and regulation for beauticians—non-medical people who constitute around 50,000 jobs in the UK economy—there is huge appetite and support within the industry for proper and appropriate regulation, and there is recognition of the urgent need for that. However, there are no regulated qualifications available for non-medical practitioners for injectables at the moment. Going forward, does the Minister think there will be some kind of progression route for beauticians to go into this kind of industry, so that we can guarantee proper standards for the consumer?

Jackie Doyle-Price: The hon. Lady is right, and I am grateful for the spirit in which she makes her comments. Anyone who establishes themselves in business as a beautician wants to deliver a good service, has pride in what they do and would not want to be accused of doing anything unsafe.

My first focus of activity is those organisations that train people in these procedures, because I can see a situation in which a beautician will have paid thousands of pounds to go on a course and will then think that they are qualified, but they might not be. That is where we need to bring the focus of regulation in the first instance, so that when somebody proudly displays their certificates, consumers can have some guarantee that they are legitimate. I welcome the opportunity to air these issues with the all-party parliamentary group as we move this system of regulation forward.

Sadly, we only have 30 minutes for this debate, so I doubt whether I will be able to get through as much as I would wish, but I will do my best. I am grateful for the interest of all Members here. We will continue this

discussion. It is worth saying that Botox treatments and dermal fillers are increasing and, along with laser hair removal, now represent nine out of 10 non-surgical treatments performed in the UK. This is a major area of risk.

Hon. Members have referenced the campaign that we launched today. Clearly, consumers will be the best defenders of their own interest, but we must make sure that they have access to appropriate information with which to do so; we need to do much more to inform people about the risk. Just as in my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire's example of his constituent, I am quite sure that many people who have had fillers—who have gone to have their lips done, like they do—would have no idea that there is a risk of their artery being injected with poison. We need to make sure that consumers are much more aware of that, which is why we are doing so much more in the next six weeks to try to raise public awareness.

We will focus on targeting our messages to women aged 18 to 34, on whom the majority of the treatments are undertaken. I am pleased that we are working with Bauer Media, which publishes *Grazia*, *Closer* and *Heat*, which I hope will be appropriate vehicles to reach that audience. We will make sure that the NHS information is kept up to date and remains a meaningful resource for consumers.

Jim Shannon: Would the Minister consider making it so that under-18s could not have this treatment?

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Minister, you have less than two minutes.

Jackie Doyle-Price: Yes, absolutely. I am committed to bringing forward legislation to do that at the earliest possible opportunity. I would really like to engage with the all-party parliamentary group to see what other conclusions they can bring forward quickly, so that we can make use of that legislation, to strengthen the opportunities to have a meaningful register, and indeed to look at the whole issue of insurance and what we should expect everyone involved in this to do.

I am open to debate, and I am absolutely committed to bringing the age restriction in line with things like tattoos and sunbeds. Frankly, it is ridiculous that there is an age limit for getting on a sunbed but anybody can have poison injected into their face. That is clearly ridiculous, and we need to tackle it.

We will encourage consumers to look at choosing a reputable practitioner and to properly interrogate the person doing the procedure, asking them about the risks. I am pleased that Superdrug, which has moved into this field, is having pre-screening conversations with clients and giving them cooling-off time before embarking on the treatment. I think that is really good practice and is something we could encourage throughout the industry, not least because it encourages practitioners to think about how they engage with their consumers and to properly understand the risks themselves.

We are moving into a new period of regulation of dermal fillers. My hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire is quite right that they are completely unregulated at present, but they will become regulated by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency,¹ which will put them on a similar footing to

1.[Official Report, 12 June 2019, Vol. 661, c. 5MC.]

[Jackie Doyle-Price]

Botox and will mean that they need to be given by the prescriber. He is right to highlight the risk of people being able to delegate that responsibility for prescribing, and again we should look at legislating on that. Clearly we could also ask the regulators of medics to look at that, because, frankly, delegating the responsibility for prescribing does not really seem consistent with patient safety. We need to look at that.

I am fast running out of seconds, so I will conclude by thanking my hon. Friend and all hon. Members for their interest in this subject. I hope that we all continue talking about this, so that we can take action quickly. This is massive area of risk for consumers and we need to take action to fix it.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): I am grateful to both the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) and the Minister for taking so many interventions.

Question put and agreed to.

Automatism as a Legal Defence

4.30 pm

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered automatism as a legal defence.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. We have met in these roles on previous occasions, and you know that I will try very hard to stick to all the rules and obey every indication that comes from the Chair. I can see you are smiling at that, Mr Owen.

This is a difficult subject. Let me first say, as someone who has been in the House a long time, that when we introduced the notion of a smaller debating Chamber—Westminster Hall—a lot of people criticised it and said, “Will it work?” In fact, it is a great asset to Parliament that we can use this debating Chamber for many of the issues that we have great passion about and that we care about. We may raise them in a parliamentary question in the main Chamber, but when we want to go into something in a bit of depth, this Chamber is the right environment in which to do so.

I am tackling today something that I care passionately about, but which is a little bit complex. I confess that although I have a couple of skeletons in my cupboard, in that I have a daughter and a son-in-law who are lawyers, I am not a lawyer, and it is quite a technical area that we are looking at.

Most Members of the House will know by now that I am a passionate campaigner for road safety and ending road deaths. I started the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety. Many years ago, my first private Member’s Bill banned children from being carried unrestrained in cars. Then I organised, with a cross-party group, the seatbelt legislation, which was aided a little bit by the Father of the House at the time; the Father of the House now was at that time a young Minister. I am passionate about stopping the waste of life on the roads, and many of the campaigns that I get involved in are about seeing things from the victim’s point of view. I am thinking of the knock on the door. There are several thousand of these cases even in this country today, but there are many more deaths worldwide—1.2 million a year. People will get a knock on the door to say that their daughter or son is dead, or their mum, dad, uncle or aunt is. It is the victim that I am really concerned about, so often, and my passion for this subject comes from the fact that once someone is a victim—once they are dead—they cannot speak for themselves, so it is for us to speak up for them.

Today, I want to talk about automatism, because it is concerning that increasingly we hear of road deaths and road accidents where someone who is driving a car ploughs into a number of people—I will give some examples as I make my case—several people die in this dreadful accident and then the person who was driving the car gets a very good lawyer who says, “Oh, you obviously were in a state of automatism. You weren’t responsible for your action.” That is increasingly being used by well informed and clever lawyers to represent people who get into such a situation, and I want to deal with some particular aspects of that.

I called for this debate because I searched *Hansard* and was not able to find any mention of automatism since 2008. Back in 2008, two private Members’ Bills

were introduced; they related to different aspects of automatism. Automatism can be used in relation not just to road deaths and road accidents, but to rape and murder. The most familiar case of that is when people defend their action of rape or murder by saying that it was automatism; they were sleepwalking and were not responsible for their actions.

Today, I want to tackle this issue, because I believe that there is an injustice out there and I am speaking for the victims who can no longer speak. I have become familiar with many high-profile cases in which automatism has been used as a legal defence to avoid criminal prosecution, particularly in relation to incidents that occur on the roads, although concerns surrounding the use of automatism as a defence are, as I have said, not exclusive to driving offences.

Automatism is a common-law defence used by defendants in court. There are numerous definitions, which makes defining this state difficult, but I will try. An article in the *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine* describes legal automatism as “a state of involuntariness” and says that it

“exonerates the individual because the criminal justice system only punishes those acting voluntarily.”

Automatism is broadly divided into two types: sane automatism and insane automatism. “Sane” relates to cases of sleepwalking, fainting and hypoglycaemic attack, whereas “insane” relates to schizophrenia and diseases of the mind.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): I heard about this defence quite a long time ago, in 2002, because of the very high-profile case of Peter Buck, the guitarist in the rock group R.E.M. He was charged for air rage on a BA flight and he did not deny his behaviour, but he claimed that a zolpidem sleeping pill reacted violently with alcohol, turning him into a non-insane automaton—you could say that he was acting “Automatically against the People”. Does my hon. Friend think that in that sort of case, in which there is no injury, automatism is a valid defence?

Mr Sheerman: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I was going to mention the R.E.M. case, which, as he says, is a very famous one. Can I come back to that? He is absolutely right, and I will come back to it in a moment.

The requirements of a defence of non-insane automatism—I am not dealing with insane automatism—are that, first, there must exist an involuntary action arising from an external source or reflex action; secondly, the action must be completely involuntary; and thirdly, the automatism must not be self-induced. Some academic literature states that the automatism defence is increasingly being used, but the problem is that no statistics are kept on how often the automatism defence is pleaded or succeeds. The word I hear from the justice system more broadly is when a senior policeman or policewoman comes up to me and says, “Look, we’re in real difficulties prosecuting here, because the defendant is going to use automatism. It’s going to be very, very difficult, because the CPS will be very reluctant to bring the prosecution.” In a sense, what I am trying to bring to the public gaze today is this question: why do we not know how many cases are not proceeded with because the Crown Prosecution Service thinks that it is all too difficult, that the chances

of getting a conviction are not good with a clever lawyer using automatism as the reason for the defendant’s behaviour?

I want to give a couple of examples. In 2014, there was the terrible accident in Glasgow involving a council-owned waste lorry that collided with pedestrians in the city centre, killing six people and injuring 15 others. The driver said that he had passed out at the wheel, and he was not prosecuted. Glasgow sheriff court was told that the driver had passed out at the wheel and heard evidence regarding his alleged failure to disclose a history of dizziness and blackouts in job applications and when renewing his licence.

Nicky Selby-Short, a solicitor in Access Legal’s specialist personal injury team, comments:

“There may be occasions when such a defence is entirely justified, but claiming automatism is likely to continue to be used by defendants since it is a good tactic; however, it is accepted it will leave innocent claimants with no award whatsoever for what are often very serious injuries”

and, of course, death.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is of course raising a really important issue, but it is important not to lose sight of the fact that to make out this defence, the burden is on the defendant to advance evidence, which may be in the form of medical evidence. It would be quite wrong to give the impression that somehow a defendant could simply say, “I’m invoking non-insane automatism,” and get off scot-free. The burden is on him to prove it. Does the hon. Gentleman agree?

Mr Sheerman: Absolutely, I agree with that, but as I make my case, I think the hon. Gentleman will understand why I am worried about what happens at the moment.

The second case I want to mention is *R v. Burton* in 2007. An elderly motorist killed a married couple in a high-speed crash and was controversially cleared of all blame by a judge, after claiming that he may have been in a state of automatism at the time. Experts said that retired businessman Arnold Burton may not have known what he was doing when he smashed head-on into the couple’s car, while doing at least 76 mph in a 30-mile speed limit in his Jaguar X-Type.

Leeds Crown court was told that the 89-year-old, whose father founded the Burton clothing empire, could have been suffering from a lack of blood to the brain. Prosecutors decided to offer no evidence on two charges of causing death by dangerous driving after psychiatrists concluded that Mr Burton might not have been aware at the time. The recorder of Leeds, Judge Norman Jones, said that the elderly motorist was “driving automatically” and that his

“brain was not in control of his body”

when the crash happened.

In Glasgow, in 2010, two little girls were killed while Christmas shopping by a Range Rover that hit them on the pavement. The charges against the driver were dropped, because he suffered a loss of consciousness, owing to an undiagnosed medical condition.

Alex Chalk: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for generously giving way. Where a road accident leads to someone losing a life, one’s heart goes out to the victims

[Alex Chalk]

and those who are left behind. However, it is important that one injustice is not replaced by another injustice. If it really is the case that that individual was effectively unconscious, surely the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that he should be criminally culpable none the less. It may be that he should not have his driving licence, but that is another issue. If he is truly unconscious, surely he is not criminally liable.

Mr Sheerman: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman. I believe in evidence-based policy. We have a great deficiency in the transport safety area that I keep nagging the Government about. In Sweden, every time there is a fatality on the roads, there is a thorough investigation. That does not happen in the United Kingdom. There is no highly skilled investigation of an accident involving a death. There is a real problem finding out what really happened.

I will whisk through the prominent case that highlights how automatism might be used too broadly. It involves Peter Buck from the band R.E.M., who was acquitted of charges of two counts of common assault and one count of criminal damage while being drunk on a plane. There was a good defence. What distinguished Mr Buck's case from others of this nature was that he raised the defence of automatism in a Court of Appeal, which described non-insane automatism as

"malfunctioning of the mind of transitory effect caused by the application to the body of some external factor such as violence, drugs, including anaesthetics, alcohol and hypnotic influences".

Mr Buck sought to establish that the commission of the offences he was charged with lacked a mental element due to a transitory effect caused by the external factor of red wine combined with sleeping tablets.

However, a defendant cannot simply absolve himself of all responsibility for his actions by blaming pills and alcohol. A self-induced incapacity will not excuse; nor will one that could reasonably have been foreseen, such as the result of taking alcohol against medical advice after using certain prescribed drugs or failing to have regular meals while taking insulin. However, Mr Buck produced his prescription bottle, which did not contain a warning about mixing alcohol, so he was acquitted.

While it is difficult to put forward a defence of automatism, once such a defence has been established—this is what legal experts tell me—it falls on the prosecution to disprove the evidence of automatism beyond reasonable doubt. I am not trying to turn the justice system upside down; I am merely shining a light on the increasing use of automatism as a defence.

Forms of automatism have also been used to defend people who have been accused of rape. Sexsomnia is being used internationally. In 2007, in the UK a man was let off for raping a 15-year-old because he claimed sexsomnia. Let us remember that, according to a 2002 London Metropolitan University study, just 6% of cases result in conviction, because of loopholes in the law such as automatism.

Dr Cosmo Hallström, a member of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, said:

"People do sleep walk and they do strange things in their sleep, but it is usually no more complex than grinding of the teeth or smacking the lips—at most they may get up and make a cup of

tea. I would think it was extremely difficult to perform such a complex manoeuvre as having sexual intercourse while asleep—especially if the other person is unwilling."

Harry Cohen spoke on this in the House of Commons only 11 years ago:

"Anybody up in court on a rape charge could get a few friends and family to claim that he sleepwalks, and he will almost certainly get off."—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2008; Vol. 480, c. 801.]

Harry Cohen introduced the Rape (Defences) Bill in 2008 to address this. That Bill sought to prohibit the use of a defence of sleepwalking or non-insane automatism in proceedings relating to the offence of rape.

Alex Chalk: The hon. Gentleman is being extremely generous with his time. We all want to see more people who are guilty of rape convicted. We all agree that the statistics are shocking. However, on the example that he gave, if the prosecution were able to call evidence to suggest that what was being posited—namely that the defendant raped through non-insane automatism—was a complete fiction and entirely implausible, a jury should have little difficulty giving that defence short shrift and finding the defendant guilty. Does he agree that if it is a bad defence, the prosecution can call evidence to expose it as such?

Mr Sheerman: The hon. Gentleman is right, but I am trying to get the balance right. There are so few successful prosecutions for rape and there is an increasing tendency worldwide to use this as a reason why the person—usually a man—was unable to know what they were doing.

In 2008, another good former comrade—sorry, colleague—of ours, Dr Brian Iddon introduced the Road Traffic (Accident Compensation) Bill, which sought to provide no-fault compensation for personal injury in road traffic accidents where liability cannot be established. This is the nub of the matter. However many people are killed or injured in an accident involving automatism, there is no compensation. How can that be just? In such cases, the victim is left injured or killed, but with no compensation for the family. Surely, the Minister would agree that it is time to consider introducing a no-fault compensation system in this area, as is used in other countries such as New Zealand.

We are coming to the end of the story. In 2013 the Law Commission undertook a review and produced a discussion paper called "Criminal Liability: Insanity and Automatism". It produced a range of recommendations for reform of this defence. I hope that the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), who intervened on me two or three times, will be able to hear this, because it is germane to his interventions. Much of the report focused on the need for modernisation and reform of the law around insane automatism or the insanity defence. It recommended that the arcane criminal law be reformed by replacing it with the new defence of

"not criminally responsible by reason of recognised medical condition".

However, it also proposed to abolish the less clearly defined common law defence of automatism in favour of a reformed automatism defence that was clearer and narrower in scope. To the best of my knowledge, the Government have not since acted on those recommendations. I ask the Minister what actions, if any, the Government have taken in relation to clearing

up the legal problems identified by the Law Commission. Will the Government undertake to enact any of the proposed reforms recommended by the Law Commission?

This is about victims and justice. What is really going on in the undisclosed statistics from the Crown Prosecution Service? What is going on in the desperately underfunded justice system that we operate in this country? I co-chair the all-party parliamentary group on miscarriages of justice. How many more miscarriages of justice will happen, not because of ill-will or badly motivated, wicked people, but because of a lack of resources, investment and personnel?

There is no scheme in the UK to compensate victims of genuine automatism. A person who is injured through no fault of their own has no opportunity for compensation for what are often serious injuries or death. Sometimes an insurance company makes an *ex gratia* payment to an injured party, but that is rare. As it stands, the law offers no protection to the often entirely blameless victims of the automatism defence.

It is not surprising that this effective get-out-of-jail-free card is being used more frequently by defendants. Countries that operate no-fault compensation schemes include France—it has implemented a no-fault standard for serious and unforeseen medical injuries, and a fault standard—and New Zealand, which has also put in place a no-fault compensation scheme with the broadest eligibility criteria; the no-fault standard is applicable to any unexpected treatment injury.

On the Crown Prosecution Service and the police, an article in the *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* notes that in a criminal trial, it can be difficult to decide whether to hold responsible a defendant who did the act but claims that their mental state was abnormal because of the lack of objective evidence. There is no brain scan or blood test to measure responsibility. The best witness to what was in the defendant's mind is usually the defendant, who obviously has an interest in what the court decides.

I have always said that we need good evidence-based policy, but we lack the evidence and statistics about how often automatism is evoked as a legal defence. As I talk to people in the police and the Crown Prosecution Service up and down the country, there is a suspicion in my mind that the defence is increasingly becoming a way for well-heeled people who can get the right solicitor to get off dreadful crimes on the road. We know that there is a group of solicitors who can find some defence to get rock stars or people in the public eye off.

Despite many high-profile cases, we do not know how often this occurs. How many cases are not being brought to trial because prosecutors have lost confidence that they can challenge the evidence? How aware are the police, while they are investigating a case, about people invoking automatism? We need evidence to evaluate whether clever lawyers are using the defence to get people off.

This is about justice for people who can no longer fight their own corner. This Chamber is the right environment for this debate, and I hope I have made a coherent case.

4.53 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I congratulate the

hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) on bringing this interesting and important issue to the Chamber, and on the eloquent and passionate way that he explained the background. I also pay tribute to him for his work on road safety over the years.

I, too, apologise in advance to any criminal lawyers or criminal law academics who are watching the debate, as I am about to blunder into it with a few thoughts. In years gone by, I was a lawyer, for my sins, but not a criminal lawyer, so I am somewhat reluctant to wade in.

The debate allows us to consider whether the principles behind the defence of automatism are right and to ask whether there is evidence for the term being too broadly defined so there have been unjust acquittals or for it being too narrowly drawn so people have been convicted who should not have been. As has been explained, in simplified terms, the defence of automatism involves the defendant showing that his conduct was involuntary, so he cannot be held criminally liable for it.

Criminal law in England and Wales and in Scotland recognises versions of automatism. That has been developed case by case under common law. Its terminology and operation, in certain circumstances, can look a little strange and dated. There are differences, but both jurisdictions—of England and Wales and of Scotland—have historically made distinctions between, on the one hand, automatism caused by so-called internal factors, which can justify a plea of insanity, although that has changed a bit in Scotland recently, and, on the other, automatism caused by external factors where the defendant was not at fault for inducing that state.

The key point is that, as a broad principle—I do not think the hon. Gentleman suggested otherwise—the idea that someone cannot be criminally responsible for involuntary acts must be right. Convicting a person for involuntary acts would not serve the purposes of the criminal justice system. We cannot rehabilitate someone who needs no rehabilitation, because they did not choose to do wrong, and we cannot deter people if they have no control over what they are doing. It is fundamentally wrong to punish people where there is no responsibility.

The question that has been posed today, however, is whether that is working in practice and whether it is being interpreted too broadly or narrowly. As with any criminal defence, there will be individual cases where some people—sometimes many people—question whether justice has properly been done one way or another. The hon. Gentleman highlighted some difficult and heartbreaking cases.

The hon. Gentleman also flagged up concerns that the defence has been increasingly relied on by criminal lawyers. I confess that I have not picked up on that, but he is obviously far more engaged in the issue than I am. I certainly agree, however, that it would be good to have greater transparency about it. I am interested to know whether the Minister is willing to try to see whether there is a better method to record how often the defence is being used or seems to be a barrier for the prosecution. We need to know what is happening either way.

On the whole, from what I understand, the balance of case law seems to suggest that the courts will usually take a pretty narrow view of the scope of the defence—the word “scepticism” has sometimes been used. As the hon. Gentleman said, several cases involve drivers, some of whom are diabetic drivers. I found the example of

[*Stuart C. McDonald*]

Broome v. Perkins in the textbooks, where the defendant, although in a hypoglycaemic state, was found guilty of driving without due care and attention, because from time to time he apparently exercised conscious control of his car by veering away from other vehicles to avoid a collision, braking violently and so on. In the Court of Appeal, it was said that the defendant would need to show that he was totally unable to control his actions owing to an unforeseen hypoglycaemic attack, that he could not reasonably have avoided the attack and that there was no advance warning of its onset.

In Scotland, the jury manual published by the Judicial Institute for Scotland also seems to be strict in setting out the requirements for defending externally caused automatism. It says that

“the external factor must not be self-induced, that it must be one which the accused was not bound to foresee and that it must have resulted in a total alienation of reason amounting to a total loss of control of his actions in regard to the crime with which he is charged...the whole point of the defence is that the accused was suffering from a total loss of control over his actions in regard to the crime with which he is charged. Unless there is evidence directed to this essential point, the defence is not available. It is a point of such importance that it cannot be left to speculation, and a few casual remarks or feelings by the witnesses will not do. There must be clear evidence to support it, and this means that the evidence must be specific on all details which are material.”

Mr Sheerman: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a real problem with medical evidence, if there is no charge, is that it is difficult for the victims ever to understand what the medical reason was? If there is no trial, there is no explanation of what kind of ill health caused the accident. The fact is that many drivers who are not charged continue to drive and may have the same medical condition. That is a real problem. In Scotland, however, there are more advanced laws on many of these issues than we have.

Stuart C. McDonald: I would like to think so, but I am not absolutely convinced.

Mr Sheerman: Alcohol.

Stuart C. McDonald: Certainly, on alcohol, we have taken the step to reduce the limit up to which people can drive to virtually nothing.

As I say, there has to be transparency. I am not aware that this has caused a problem for the prosecution services, but I am now alive to those concerns and I will perhaps try to establish whether that is the case. In some examples, however, when the burden is on the defendant to prove the case, I am not sure that it would stop a prosecution in the first place—the prosecution would proceed and the issues would come out afterwards. I do not have an easy answer, however, and this is something that I definitely need to look into.

Also, when we look at all these things in the round, the prosecution service has to be aware of what other action needs to be taken to stop such things happening again, even if there is not a prosecution subsequent to an accident of the sort that we have been talking about. There are other disposals or actions available, as the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) said, in relation to making sure that that person no longer drives, for example. However, we need reassurance that that is definitely happening.

In short, the point that I was making there was that what the courts have been looking for is

“a total destruction of voluntary control”,

to quote one case. The hon. Member for Huddersfield has rightly flagged up a number of other areas of controversy. This issue is not just about driving; there have been a number of cases where the defence of sleepwalking has been used in relation to accusations of sexual offences. However, the principle remains that the defence of automatism must be available if the evidence is there to justify it.

Should there be reform at all? In 2010 in Scotland, the internal-cause “insanity” defence was replaced by a mental disorder defence. This requires that an accused, at the time of the conduct constituting a crime, must have been

“unable by reason of mental disorder to appreciate the nature or wrongfulness of the conduct.”

Then there is a detailed definition of “mental disorder”. As I understand it, that reform has been broadly welcomed. That said, it is only fair to point out that some have criticised the Scottish Law Commission’s report because it ignored “external-cause” automatism, thereby arguably missing the opportunity to ensure that the law here is coherent and comprehensive in relation to what are really two closely related and even overlapping defences.

Of course, the hon. Gentleman referred to the Law Commission in England and Wales, and its report, which I think was done in 2013, when it carried out a similar review. It looked at both types of automatism defence and recommended a new statutory “recognised medical condition” defence, which I think is along the same lines as the Scottish defence. However, it also went for a new and more tightly drawn statutory automatism offence. I also understand that, so far, the Government here have decided not to act on that advice. They might have good reasons for that, but it is obviously up to the Minister to set them out today.

From my point of view, there may well be good reasons for looking at the two sides of automatism together, because it makes a significant difference which is considered, in terms of where the burden of proof lies and what disposals are available to a court if the defence is made out.

I do not come to any fixed conclusion on that, but on the whole I will just say finally that we need defences of this nature to be available to ensure that justice is done. For the most part, the current system seems to be working in practice and the courts have been justifiably restrictive in interpreting the scope of these defences. There will be controversial criminal verdicts—that does not necessarily mean that there is a fundamental injustice in the nature of these defences—but I absolutely take on board what the hon. Gentleman has said today about there being some concern that automatism is being increasingly relied on. That should be looked at. We need more transparency about what is going on—

Mr Sheerman: Victims.

Stuart C. McDonald: Absolutely—the victims need to know what is happening in a particular case and they also need a full explanation of why any prosecution does not go ahead, including the nature of any medical evidence, if that is at all possible.

I am absolutely alive to arguments for improvement and reform. The hon. Gentleman also made some interesting comments about a compensation scheme. I had not considered that in advance of the debate, but I will go away and consider it too.

I thank the hon. Gentleman again for securing this debate. It has been very interesting and thought provoking, and I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

5.2 pm

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): It is, as always, a pleasure to serve under you as Chair, Mr Owen. It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald); I congratulate him on his speech.

I also refer at the outset to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I am a non-practising barrister now at Civitas Law in Cardiff. I was a practising barrister for a number of years before entering the House, but I practised in criminal law only for a few years at the start of my career at the Bar.

I also warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) on his opening speech and on bringing this matter before the House. Although they are no longer in their places, I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) and the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) for their contributions to the debate.

I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield about the utility of Westminster Hall, particularly for a debate on an issue such as this, which is very important but none the less quite technical in terms of how we deal with it. I share my hon. Friend's passion for road safety, and he spoke movingly of a knock on the door bringing extremely bad news about a close family member.

My hon. Friend is also entirely right to say that the automatism defence is little understood, and I think that it is indicative that it has not even been mentioned in *Hansard* since 2008, which shows how long this House and this Parliament have gone without considering it.

On the issue of statistics, in the past I have argued about statistics in relation to a number of different offences. It is clearly an issue for the Crown Prosecution Service, superintended of course by the Law Officers, to determine what statistics are collected, when they are collected and for which particular offences. Particularly in cases where there are clearly victims who will be extraordinarily affected by the events, it is important that it is transparent as to what has happened at each stage of the process. If something does not reach prosecution in the first place, why does it not reach prosecution? There should be a full explanation. If the matter is discontinued at some stage between charge and trial, why is that? If there is a not guilty verdict in the end, why has that happened? Communication to victims throughout the process is vital.

Mr Sheerman: On that point, I said that in Sweden there is an absolutely high-class specialist unit that examines every death on the road, whereas in England and Wales the fact is that there is only very patchy expertise when it comes to investigating such a death. A defence of automatism is quite an unusual thing to happen in a police area and the competences required

to investigate it are very specific indeed. Does my hon. Friend agree that, given some of the recent cuts in the police of this country, that aspect of the investigative side of affairs has been badly hit?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to the issue of cuts in police officers affecting things right across the board. Clearly, there are different levels of investigation. For example, if there is an injury in a road traffic accident, that triggers a certain level of investigation, and similarly if there is a death. However, in a sense, the fact that we do not have a body equivalent to the one in Sweden underlines the point that I am making about the need for transparency throughout the process.

By the way, I will also add, regarding the decisions made by prosecutors, that every prosecutor has to apply the code for Crown prosecutors. First, is there a realistic prospect of conviction? Secondly, is it in the public interest to bring a prosecution? If that process is not happening, that needs to be brought to light, and the superintendence by the Law Officers is absolutely vital to ensure that, right through the system, that process is happening. If there is anywhere where it is not happening, that should not be the case.

While I am on the subject of the Crown Prosecution Service, I will refer to the sleepwalking cases that my hon. Friend mentioned. The CPS has recently issued legal guidance about the sleepwalking cases, which should be available to everyone involved in the area, including the prosecutors, on how to challenge the automatism defence appropriately before a judge, if it is raised. If the defence uses expert evidence, which it is likely to, the CPS says this to its prosecuting lawyers:

"Such evidence should always be analysed by an expert for the prosecution."

That is what we would expect to happen. Indeed, as long ago as 1958, Mr Justice Devlin, in the case of *Hill v. Baxter*, said:

"I do not doubt that there are genuine cases of automatism, but I do not see how the layman can safely attempt, without the help of some medical or scientific evidence, to distinguish the genuine from the fraudulent."

We would expect there to be experts on both sides in such a case that came before the criminal courts, and for many of the reasons that my hon. Friend outlined during his fine speech that is how it should be, and I would hope to see that in the criminal courts.

My hon. Friend also referred to the comments of the Law Commission on this issue, and I will come on to them with the Minister. Actually, the Law Commission's document was very useful, in terms of the need for reform in this area. Looking at the defence of insanity—I appreciate that there is a distinction between non-insane and insane automatism, and I will come to that in a moment—in essence, it goes back to 1843. Frankly, it has not changed much since then, which is a real issue.

The Law Commission accepted the principle of the automatism defence, but it made a substantial number of criticisms of it, regarding what has to be done to bring it up to date and make it fit for the modern day. The Law Commission said:

"We take the view that it is unjust to hold people criminally responsible when they could not have avoided committing the alleged crime, through no fault of their own. Put another way, a person should be exempted from criminal responsibility if he or she totally lacked capacity to conform to the relevant law."

[Nick Thomas-Symonds]

Of course, that excludes situations where the automatism is self-induced, or situations in which, given what someone did, it was foreseeable that they could end up in a particular state. It excludes that, and so it should, because the defence is very narrow in what it refers to.

The Law Commission has made many important criticisms of the law as it stands. First is the criticism that it is technically deficient. We are distinguishing between the mental and physical elements of the crime, but that is not always possible. It is not easy to see possessing something that is illegal to possess purely as an act; there must be the intent to hold on to it, and it is not easy to make that distinction. Secondly, has the law really kept up with developments in medicine, psychology and psychiatry in how we classify mental illness? No, it has not. It has not changed substantially for more than 150 years. Bizarrely as well, this is not available in magistrates court. Why should it be that the defence is applicable in our Crown courts but not in magistrates? That is clearly a loophole that needs to be dealt with.

There is an argument that defendants can find themselves acquitted but stigmatised because of the word “insanity”, which is still used as it is central to the defence. In addition, and as was at the heart of my hon. Friend’s speech, how does the defence sit with the victim’s human rights? Like everyone else, the victim in these cases is entitled to the right to life—article 2 of the Human Rights Act 1998—and where there has been a tragic death that article has been clearly violated.

There is also article 3 on inhuman and degrading treatment, and article 8 on the right to a private life. We really must ensure that the defence, as it is framed today with appropriate safeguards, is compatible with the victim’s human rights. One can understand the situation in the road traffic incidents described by my hon. Friend, where either automatism has ended up, it seems, with prosecutors not seeing the case as passing the evidence test or something has happened further down the line, with victims not being aware of why that had happened. That is a real issue.

Mr Sheerman: May I make a cynical point? A road traffic academic expert pointed out to me that it is ironic that the number of cases in which people plead automatism has risen almost exactly in parallel with the use of mobile phones in cars.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: There may well be a number of reasons for that; we may simply have more offences. However, I entirely take on board my hon. Friend’s point, and it would indeed reinforce the need for an understanding and an awareness of the defence and why certain cases are not being proceeded with or are not successful.

The other point I make to the Minister is about Parliament as it is at the moment. The Law Commission has papers about reform of the law—not just on automatism, but in many other areas too—that would not be partisan and would be likely to command widespread support. We have not had a vote in Parliament for the past month, so it seems that at this point in our parliamentary history, and when the Law Commission has made recommendations, there is room in the timetable for laws to be introduced. If this situation of so little

substantive business continues, real thought ought to be given in Government to at least trying to use the time productively on matters that, while perhaps not partisan, would make a big difference to the lives of our constituents.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): I remind the Minister that he might want to allow the mover of the motion to wind up the debate.

5.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): I suspect I will, Mr Owen. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) on securing this debate on automatism as a legal defence. I am conscious of his work in this area and across a range of aspects of the operation of the law, particularly regarding the impact on victims. I know that he has taken a particular interest in a number of tragic cases. Although he will appreciate that I cannot comment on individual cases, especially where charging decisions are concerned, I know his work in the area.

Given the limited examples of the use of automatism as a defence, it might be worth elaborating a little, as other hon. Members have, on the current law and its operation. I will also seek to share the Government’s general approach to reform of the law in this area, and the Law Commission’s.

Generally, automatism is a defence to a criminal charge where the defendant’s consciousness was so impaired that he or she was acting in a state of physical involuntariness. It is more than not intending something to happen; it is not being aware of those actions. There are two distinct types of automatism. First, there is insane automatism, which stems from an internal cause or disease of the mind. Where this occurs, the proper verdict is not guilty by reason of insanity. Secondly, there is sane or non-insane automatism, which stems from a cause other than a disease of the mind, an external cause that leads to a loss of control. Where this occurs, the proper verdict is not guilty. The hon. Member for Huddersfield suggested, and I think I am quoting him accurately, that there was an increasing tendency by clever lawyers to seek to use this defence, but I have to say that there is no evidence of that. He himself mentioned the stats, and this comes back to the statistical point, which I will touch on shortly. As always, the hon. Gentleman makes his point forcefully, to highlight the issue that he believes is behind this.

Mr Sheerman: How do we know how many times the Crown Prosecution Service does not prosecute because it thinks it will not be able to get a conviction because of the use of automatism?

Edward Argar: I will come back shortly to the two tests that the shadow Solicitor General mentioned. On the statistics point, it appears that automatism is rarely used as a successful defence, and that sane automatism, which is what most people assume that to be, is extremely rare because it is very hard to prove. However, the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) also made the point about the statistics. It is a matter for the CPS, but we can take back to that service and to other agencies the question of examining whether there are better ways to identify

trends and the statistical evidence bases underlying them. I do not have an answer now, but that is something we can take away and look into.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: This is an issue that I have raised before in other contexts. Sometimes we are told by the CPS that it has to look through the file of each case to pick up certain data, but in such cases, particularly where there are deaths, as there might be in a road traffic case, it would be useful to look at what data is collected and reviewed. I hope that the Minister will pass that on to the law officers who superintend the CPS.

Edward Argar: I am happy to do that, not least because in her previous ministerial role the now Solicitor General would have been taking this debate. I am sure that having prepared for it in advance, as she usually did, she will be well aware of the issue, and I am happy to raise it with her.

The distinction between the two types of automatism is important for reasons other than the verdicts. In insane automatism, the burden of proof is on the defendant to show that he or she did not know the nature of the act committed. However, in the case of non-insane automatism, the burden remains on the prosecution to satisfy a jury beyond reasonable doubt that the defendant has not had a total loss of control and is, therefore, guilty of the offence.

To illustrate that further, there is the example of incidents that occur as the result of hypo or hyperglycaemia. If a defendant argues that the act was caused by the administration of insulin leading to hypoglycaemia, that is an external factor and the defendant will be acquitted unless the prosecution can show this to be untrue. However, if the defendant argues that the incident was due to diabetes causing excessive blood sugar hyperglycaemia, that would be an internal factor and the onus would be on the defendant to prove, on the balance of probabilities supported by medical evidence, that he or she was not guilty by reason of insanity.

The cause of automatism can understandably be confusing to many. I will give an example that is possibly a reflection of how the law is interpreted and the difference between what is, in legal terms, the interpretation and what anyone else might read it as. For example, epilepsy is a disease of the mind. When an epileptic seizure results in an assault, for instance, a successful defence would be an insanity verdict. Of course, most people would not consider that an epileptic seizure amounted to insanity, but that is how the law would be interpreted in a narrow, legal context.

Acts committed while suffering from concussion, sleepwalking—which we have touched on—amnesia, and even post-traumatic stress disorder may amount to an automatism defence. As alluded to earlier, such cases rely heavily on medical evidence as to the nature and causes of the loss of control. Perhaps the most famous illustration of automatism was in the context of an example given in one of the leading cases, *Hill v. Baxter* in 1958—that of a driver who causes an accident after being stung in their cab by a swarm of bees.

I will cover two final points before ending my survey of the current law and moving on to the future. I know that the hon. Member for Huddersfield has a particular interest in driving offences in the context of this debate,

although his interest goes wider than that. Automatism is a defence even against strict liability offences; I mention that because although that defence occurs infrequently, it is most commonly reported in relation to driving offences. Significantly, that defence applies even when the offence does not require intent, such as with dangerous driving.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) and others have highlighted, when automatism arises from prior fault or voluntary conduct, that usually—but not exclusively—means that the defendant was taking illegal drugs, or that alcohol was involved, for example. When a person is taking substances other than in accordance with medical direction, and the crime is one of basic intent such as an assault, the defence should fail if the substance taken is known to cause aggression or the consequences that caused the offence. It is not a defence to be completely out of it on drugs or due to alcohol, and as a result commit an offence, however unknowingly. Those questions, though, will often be left to the jury or to magistrates. It is worth stressing that the defence is much more narrowly drawn than many people might imagine.

Let me turn again to why the defence exists and briefly touch on the Scottish situation, which the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East alluded to. I understand that in Scotland the context is different, in that an automatism plea is treated as a denial of *mens rea*. In other words, if acting as an automaton, a person lacks the essential mental element of a crime and as a result should be acquitted of an offence. However, the Scottish courts have clarified that, for the defence of automatism to succeed, there must be a total alienation of reason that is caused by an external factor that was not self-induced or foreseeable. The internal versus external distinction therefore applies as a test in Scotland as it does in England, albeit in a slightly different form, and the defence will also fail if the defendant's state is self-induced. Although the test of what amounts to insanity is different in Scotland from that in the jurisdiction of England and Wales, the defence—although it takes a slightly different approach—is none the less very similar in its application and consequences for defendants.

As I believe all who have spoken today have also said, I do not think that anyone would contend that a person who commits an act because of loss of control and through no fault of their own should be held liable for that offence. In such cases, it is also unlikely to be in the public interest to prosecute, as a conviction would not be secured. If there is doubt about whether the defendant contributed to their loss of control, then those questions may be tested in court. Of course, it is very difficult for innocent victims of these acts, who may themselves be injured or bereaved as a result of them, to accept that in law no one is to blame. It is particularly difficult for families of those who are killed, again through no fault of their own, by a person who was not in control of their actions. However, it remains unjust to punish someone for something they genuinely had no control over.

As was rightly highlighted by the shadow Solicitor General, the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), the code for Crown prosecutors is clear about its dual test. The public interest, and the evidence and likelihood of securing a conviction, are the tests

[Edward Argar]

that Crown prosecutors will consider when assessing whether a defence is likely to undermine one or other of those factors. In that context, the hon. Member for Huddersfield mentioned transparency, as did the hon. Member for Torfaen. I think both will be aware that our system seeks to make the decision to prosecute as transparent as possible, including through communication with victims and those victims having the right to challenge and review the decision of the Crown Prosecution Service. In those cases, they will have information about what in those two tests caused the charge to not proceed.

Let me turn to the future, and the Law Commission's report and proposals about this area. The lack of clarity on automatism to which the shadow Solicitor General referred, and the complexity of the outdated law on the connected defence of insanity, led the Law Commission to conduct a scoping study in 2012 and issue a discussion paper in the following year. The Law Commission did not, however, produce a full set of recommendations on automatism or complete its work with a final report. It rightly recognised that, in the context of its broader work on the law around insanity as a defence, this was an important but small part of a much broader piece. In taking that work forward, its focus was on the "unfitness to plead" aspect, and it is therefore yet to produce for consideration qualified legislative proposals on automatism.

Although the Law Commission's comments and proposals in the 2013 discussion document would narrow the automatism defence slightly, as has been said, it would not remove it. The proposed reforms sought to simplify the law, replacing the common-law defence with a statutory one, and have one defence that, if made out, would lead to a not guilty verdict rather than the two possible verdicts previously mentioned. The Government considered the initial discussion paper's proposals, but concluded that they would be a very limited reform to an already rarely used defence.

We have no current plans to bring forward legislative proposals. However, that does not mean that we have ruled out making changes to the law, including the wider and related law on insanity and fitness to plead; we keep that area under review. The shadow Solicitor

General tempts me into saying that if the Ministry of Justice wishes to use any legislative time, that would be a good use of it. As a Department, we are productive in legislation; we have been, and I suspect we will continue to be.

To conclude, I congratulate the hon. Member for Huddersfield on drawing the attention of the House to this issue. It is, as I think he said, the first time in 11 years that it has been properly debated, and I am sure there will be Members who are hearing about this issue today for the first time. I thank all who have contributed to the discussion of this complex topic, and I hope I have set out the law as it stands and where the Government stand on it. Finally, the hon. Gentleman knows that we already have a meeting scheduled on a different topic. I enjoy my meetings with him, and if he wishes to add specific questions about this aspect of law to our next meeting, I am happy to consider them.

5.27 pm

Mr Sheerman: I was lucky enough to have had my undergraduate and postgraduate education at the London School of Economics, whose motto is "To know the causes of things". A few weeks ago, I had never heard of automatism at all. When it started cropping up in my consciousness, I thought, "This is the right place to bring it up, to see whether we can shed some light on it." That is what we do well in Parliament.

I have been well served by the shadow Minister, the Minister, and those others who have contributed. We have shed some light on an important topic that many people knew little about, and I think this will go down as a historic debate. I hope we will come back to this issue, and that the improvements to the law that the Minister suggested might come about in the not too distant future.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered automatism as a legal defence.

5.28 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Tuesday 14 May 2019

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agriculture and Fisheries Council

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr Robert Goodwill): Agriculture and Fisheries Council takes place in Brussels on 14 May.

As the provisional agenda stands, the primary focus for agriculture will be on the post-2020 common agricultural policy (CAP) reform package. Ministers will exchange views on the new delivery model in the regulation on CAP strategic plans.

Member states will also exchange views on the agricultural aspects of the Commission's communication titled "Clean Planet for all: strategic long-term vision for a climate neutral economy".

The Commission will then provide an update on the performance of EU agricultural trade after which Ministers will hold an exchange of views.

There are currently three items scheduled for discussion under 'any other business':

Information from the Netherlands delegation on the judgement of the Court of Justice on organisms obtained by mutagenesis (case C-528/16).

Information from the Spanish and French delegations on the regulation on the European maritime and fisheries fund.

Information by the Belgian delegation on the situation in the fruit sector for apples and pears.

[HCWS1555]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local Government Update

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): On 29 November 2018 I told the House that I was launching a statutory consultation on the proposal for reorganising local government in Northamptonshire which I had received from seven of the area's eight principal councils. The councils had submitted this proposal in response to the invitation issued on 27 March 2018 following the recommendations in the independent inspection report on Northamptonshire County Council.

This locally-led proposal is to replace the existing eight councils across Northamptonshire (the County Council and seven district councils) with two new unitary councils—one for North Northamptonshire covering the existing districts of Kettering, Corby, East Northamptonshire and Wellingborough, and the other for West Northamptonshire covering the existing districts of Daventry, Northampton and South Northamptonshire. The proposal envisaged the new councils being fully operational from 1 April 2020.

The statutory consultation closed on 25 January and invited views from councils concerned, other public sector providers and representatives of business and the voluntary sector and welcomed views from any interested persons.

I have received a total of 386 responses. The district and county councils—except for Corby Borough Council—and councillors and public service providers, including the Police and Crime Commissioner and health partners, generally supported the proposal. Responses from businesses, members of the public, parish councils and community organisations were more mixed.

This consultation supplements the consultation exercise undertaken on behalf of the Northamptonshire councils by the independent opinion research services. This exercise included face to face workshops, a representative telephone survey of Northamptonshire residents and an open questionnaire.

Ninety per cent of respondents to the telephone survey agreed that there was a need to make changes to Northamptonshire local government and 74% agreed with the unitary proposal; 83% of the over 6000 individuals who responded to the open questionnaire agreed that there was a need for change, with 67% agreeing that a number of unitary councils should be introduced and 44% supporting the proposal for two unitary councils.

I have now carefully considered the councils' proposal, along with the results of the consultation exercises, a report by the Northamptonshire Children's Commissioner, submitted to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and me, on how best to ensure continued improvement of the fragile children's social care service in Northamptonshire in the context of reorganisation, and all other relevant information and material available to me. I have concluded that the proposal meets our publicly stated criteria for local government reorganisation. If implemented, I am satisfied that the proposal would improve local government and service delivery in the area, has a good deal of local support and the area of each new unitary represents a credible local geography.

This is on the basis that there is a children's trust covering the whole of Northamptonshire, which, with my support, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education is minded to establish, as recommended by the Children's Commissioner, if the unitary proposal is to be implemented. With such an arrangement children's social care would not be disaggregated with the trust discharging functions on behalf of both councils. My right hon. Friend will be publishing the Commissioner's report today. It is also on the basis that work continues to be taken forward in Northamptonshire to do more to integrate adult social care and health services.

I have therefore decided, subject to the issuing of statutory directions requiring the establishment of a children's trust and to parliamentary approval of the secondary legislation, to use my powers under the local government and public involvement in Health Act 2007 to implement the proposal. These powers enable me to implement a unitary proposal with or without modification and in this case, having carefully considered all the material available to me, I have decided to make one modification to the proposal.

This is to extend the period for fully implementing the new arrangements so that the new councils are operational from 1 April 2021. While I recognise that a

delay in implementation will mean potential savings estimated in the proposal will not be realised for another year, I am clear that the extended implementation period means we can be confident that there will be a safe and effective transition to all the new service delivery arrangements across the whole of the area, including for those crucial services supporting the most vulnerable. Throughout this extended period my Commissioners will be able to continue to support the County Council.

To support the transition, I have decided to establish shadow authorities. I envisage the May 2020 local elections in Northamptonshire will be elections to those shadow authorities rather than to district councils, with the district elections currently due on that date being cancelled. In line with the approach in the proposal for elections to the new unitary councils, I also envisage the elections to the shadow authorities are held on the basis of three member wards resulting in the North Northamptonshire

Council having 78 members and West Northamptonshire Council having 93 members. Those so elected would be members of the new councils when these go live in April 2021. Elections to parish councils will proceed as scheduled in May 2020. I intend to confirm these electoral arrangements shortly after hearing any views the district and county councils may have on this.

I now intend to prepare and lay before Parliament drafts of the necessary secondary legislation to give effect to my decisions. Establishing these new unitary councils will be a significant step towards ensuring the people and businesses across Northamptonshire can in future have the sustainable, high-quality local services they deserve. I welcome the commitment of all the existing councils and their partners to drive forward this process of establishing new councils and transforming local service delivery. I am confident this will continue.

[HCWS1556]

Ministerial Correction

Tuesday 14 May 2019

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Topical Questions

The following is an extract from Topical Questions on 8 April 2019.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Lack of knowledge of the armed forces covenant and of joined-up working in some cases is one of the key barriers to veterans getting the help that they need. What more can we do to increase joined-up working and awareness?

Mrs Wheeler: My hon. Friend will have to excuse me for turning my back—there are not too many daggers in it today. We have been asking councils to nominate a

senior councillor in every single council to be a veterans' champion. I will audit that and ensure that it happens. The Veterans Board—the inter-ministerial Government board—meets regularly; in fact, we have our next meeting in only about three weeks' time.

[Official Report, 8 April 2019, Vol. 658, c. 22.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs Wheeler):

An error has been identified in my response to my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove).

The correct response should have been:

Mrs Wheeler: My hon. Friend will have to excuse me for turning my back—there are not too many daggers in it today. We have been **encouraging** councils to nominate a senior councillor in every single council to be an **armed forces** champion. I will **ask local authorities to let us know who has been appointed**. The Veterans Board—the inter-ministerial Government board—meets regularly; in fact, we have our next meeting in only about three weeks' time.

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Tuesday 21 May 2019**

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