

**Wednesday
19 June 2019**

**Volume 662
No. 316**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 19 June 2019

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Leaving the EU

1. **Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Prime Minister on the UK leaving the EU without a deal. [911386]

11. **Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Prime Minister on the UK leaving the EU without a deal. [911397]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): I should like to begin by wishing Shelley Kerr and the Scotland team all the best in tonight's women's World cup match against Argentina. Although results have not necessarily gone the team's way to date, they have been a credit to Scotland and have transformed people's views on women's football.

I have had regular discussions with the Prime Minister on a range of matters relating to EU exit. It is the Government's position that leaving the EU with a deal is in the best interests of Scotland and the UK.

Joanna Cherry: One thing that the Secretary of State for Scotland and I can agree on is wishing our colleagues well in the football, and, of course, things always go very well for the Scots where Argentina and football are concerned.

It seems clear that the Conservative party is on the verge of electing a new leader and Prime Minister whose primary purpose will be to deliver a no-deal Brexit. Is the Secretary of State prepared to be part of a no-deal Cabinet that will shrink our economy by up to 7% and put 100,000 people in Scotland out of a job?

David Mundell: Obviously, I am answering questions on behalf of Her Majesty's Government and not on behalf of the leadership candidates, but I am clear that those aspiring to the leadership of the Conservative party want to leave with a deal. Throughout this process, I have voted on every occasion to leave the EU with a deal. The hon. and learned Lady has never done so.

Drew Hendry: According to every piece of the Secretary of State's own Government's analysis, there is no version of Brexit that fails to harm Scotland. New YouGov polling shows that Tory members would prefer Scotland to be an independent country, rather than stopping Brexit. Which choice should the Scottish Secretary make: a devastating no-deal Brexit Britain, or giving the people of Scotland the choice to be an independent European nation?

David Mundell: Mr Speaker, it will not surprise you to hear me say that Scotland has already made its choice on whether to be independent or part of the United Kingdom. The poll to which the hon. Gentleman referred was based on a false premise. This Government are about delivering Brexit and keeping Scotland at the heart of the United Kingdom.

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): Will the Secretary of State tell us how much money the Scottish Government have given to local authorities in Scotland to prepare for our exit from the European Union?

David Mundell: As far as I understand it, the UK Government have made more than £100 million available to the Scottish Government to help to prepare for Brexit—and, indeed, a no-deal Brexit—but precisely none of that money has been allocated directly to local authorities or to Police Scotland.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Further to the reply that the Secretary of State gave a few moments ago, does he agree that the majority of Scots voted in the 2017 general election for parties that were committed to delivering the 2016 referendum, and that it would be a dereliction of our democratic duty not to do so?

David Mundell: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. That is why this Government are committed to respecting the outcome of both the referendums that have taken place in Scotland: the 2014 independence referendum, in which people voted to remain in the United Kingdom; and the 2016 EU referendum, in which people across the UK voted to leave the EU.

10. [911396] **David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Given that the Scottish Government and the Welsh Assembly have both said that the economies of Scotland and Wales would fall by between 7% and 8% on no deal, what has the Secretary of State said to the five leadership candidates about the impact of no deal and why they should avoid it?

David Mundell: This is not just about the five leadership candidates. Both in this House and elsewhere, I have been clear that a no-deal Brexit would be bad for Scotland, and we want to avoid that. We want to leave with a deal and, as I understand it, the leadership candidates are all setting out how we could leave with a deal.

9. [911395] **Jo Swinson** (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): Brexit is already having an impact on East Dunbartonshire's major employers. Aviva has announced that there will be job losses in the coming years, and a major engineering firm—an award-winning exporter—has told me about the negative impact Brexit is having on its business. Knowing what he does about the devastating impact

on Scotland, how can the Secretary of State possibly countenance the no-deal or hard Brexit being offered by his colleagues in his party's leadership election?

David Mundell: I thought for one moment that the hon. Lady was going to refer to her own leadership campaign, and if I did not think it would stymie her chances I would wish her well. She knows that the current uncertainty is the more serious problem for businesses in Scotland and elsewhere, but we could have ended that uncertainty much earlier by voting for a deal.

Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): My right hon. Friend spoke about the £100 million being given to the Scottish Government to tackle Brexit. Will he confirm that Scottish nationalists have chosen to spend £10 million of it on plugging holes in their own budget?

David Mundell: I fear that there are so many holes in the Scottish Government's budget that a mere £10 million will not fill many of them.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): I join the Secretary of State in congratulating and sending our best wishes to Scotland's women's team, particularly to Leanne Crichton. She is from Dennistoun in my constituency, and it was a pleasure to meet her just a couple of weeks ago.

Speaking of team players, the Secretary of State has refused to rule out working with the calamitous former Foreign Secretary, who is prepared to see the United Kingdom leave the EU on disastrous no-deal terms. A majority of Conservative party members would rather see the economy crash, the United Kingdom fragment, and their own party destroyed to secure Brexit. The party is now better described as the "English nationalist party" rather than a party that wishes to preserve the unity of the British people. Has it now dawned on the Secretary of State that he may not have left the Conservative party, but the Conservative party has certainly left him?

David Mundell: I am sure that that read better as a press release. This Government's position is quite clear: we are about honouring both the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the 2016 EU referendum. I will take no lessons from the hon. Gentleman on party affairs when his colleague Neil Findlay used his resignation letter to describe the Scottish Labour Party as having a "toxic culture" and "eternal" infighting.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): The Secretary of State has been consistent, if nothing else, in denying the Scottish Parliament's aspirations to offer the people of Scotland a choice between remaining in a Brexit Britain or taking control of their own affairs. Indeed, he made it a central plank of his party's election campaign last month. In that election, the Scottish Conservative and Unionist party received 11.6% of the votes. Given that only one in nine people support his proposals, is it not time to demonstrate some grace and humility and stop behaving like a colonial overlord?

David Mundell: If anyone requires grace and humility, it is the SNP, which still fails to recognise that in the 2017 general election, in which Brexit was a key issue, its vote fell by more than 500,000 and it lost 21 seats.

Tommy Sheppard: Many of us appreciate that this may well be the Secretary of State's last outing in this Chamber in his current role, so his mind may be somewhat distracted, but he must surely recognise that the circumstances have now changed. His party is about to elect a leader and force upon us a Prime Minister hellbent on a no-deal Brexit. If that happens, will he continue to refuse the right of the Scottish Parliament to consult Scotland's people on their own future?

David Mundell: I understand that the Scottish Parliament will consult via a people's assembly process, although I do not agree with it. When we have a Scottish Parliament and 129 elected representatives, I feel that is the forum in which these matters should be discussed.

The hon. Gentleman is wrong in how he characterises the Conservative leadership candidates, who have made it clear that their preference is to leave the EU with a deal.

Household Incomes

2. **Paul Masterton** (East Renfrewshire) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effect of recent changes in the personal allowance on levels of household income in Scotland. [911387]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): We are helping families to keep more of what they earn by raising the personal allowance, which has gone up to £12,500. As a result, 2.4 million Scottish taxpayers received a cut in their tax in 2019-20 compared with 2015-16.

Paul Masterton: As well as letting hard-working families keep more money in their pockets—in stark contrast to the Scottish Government, who are taxing 22,000 of my constituents more than they would be taxed if they lived in England—raising the personal allowance also takes some of the lowest paid out of tax altogether. Will my right hon. Friend confirm how many people in Scotland have been taken out of paying income tax by the Conservative Government?

David Mundell: Thanks to this Government's increases in the personal allowance, 135,000 Scots no longer have to pay any income tax at all. That is the record of this Conservative Government: cutting tax, as opposed to the SNP Scottish Government who are making Scotland the highest taxed part of the UK.

14. [911400] **Ruth George** (High Peak) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State realise that people on universal credit automatically lose 63% of those tax benefits? That is contributing to the fact that more than 34,000 tenants on universal credit in Scotland now owe over £21 million in rent arrears, an average of £644. Will he look at the impact of universal credit on Scottish people, and particularly those in low-income households?

David Mundell: I am always willing to look at specifics. Of course, we are working with the Scottish Government to bring forward the variations in universal credit that they are seeking, and one of those variations relates to the payment of rent. Another point I have made many times at this Dispatch Box is that the Scottish Government also have wide-ranging powers to make additional payments to people in Scotland, if they choose.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Our armed forces serve the whole United Kingdom, and, as an English MP, I am proud that our United Kingdom Government are supporting our armed forces personnel stationed in Scotland to the tune of £4 million. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is only the UK Government who can stand up for our armed forces personnel?

David Mundell: The Ministry of Defence again made a very positive announcement this year confirming extra payments to servicemen and women who have been sent to Scotland for operational requirements to ensure that they are not penalised for serving in Scotland by the SNP's high-tax policies.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I note what the Secretary of State says about taxation. However, people living in remote parts of the UK, such as my constituency, are paying crippling delivery charges for goods. Would we not help the income of those families by tackling this serious problem?

David Mundell: I recognise this issue and, obviously, it has been raised many times in this Chamber by my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Douglas Ross). The Government are seized of this issue and are looking to try to resolve this inequity whereby people living in remote and rural areas are asked to pay disproportionate delivery charges.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Although the lowest-paid members of the armed forces in Scotland pay less tax than their counterparts in England, can the Secretary of State confirm that the mitigation payments made by the United Kingdom Government to the highest earners in Scotland are subject to tax?

David Mundell: Every payment made is subject to the tax system, as is self-evident, but what these payments do is mitigate the reduced payments that our armed forces personnel are receiving due to the SNP's high-tax approach.

Intergovernmental Relations

3. **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What progress the Government have made on their review of intergovernmental relations. [911389]

6. **Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): What progress the Government have made on their review of intergovernmental relations. [911392]

7. **Mhairi Black** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): What progress the Government have made on their review of intergovernmental relations. [911393]

12. **Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): What progress the Government have made on their review of intergovernmental relations. [911398]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): This is a joint review between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations, and it is incumbent on all Administrations to make progress. There are ongoing discussions across the review's work streams, which will be discussed at the next meeting of Joint Ministerial Committee (EU Negotiations), which is next week.

Alan Brown: The frontrunner to become the next Prime Minister has published an anti-Scottish poem. He believes that a pound spent in Croydon is of more value than a pound spent in Strathclyde, and that a Scottish MP should never be Prime Minister. Does the Secretary of State agree that if the former Foreign Secretary became Prime Minister, it would be a disaster for intergovernmental relations and a boost for Scottish independence?

David Mundell: At every Scottish Question Time we hear the assertion that this or that will be a boost for Scottish independence—it has got to the stage where if the chicken crosses the road, it will be a boost for Scottish independence. It is for individual candidates in the Conservative leadership elections to answer questions about their own position and background.

Ronnie Cowan: During an open session of the Political and Constitutional Affairs Committee on Monday 20 May, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was asked whether he could give an update on the progress of the review of intergovernmental relations. He replied:

"I cannot put a firm timescale on this. Perhaps, if we were looking towards the end of this year".

Given the time that has elapsed, and the uncertain political times we are living through, is that good enough for Scotland?

David Mundell: I believe that progress is being made, and I am hopeful that next week's meeting of the JMC(EN) will provide an opportunity to discuss the principles that would underpin the new IGR agreement. That was discussed with Welsh Government Ministers and Mr Mike Russell at the last meeting of the JMC(EN).

Mhairi Black: The current frontrunner to become Prime Minister has previously written that "government by a Scot is just not conceivable in the current constitutional context."

Does the Secretary of State agree? Does he believe that such an opinion is helpful to intergovernmental relations?

David Mundell: I do not agree, and I am sure that the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson), should she lead her party, will aspire to the office of Prime Minister. No, I do not agree with that analysis.

Deidre Brock: The Scottish Affairs Committee should be holding the Secretary of State to account, but he keeps refusing our invitations. As this is his last Question Time before leaving office in the great Tory purge to come, does he agree that the Scotland Office is no longer fit for purpose, that its function as a propaganda unit is unbecoming of a Government Department, and that it needs serious reform and overhauling—or quite simply to be abolished? What is the point of the Scotland Office?

David Mundell: The very simple answer is no.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): Like me, the Secretary of State has served as a councillor, an MSP and an MP, so does he agree that we can have political differences within and between the various levels of government, but that that should not be misconstrued as a breakdown in intergovernmental relations?

David Mundell: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. Many of the disagreements between the Scottish and UK Governments are over political differences, rooted

in the fact that this Government want to respect the outcome of the 2014 independence referendum and the SNP Scottish Government want to have another referendum. They are political disagreements.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that £1.3 billion has been allocated to Scotland through the city and growth deals? Lessons learned through the city and growth programmes are being played into the Union strategy and intergovernmental relations, so we take the positives out of the incredible investment that is coming to Scotland through the UK Government.

David Mundell: I have always believed that the city and growth deals are a clear example of the fact that the two Governments can work together constructively for the benefit of the people of Scotland. That is what people in Scotland want to see.

Mr Speaker: In congratulating the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire on a particularly splendid tie, I call Mr Pete Wishart.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Scottish Affairs Committee has just released our report on intergovernmental relations. It is an evidenced-based, wide-ranging report on a number of important issues. This cross-party report states that the Scotland Office has failed to keep pace with devolution and that most direct intergovernmental relations are conducted outwith the Secretary of State's Department. I have noticed in some of the press comments that he is not taking this at all seriously, so will he now agree to a proper review of his Department?

David Mundell: I do not know to which press comments the hon. Gentleman refers, because although we have our political differences, I respect the work of his Committee and have been clear that I welcome the opportunity for a review of the Scotland Office. I am confident that such a review would result in an enhanced Scotland Office, not the loss of it.

Lesley Laird (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Lab): First, I associate myself with colleagues' remarks and wish the Scotland team all the very best in their final match tonight.

Two parliamentary Select Committees have now recommended that the Secretary of State's role should be abolished. The Secretary of State ignored Labour's warning about the democratic deficit of the Joint Ministerial Committee, he botched the devolution element of the Brexit Bill and he has failed to secure funding for Scotland as part of the stronger towns fund. Does he accept any responsibility whatsoever for presiding over the mess that has led to the unprecedented step of two parliamentary Committees calling for his head?

David Mundell: I do not know whether the hon. Lady has read the Scottish Affairs Committee report; it might have been helpful, because it does not call for the abolition of the Scotland Office. The SNP obviously wants to see the Scotland Office abolished—the SNP

wants to see the UK Government abolished. The report calls for a review, and after 20 years of devolution a review is a perfectly appropriate step to take.

Lesley Laird: The issue is how we got to this point. The right hon. Gentleman's handling of all the issues I have outlined confirms why we are in this mess. Given that he is unhappy in his work, his threats to resign may well be fulfilled by the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) in a short period.

Both the Secretary of State and Ruth Davidson have flip-flopped on whether they would work with the former Foreign Secretary if he became Prime Minister. Does the Secretary of State think that if the former Foreign Secretary is elected as Prime Minister, his diplomatic skills will come to the fore and he will improve relations between the Scottish and the UK Government, or would it be another Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe moment?

David Mundell: I am very clear: I respect democracy and will respect the result of the Conservative leadership election. All five of the candidates who are still in the race are clear that they are Unionists, which is what makes them different from the Leader of the Opposition. They will not be cosy up to the SNP to have a second independence referendum.

The Union

4. **Sir Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): What steps he is taking to strengthen the Union.
[911390]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): Strengthening and sustaining the Union is a key priority for the UK Government. The Government deliver for the people of Scotland day in, day out, whether through creating jobs, opportunities and long-term growth, or keeping our citizens safe.

Sir Henry Bellingham: One obvious way further to strengthen the Union is for key Government Departments, such as the Ministry of Defence and the Department for Work and Pensions, to move more jobs and activities to Scotland. What is the Secretary of State doing to pursue that agenda?

David Mundell: My Cabinet colleagues are present, and I am keen to ensure that as many UK Government jobs as possible are in Scotland. Last week, I was delighted to launch the new UK Government hub in Edinburgh, which will house 3,000 UK civil servants.

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): The Scottish Government have launched an independent review of the joint campus of Buchanan and St Ambrose High Schools in my constituency, after health and safety concerns were raised by parents, pupils and staff. Does the Secretary of State agree, like me, with the concerned parents, pupils and staff, who think that an independent review must properly assess the water quality and the site of both schools, including for air and soil contamination—for the past, present and future of these children?

David Mundell: Obviously, that matter is ultimately for the Scottish Government, but I know that the hon. Gentleman is a real champion for the parents and pupils at those schools, and I will do everything to assist him in taking forward their concerns.

Fisheries Bill

5. **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on the Fisheries Bill. [911391]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): I continue to work closely with colleagues on the Fisheries Bill, which will allow us to manage our fisheries sustainably and deliver on our promise to take back control of our waters. It will allow us to decide who may fish in our waters and on what terms as we become an independent coastal state.

Mr Carmichael: The last time that I asked the Secretary of State about the Fisheries Bill, he deflected the question by saying that

“we will see what happens when the Bill returns on Report.”—[*Official Report*, 16 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 1152.]

That was five months ago, and we have still not had the Fisheries Bill on Report. When are we going to get it?

David Mundell: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to hear me say that it will be in due course.

Oil and Gas Industry

8. **Colin Clark** (Gordon) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on the Government's role in supporting the oil and gas industry. [911394]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): I have regular meetings with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on a range of issues relevant to Scotland. That has included discussions about the support that this Government have provided to the oil and gas sector. The UK Government are committed to ensuring that this key industry has a long future.

Colin Clark: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. May I congratulate him and the Scotland Office on supporting Scottish industry, when the SNP Scottish Government do not? It is due to his hard work that transferable tax history was delivered to the oil and gas industry. Does he agree that Opposition suggestions that we should divest ourselves of the oil and gas industry would threaten 120,000 highly paid Scottish jobs?

Mr Speaker: That goes into the matter of Opposition policy. That would be impure, and I am sure the Secretary of State would never knowingly be impure.

David Mundell: Since joining this Parliament, my hon. Friend has become a real champion of the industry, and it disappoints me to hear Opposition Members describing oil and gas as a dirty technology with no long-term future. We can be clear that this party and this Government will always stand up for Scotland's oil.

Drug Consumption Room: Glasgow

13. **Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): What discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the potential merits of establishing a medically supervised drug consumption room in Glasgow. [911399]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): There is currently no legal framework for the provision of drug consumption rooms in the UK. The Scottish Affairs Committee is undertaking an inquiry into drug use in Scotland. As with other inquiries, the Government will consider the Committee's report.

Alison Thewliss: I am sorry, but that is just not good enough. People in my constituency are dying for want of a safe consumption room. Will he come to meet people in Glasgow to see why such rooms are very much needed to reduce harm and to save lives?

David Mundell: I hear what the hon. Lady says, but I do not think that the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) would accept that we would not want to take seriously his Committee's serious inquiry—the Committee is visiting many overseas examples. We want to look at its report, and that is what we will do.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [911436] **Mr Marcus Jones** (Nuneaton) (Con): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 19 June.

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): Today marks two years since the terror attack on the Finsbury Park mosque. It was a truly cowardly and depraved attack that was intended to divide us. Instead, London remains united, and it is London's diverse communities that make London the world's greatest capital city.

In recent days and weeks we have seen flooding across the country, which has been particularly severe in Lincolnshire. I know that the whole House will want to join me in paying tribute to the work of the emergency services, our military, the Environment Agency and all those who have been working on the ground to support the communities affected. The Government stand ready to respond and offer all assistance where required.

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

Mr Jones: I associate myself and the whole House with the comments that the Prime Minister has made about the Finsbury Park mosque attack and the flooding in Lincolnshire.

If our town centres are to survive and thrive, we need more people living in them, more people working in them and more people spending their leisure time in them. I welcome the future high streets fund and commend to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister the important

bid that has been made by Nuneaton. Will she speak to her Ministers and ask them to look on that bid very favourably?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to say that high streets are changing, and we are committed to helping communities to adapt. He set out some of the things he wants to see if those high streets are to continue to thrive. As he said, we have provided £675 million through the future high streets fund. I am pleased to hear about the Transforming Nuneaton programme, which I understand aims to increase footfall and drive economic growth. Nuneaton's bid for the future high streets fund is currently under consideration, and we hope to announce the bids that have been successful in going forward to the business case development phase in the summer.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): Today does mark two years since the terrorist attack on Muslim people in Finsbury Park outside the mosque, and the murder of my constituent Makram Ali. With the far right on the rise both in our country and across the world, we can all send a message to all those who seek to sow hatred and division in our society that we will not be divided. Our diversity is our strength, and I believe it always will be.

I concur with the Prime Minister about the need to support people who have suffered as a result of the floods over the weekend, and about the work of the emergency services in helping them.

On Friday, I was honoured to join Grenfell residents and survivors to mark the two-year anniversary of that terrible tragedy. With great dignity, they are campaigning for justice and change. Across this House, we have a duty to ensure that such fires can never happen again. That is why I have signed up—I hope the Prime Minister will do so as well—to the “Never Again” campaign, which is run by the Fire Brigades Union with the support of the *Daily Mirror*. Three days after the Grenfell fire, the Prime Minister said:

“My Government will do whatever it takes to help those affected, get justice and keep our people safe.”

So two years on, why do 328 high-rise buildings—homes to thousands of people from Newham to Newcastle—still have the same Grenfell-style cladding?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely agree with the right hon. Gentleman that we will never be divided and that our diversity is indeed our strength; we should all celebrate that diversity.

The right hon. Gentleman refers to last Friday being two years on from the terrible tragedy of the Grenfell fire. I was very pleased yesterday to welcome, as part of Green for Grenfell, people from the Grenfell community—Grenfell United and others—to No. 10 Downing Street. I was particularly pleased to meet young people, hear their questions and talk to them about their concerns for the future. *[Interruption.]* I am pleased to see the shadow Foreign Secretary back from her re-education camp of a few weeks ago. She says, “What did you say?” I am about to tell her and the rest of the House what I said—just a little patience.

The issue of justice was indeed raised by one of the young people, which is exactly why I set up the public inquiry within days after the fire. That inquiry has

two phases. It will soon be entering its second phase, and we have appointed panel members to sit alongside the judge in that phase. The aim is to find out exactly what went wrong, who was responsible and who was accountable, and to enable that justice for the people of Grenfell.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned cladding. We asked building owners in the private sector to take the action that we believed necessary, but they have not been acting quickly enough. That is why we will fully fund the replacement of cladding on high-rise residential buildings, and interim measures are in place where necessary on all 163 high-rise private residential buildings with unsafe aluminium composite material cladding.

Jeremy Corbyn: Obviously, the inquiry must go on and we await its response to what actually happened at Grenfell, but the answer that the Prime Minister gave is of no comfort to the 60,000 people living in high-rise tower blocks across the country. They are worried—their communities are worried.

Although Government funding is, of course, necessary and welcome, but not yet available, more than 70 block owners still have no plan in place to get the work done. Will the Prime Minister set a deadline of the end of this year for all dangerous cladding to be removed and replaced? Will she toughen up the powers for councils to levy big fines and, where necessary, to confiscate blocks to get this vital safety work done if the block owners simply fail to do it?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, all affected buildings identified in the social sector have been visited by the fire and rescue services, which have carried out checks and made sure that interim safety measures are in place. Remediation work has started or finished on over three quarters of those buildings. We are fully funding the removal and replacement of unsafe ACM cladding systems on high-rise social housing.

The right hon. Gentleman refers to housing in the private sector. We asked building owners to take the action necessary, and we expected building owners to take the action necessary. They have not done enough; they have not acted quickly enough. That is why the Government have stepped in and said that we will fully fund the replacement of cladding on high-rise residential buildings. As I said, interim measures are in place until that work is done.

Jeremy Corbyn: The question was: will the Prime Minister ensure that this is done by the end of this year? At the current rate of progress, it will take three years for even the social housing blocks to be done.

But the issue goes wider: 1,700 other buildings, including hospitals, care homes, schools and hotels, are clad in other potentially combustible materials. If landlords will not act, will the Government step in and act on those buildings as well? The 2013 coroner's report on the deadly Lakanal House fire recommended that sprinklers should be retrofitted to all social housing. Currently, only 32 of 837 council tower blocks of above 30 metres have sprinklers. Two years after Grenfell and six years after that coroner's report, will the Prime Minister now accept that recommendation and set a deadline for all high-rise blocks to have sprinklers retrofitted?

The Prime Minister: First of all, the right hon. Gentleman raises the issue of other cladding. The work is indeed being done to investigate the safety of other cladding. He then talks about the coroner's report and recommendation in 2013. I think he has inadvertently said something that does not quite reflect what the coroner's report said. It said that landlords should consider retrofitting sprinklers; it did not say that every building should be retrofitted with sprinklers. As he will know, there are many landlords up and down the country, including Labour councils, that have chosen not to fit sprinklers.

Jeremy Corbyn: The coroner's report made it very clear that she thought that sprinklers would make blocks safer; I do not think we should be playing around with semantics—we should be making sure that all the blocks are safe across the whole country. Only 105 of the 673 new-build schools have sprinklers. Labour would make sure that all new schools had sprinklers fitted.

Grenfell survivors say, "We were victims before the fire." Radical change is needed in our system of social housing. Tenants raised concerns about safety; they were ignored. Two years on from Grenfell, when will we see Government legislation to strengthen tenants' rights and apply the Freedom of Information Act to all housing associations as well as local authorities?

The Prime Minister: It is absolutely right that one of the truly shocking aspects of what happened at Grenfell Tower is that, before the fire happened and over a significant period of time, residents of the tower were raising concerns with the tenant management organisation and the council, and their voice was not heard. That is why one of the other things that I did after the Grenfell Tower fire was to initiate work looking at social housing.

The then Housing Minister—and this has been taken on by subsequent Housing Ministers—went around the country meeting people in social housing to see whether that had happened simply at Grenfell or was happening across the country, and to see how we could strengthen the voice of people living in social housing. I believe that should be done, and it is the work that we have been putting in place. It is absolutely right that the voices of those people should have been heard and acted on. We want to ensure in future that social housing tenants' voices will be heard.

Jeremy Corbyn: That is all well and good, but just how long does it take to amend the Freedom of Information Act to make sure it applies to social housing run by housing associations as well as local authorities?

The Government spent £1,013 million on fire services in 2016-17. This year, the figure is £858 million—£155 million cut from fire services. Every fire authority across the country, from the 11% cut in Greater Manchester to the 42% cut in Warwickshire, is going through the same experience. We cannot put a price on people's lives. We cannot keep people safe on the cheap. The Prime Minister told the country at the Conservative party conference last autumn that austerity is over. Will she now pledge that her Government will increase fire service funding and firefighter numbers next year?

The Prime Minister: Indeed, we are able to end austerity, and we are able to put more money into public services. We are able to do that because a Conservative Government

take a balanced approach to the economy. We have been putting right the wrongs of a Labour Government who left us with the largest deficit in our peacetime history. That is the legacy of Labour. We saw fewer people in work and less money to spend on public services, and we will not let it happen again.

Jeremy Corbyn: The legacy of this Tory Government is 10,000 firefighter jobs cut since 2010 and 40 fire stations closed, including 10 in London under the previous Mayor.

The Prime Minister claimed that action on Grenfell would be part of her legacy, but in two long years, too little has changed. She has met the Grenfell survivors, as have I. Their pain is real and palpable, and it continues. A big test for the next Prime Minister will be to make good the failings of this Government over the past two years—a failure to rehouse all the survivors, a failure to give justice to the Grenfell community, a failure to make safe other dangerous high-rise blocks, a failure to retrofit sprinklers and a failure to end austerity in the fire service. Does the Prime Minister believe that by the third anniversary next year, the Government will be able to honestly say with conviction to the country and to the Grenfell survivors, "Never again"?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman refers to the rehousing of the Grenfell survivors. All 201 households have been offered temporary or permanent accommodation —[*Interruption.*] I think that 194 of those households have accepted that, and 184 have been able to move into their accommodation.

The right hon. Gentleman talks about what the Government have been doing in response to the Grenfell Tower fire. We set up immediately a public inquiry. We set up immediately the Dame Judith Hackitt review, which looked at the issues around building regulations and fire safety. The Government are acting on the results of that, and I expect a future Government to act on the results of the public inquiry.

I have met on a number of occasions, including yesterday, people who survived the Grenfell Tower fire—people who lost their homes, people who lost members of their family and young people who lost their best friends. Their pain is indeed great; it will never go away. It is important for us to ensure that we provide support for those survivors into the future. It is not just about buildings and cladding; it is about support for the local community; and it is about mental health services and support for those who have been affected. This Government are committed to ensuring that we provide that support and that we do everything we can to make sure that a tragedy like Grenfell Tower can never happen again.

Q5. [911440] **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Today is Thank a Teacher Day, and I am sure the whole House would want to express its gratitude to our hard-working, dedicated teachers.

Earlier this week, a report from the Department for Education showed that children in coastal areas achieve lower grades than elsewhere, which means that children in constituencies such as mine have a double whammy, because West Sussex has historically been one of the worst-funded areas as well. Given that the PM recognises that fair funding for schools needs to be a priority in the forthcoming comprehensive spending review, will she

support setting up a coastal schools challenge fund to replicate the success of the London schools challenge fund, which achieved significant improvements in outcomes from 2003 in London?

The Prime Minister: First, I think we should all recognise Thank a Teacher Day. I am sure everybody across this House remembers a particular teacher who had an impact on them, and indeed helped them to do what was necessary to become a Member of Parliament and to represent a local community in this House.

My hon. Friend makes a point about coastal communities. He will know that school funding is at a record level, and our reforms have been improving education standards. I want to ensure that schools have the resources they need and that reform continues to improve those standards; that we are able to give schools the budgets on a timetable to work for them; and—he mentioned the issue of fairer funding—that we continue to make progress on the fairer national funding formula. I think what my hon. Friend has done in referencing a coastal schools fund is actually a bid into the spending review that will be coming later in the year.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): May I associate myself with the Prime Minister's remarks on the atrocity at the Finsbury Park mosque?

This is also World Refugee Week, and I want to commend my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil), who brought forward a family reunion Bill some time ago. Will the Prime Minister, in the time that she has got left, please make sure that this comes forward to Committee?

Does the Prime Minister agree with the front runner set to succeed her that the Scottish people are a “verminous” race that should be placed in ghettos and exterminated?

The Prime Minister: The Conservative and Unionist party not only takes the people of every part of this United Kingdom seriously, but we welcome the contribution from people of every part of this United Kingdom, because that is what makes the United Kingdom the great country it is—and long may Scotland remain part of it.

Ian Blackford: Well, of course, words matter and actions matter. The Prime Minister thought that the man who published those words in his magazine was fit for the office of our top diplomat, and he has not stopped there. He has said that Scots should be banned from being Prime Minister—banned from being Prime Minister, Mr Speaker—and that £1 spent in Croydon was worth more than £1 spent in Strathclyde. This is a man who is not fit for office. It has been said, “The ultimate measure of a person is not where they stand in moments of comfort, but where they stand at times of challenge and controversy.” This is a time of challenge, so does the Prime Minister realise that not only is the Member racist, but he is stoking division in communities and has a record of dishonesty? Does the Prime Minister honestly believe—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. If the right hon. Gentleman is referring to a current Member of this House—I do not know whether he is—[HON. MEMBERS: “He is.”] If he is, he should be extremely careful in the language he uses,

and he should have notified the Member in advance, but I would urge him to weigh his words. [HON. MEMBERS: “Withdraw!”] Indeed, I think it would be much better if, for now, he would withdraw any allegation of racism against any particular Member. I do not think that this is the forum, and I do not think it is the right way to behave.

Ian Blackford: Mr Speaker, I have informed the Member. He has called Muslim women “letter boxes”, described African people as having “watermelon smiles” and another disgusting slur that I would never dignify by repeating. If that is not racist, I do not know what is. Does the Prime Minister honestly believe that this man is fit for the office of Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has been leader of the SNP in this Chamber and has asked Prime Minister's questions for some time, so he might understand that the purpose is to ask the Prime Minister about the actions of the Government. That is what he should be asking us about. I believe that any future Conservative Prime Minister will be better for Scotland than the Scottish nationalist party.

Q7. [911442] **Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): Does the Prime Minister agree with me about the importance of tackling corruption and tax evasion around the world and about the key role that knowing who really owns companies plays in that? Does she therefore welcome the announcement today by Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man that they will open their registers in a couple of years' time, and will she urge our remaining overseas territories to make progress in doing the same?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has raised an important issue. I am very pleased to see the announcement today by Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man. We continue to work with overseas territories to ensure that they follow those standards and open their books so that people can see who actually owns companies.

Q2. [911437] **Tonia Antoniazzi** (Gower) (Lab): Following my visit to the Netherlands two weeks ago with Emma Appleby, I have witnessed at first hand the incompetence of the Home Office and the Department of Health and Social Care in delivering medical cannabis with THC, not just CBD, for children with severe epilepsy. History was made exactly one year ago today when Alfie Dingley received the licence for his medication and the Prime Minister looked Hannah Deacon, Alfie's mum, in the eye and promised to right this wrong. Today, will the Prime Minister commit to making it part of her legacy to deliver on her promise not just to Alfie, but to the many other children who are still suffering?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady is absolutely right that we looked at the whole issue of medical cannabis. That is why we changed the approach that was taken. Obviously, individual cases are desperately difficult, and I think that everybody across the House feels with the families and friends of those who are affected. We have ensured that the law has changed and that specialist doctors can prescribe cannabis-based products for medicinal use, where there is clinical evidence of benefit. I think that was the right thing to do. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and

Social Care has heard the testimony of families about the barriers they appear to have faced and has asked NHS England to undertake a rapid re-evaluation and to address any system barriers to clinically approving the prescribing.

Q14. [911450] **Paul Scully** (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): Last year, an Ofsted report revealed severe shortcomings in the London Borough of Sutton's special educational needs department. I have since met many parents, such as Hayley Harding, who have had to resort to tribunals to get an appropriate education, health and care plan for their children. A leaked internal report showed that money is categorically not the issue, as Sutton has the highest per head spend on SEND in the UK. However, it also has one of the highest levels of refusals for EHCP assessments. Will the Prime Minister assure me that Sutton Council will receive all possible assistance from the Government to resolve its lack of leadership and its mismanagement, which were identified in its own report, so that we do not let families down?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. It is vital that all children with special educational needs receive the support they need. I have been assured that the council will receive the right support. The Department for Education and NHS England have been working closely with the local authority to ensure that the necessary changes take place, and they will continue to do so. My hon. Friend talks about funding. This year, Sutton's high needs funding allocation has been increased. I understand that Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission will revisit Sutton to ensure that the council is improving its support for children with special educational needs, so that those children can fulfil their potential.

Q3. [911438] **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Last month, the Prime Minister wrote to the seven Westminster political leaders and said that the victims of the contaminated blood scandal would have to wait years, until the end of the inquiry, for compensation to be paid. That is a political decision. Every 96 hours, a victim dies. While I accept that the Prime Minister made the right choice in setting up the inquiry, would not a real legacy be to pay compensation now, as happened in the Republic of Ireland in the 1990s, for those who have suffered so much for so long at the hands of the state?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady has campaigned long and hard on this issue and championed the needs of all those who were affected. The victims and families have suffered so much, and it is obviously important that they get the answers and the justice that they deserve. They have been waiting decades for that. In April, as she will know, the Department of Health and Social Care announced a major uplift in the financial support available to beneficiaries of the infected blood support scheme in England. Discussions are now under way between officials in the UK, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Administrations to look, as a matter of urgency, at how we can provide greater parity of support across the UK.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): The Conservative party has frequently won the trust of the public over recent generations because of its reputation for economic

competence and responsibility. Those qualities have helped to contribute to the Prime Minister's legacy. She will leave behind a recovery from economic crisis to full employment and economic growth. Does she therefore agree that in the present uncertainty surrounding Brexit and the change of government, it would be extremely unwise for candidates in the leadership election, or the outgoing Government, to start making reckless commitments on tax cuts and promises on spending, which should properly be addressed responsibly in a spending round once those uncertainties are behind us?

The Prime Minister: First, I commend my right hon. and learned Friend for the work he did in a previous Conservative Administration as Chancellor of the Exchequer. He left a golden economic legacy, which was then completely squandered by 13 years of a Labour Government, and as he says, Conservatives have had to turn that around. I am pleased that we see employment at record levels; I am pleased that we see the deficit down; and I am pleased that we see debt falling. We are able to ensure that we can put more money into public services. We have already committed the biggest ever cash boost for the national health service in its history. I can assure him that in my time as Prime Minister we will not make any reckless commitments, but we do want to ensure that we see our public services supported, as they should be, to provide the services we believe the people of this country deserve.

Q4. [911439] **Mr Virendra Sharma** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): Over the past nine years, the Prime Minister has had authority over immigration, first as Home Secretary and now as Prime Minister. By her own metric, she has failed to reduce immigration, and her unjust, discriminatory and racist policies have caused thousands of people to be treated inhumanely. In Refugee Week, the last week of her term in office, can she call her record on immigration anything other than a failure?

The Prime Minister: Immigration has been good for this country, but people want to know that the Government can make decisions about who should come to the country, that there is control over the number of people coming to the country, and that the Government take action against those who are here illegally. That has been the purpose of the policy pursued since 2010, giving people confidence in our immigration system so we can ensure that people continue to welcome immigrants, who make such an important contribution to our life, into this country.

Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con): As we build the homes we need across the country, it is essential that we equip young people with the correct practical skills to drive forward our economy. The 45th WorldSkills competition takes place in Russia in August. My constituent, 21-year-old Lewis Greenwood, will be representing the UK in the bricklaying competition. Will the Prime Minister wish Lewis and the rest of Team UK the best of British in the skills olympics?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to reference the fact that we need those skills for our economy and our society in the future. I am very happy to congratulate Lewis on being the UK representative for bricklaying in the WorldSkills competition in Russia.

I wish him all the very best and I am sure the whole House will wish him all the very best as he carries the UK standard with him.

Mr Speaker: It is always said that Winston Churchill was a 60-bricks-an-hour man—a very good bricklayer himself, I must advise the House.

Q6. [911441] Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): At the end of her career, will the Prime Minister take time to reflect that her creation of the hostile environment led to the Windrush scandal, a catalogue of errors in immigration decisions, people feeling unsafe in their own homes, an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion, and to xenophobia, which has damaged our relations with our European neighbours? Will she apologise for that?

The Prime Minister: First, we mark Windrush Day on 22 June; that day has been set up to recognise the contribution that the Windrush generation made to our life, our society and our economy here in the UK. What lay behind the issue in relation to the problems that some members of the Windrush generation have faced was the fact that when they came into the UK, they were not given documentary evidence of their immigration status, and, as their countries gained independence, they were not given that documentary evidence of their status—[*Interruption.*] It is no good shouting “Rubbish”. That is what lay behind it, and there were cases of people in the Windrush generation—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. This is very unseemly behaviour. Members are entitled to ask orderly questions, but having asked the questions, they should then have the courtesy to listen to the Prime Minister’s answer.

The Prime Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

That is what lay at the heart of the issue in relation to the Windrush generation. It is the case that people in the Windrush generation faced these difficulties as a result of not having that documentary evidence both under Labour Governments in the past and, more recently, under this Government. The Home Office is working to put that right. People who are concerned about this should contact the Home Office taskforce and they will get the help and support that they need.

Andrew Griffiths (Burton) (Con): Last week, we learned that a 13-year-old boy who brought his rapist to court received £20 in compensation. A 13-year-old girl and a 15-year-old girl received £50 for being abused as children. Does the Prime Minister agree that this is a terrible way to treat the victims of child sexual abuse, that they deserve to be treated fairly and compassionately, and that it sends out all the wrong signals to anybody who is thinking of bringing their perpetrator to justice? Does she agree that it takes huge courage to bring a case such as that, and will she urgently look at a review of criminal compensation orders, so that victims of child sexual abuse get the justice that they deserve?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend that it takes huge courage to come forward to talk about incidents of child sexual abuse—and not just to talk about that, but to be able to go through that such that the perpetrator of that abuse can be brought to

justice. I commend those he has spoken about specifically and all those who come forward to do that. I hope that from the action that this Government have taken, through setting up the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse, we make it very clear that we want these wrongs to be righted. We want people to be able to feel that they can find justice. The memory will never go. The memory will live with them, but we can at least give them justice and I urge everybody to come forward, if they have been subject to child sexual abuse, such that justice can be brought.

Q8. [911443] Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): I am dealing with the most traumatic of constituency cases, affecting a vulnerable young woman refugee now at risk of prostitution and trafficking here in the UK. She faces being thrown out on the streets by this Government, who have refused her the support that she desperately needs, even though she has a further challenge submitted to the asylum support tribunal. Will the Prime Minister please show her some compassion?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has raised a very specific case. Obviously I have not seen the details of that case, but I will ensure that the Home Secretary looks at the details of it.

Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con): Police officers and firefighters are able to retire at 60, but prison officers cannot retire until they are 66 and they are facing the prospect of having to retire at 68. Does my right hon. Friend believe that that is fair?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has raised an important issue. Obviously, this has been looked at and considered in the past, but I will make sure that the Ministry of Justice is aware of his concerns.

Q9. [911444] Dr Paul Williams (Stockton South) (Lab): My community does not feel safe. Crime rates in Stockton South have almost doubled in the last eight years, while Cleveland police have lost 500 officers. Now the Prime Minister’s Home Secretary is admitting that we do not have nearly enough police to be able to keep people safe. Does she now think that she might have been wrong to make such deep cuts in policing, and will she consider, as her final act as Prime Minister, giving Cleveland police our 500 bobbies back?

The Prime Minister: We have made about £1 billion extra available to police forces this year, and that includes an increase in funding for Cleveland police. How the money is spent is a matter for the police and crime commissioners and the chief constable. We have made funds available, and we have ensured that we are giving the police the powers that they need. Sadly, the Labour party in opposition voted against that extra funding for the police.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Losing a child is every parent’s worst nightmare, but every day parents up and down the country are caring for children with life-limiting illnesses. For those families the children’s hospice and palliative care services are a necessary lifeline, but some of our hospice services are struggling for cash, and Acorns, our largest service, has had to announce the closure of one of its hospices.

Prime Minister, you came to power saying that you would help people who were just about managing, but many of those families are barely coping at all. Please, as your legacy, will you give the £40 million that is needed to provide really good palliative care for all the children in the country who need it?

The Prime Minister: I recognise the important role played by hospices generally, but by children's hospices in particular. I have been pleased to be involved in the establishment of the Alexander Devine hospice in my constituency, which was set up after a family tragically lost their son Alexander.

It is important for us to ensure that people have the support that they need as they see a child approaching the end of their life. We have made children's palliative and end-of-life care a priority in the NHS long-term plan, and over the next five years the NHS will be match funding clinical commissioning groups that commit themselves to increasing investment in local children's palliative and end-of-life care services by up to £7 million. That will increase the support to a total of £25 million a year by 2023-24. Those children and their families deserve the very best care, and I commend all who are working in the hospice movement, because they provide wonderful end-of-life care for children and adults.

Q10. [911445] **Mike Hill** (Hartlepool) (Lab): Hartlepool is a trial area for universal credit, and we now have seven food banks. Is that a legacy the Prime Minister can be proud of?

The Prime Minister: No one wants to see someone feeling the need to go to a food bank, but what universal credit does is ensure that people are helped into work, and that work pays. As they earn more, they are able to keep more of those earnings. Work is the best route out of poverty, and universal credit is working to ensure that people get into work and can provide for themselves and their families.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I know that the whole House will join the Prime Minister in thanking the emergency services and the armed services when they step up to the mark at times of national or local emergency such as the mosque outrage or the Novichok incident in Salisbury, near my constituency, but will she also do what she has done throughout her time as Prime Minister and pay tribute to a vast army of other people—the volunteers in our society who do so much for us? I am thinking particularly of the Royal British Legion, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the Red Cross, and, especially on this important day in its life, the Order of St John and St John Ambulance. Those are truly the big society.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. So much of what happens in our country—so much that is good in our country—does indeed depend on volunteers up and down the country, including those in the organisations that my hon. Friend has mentioned, and those in other community groups and charities too. We should celebrate the work that volunteers do, we should commend them for their work, and, above all, we should say a wholehearted thank you.

Q11. [911446] **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): A high score of adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, increases an individual's chances of having physical health issues or poor mental health, or being involved in violence. Today the WAVE Trust will launch a survey to collate, anonymously, MPs' ACEs score. This is the first time that that has ever been attempted by any national Parliament. Will the Prime Minister, like me, respond to the survey and encourage other colleagues to do the same?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady raises an important point about the impact adverse childhood experiences can have on people in later life. It is one of the reasons why we are putting so much support and emphasis on the mental health of young people to help them as they go through their life. I was not aware of this survey; I am happy to look at it, and I am sure all Members of the House will look at it and recognise the importance of this information that increases the knowledge of such adverse childhood experiences and helps to deal with these issues.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware that there are already almost 400,000 people employed in the low carbon sector and its supply chains across the country, but can she assure me that more jobs will be created in this industry through our modern industrial strategy, including through the utilisation of carbon capture and storage, which will be critical to our meeting our net zero targets?

The Prime Minister: I can absolutely give my hon. Friend the assurance that as we look to meet our climate change target we will indeed see more jobs being created in this sector, and I was very pleased when I made the announcement about the net zero emissions target to visit Imperial College here in London, which is doing important research and training work on CCS that will be of benefit across this country and the world.

Q12. [911447] **Mary Creagh** (Wakefield) (Lab): The Prime Minister is a dedicated follower of fashion, so can she explain why yesterday her Government rejected a penny on every garment sold in this country, which would have created green jobs, a ban on the 300,000 tonnes of textiles that go to landfill or incineration, and the 16 other recommendations made by my Committee when she wants to get to a net zero carbon economy by 2050?

The Prime Minister: I am aware of the report from the Environmental Audit Committee on this issue. Much of what the Committee wants to achieve is actually already covered by Government policy, and there are a number of areas I could mention—for example, making producers responsible for the full cost of managing and disposing of their products when they are no longer useful, and last week the Government opened a multi-million pound grant scheme to help boost the recycling of textiles and plastic packaging. We have already responded to many of the issues raised by that report.

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): Unlike local councils, NHS bodies are not legally required to balance their budget on an annual basis. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough sustainability and transformation partnership is facing

a deficit of £192 million and other STPs could be raided to bail it out. What would my right hon. Friend say to my constituents—including those in places like Jaywick, an area of deprivation that has extensive health inequalities—when they ask why their services should suffer to meet the deficits of others?

The Prime Minister: Of course we want to ensure that all health trusts and health services are operating properly within their budgets and are able to balance their books. What I would say to my hon. Friend's constituents is that I am pleased that this Government have been able to increase the funding available to the national health service, and that will go towards increasing and improving the services his constituents are able to receive.

Q13. [911449] **Sarah Jones** (Croydon Central) (Lab): The Prime Minister is a busy woman, so she might not have seen the latest report from *Inside Housing*, which has revealed that three successive Ministers were written to a total of 21 times over four years by the all-party group on fire safety and rescue urging them to act to make sure we avoided another fire following the Lakanal House fire. The last of those 21 letters was written a month before the Grenfell Tower fire; no action was taken. What does the Prime Minister believe those Ministers should have done when they received that expert advice?

The Prime Minister: Ministers obviously always look very carefully at the expert advice they receive, but the whole question of what has happened and the advice that was available will be looked at in the second phase of the public inquiry.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): Later today in Westminster Hall Members will have an opportunity to debate the independent review of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Thanks to the leadership of my right hon. Friend this landmark legislation has empowered both victims and the police to seek justice, with 239 suspects charged and 185 people convicted of modern slavery offences in 2017-18. What further measures does my right hon. Friend believe will help to strengthen this Act?

The Prime Minister: I am pleased that my hon. Friend has raised this issue, because it remains an important topic. We have seen not only the first convictions under the Act but thousands of businesses publishing transparency statements and senior business leaders being much more engaged on the issue than ever before. She asks what more we will be doing. We will shortly be publishing a consultation to look at ways to strengthen transparency in the supply chains, and we are expanding transparency laws to cover the public sector and its purchasing power. This is important as the public sector has huge purchasing power, and this could be used to good cause to ensure that we are ending modern slavery.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Change UK): The Prime Minister is keen to secure a legacy of acting in the country's very best interests, so will she commit to introducing legislation that will guarantee that this House sits in September and October so that, in the event of a no-deal Brexit, all options are available to this Parliament, including revoking article 50?

The Prime Minister: The dates for recess and the times of the sittings of this House will be published to the House in due course.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): The national funding formula for schools is great for underfunded constituencies such as mine, where funding is going up twice as fast as the national average, but village schools and other small schools are still under financial pressure and their numbers have declined over recent decades. Will my right hon. Friend encourage the Department for Education to look again at how we can make the national funding formula do more to help village schools, which are so important to our rural life?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely accept and recognise the important role that village schools play in our rural life. A lot of work went into the national funding formula, and it is right that we are introducing this fairer means of funding. We have yet to reach the end point of the national funding formula, but I want to see us progressing and ensuring that we are putting that national funding formula in place. I am sure that the Secretary of State for Education will have heard the request that my hon. Friend has made.

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): I am heartbroken, and Tooting is heartbroken. On Friday night, the streets claimed another victim. Cheyon Evans might be just another awkward statistic to this Government, but to us he was a son, a brother and a friend taken too soon. This senseless violence could have been avoided with adequate policing and good youth provision to give our young people a sense of hope. My question to the Prime Minister is simple. Will she use her remaining days in office to leave a legacy that will change the paths for those young people, or can we expect yet more of the same?

The Prime Minister: None of us ever wants to see a life, particularly a young life, taken before its time by violent crime. These are not difficult statistics; they are people who had a future ahead of them and who have sadly died as a result of the violence of criminal perpetrators. We have introduced our serious violence strategy, and we are working with the police and other organisations to ensure that young people are turned away from the use of violence and the use of knives. The hon. Lady says that this is a question of funding and police numbers, but actually it is a much wider issue—[*Interruption.*] Anybody who denies that this is a wider issue for our society is simply failing to understand the issue that we have to address, and if she wants to talk to somebody about the police on the streets of London, I suggest she talks to the Mayor of London.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Bearing the sub judice rule firmly in mind, what does the Prime Minister think of the principle of bringing a dying, decorated former soldier before the courts of Northern Ireland on charges based on no new evidence that are unlikely ever to lead to a conviction?

The Prime Minister: I know this is an issue that my right hon. Friend and a number of other right hon. and hon. Friends have raised in terms of individual cases and the general principle. None of us wants to see elderly veterans being brought before the courts in the way that he has described, but we need to ensure that we have processes and systems in Northern Ireland that

ensure that proper investigation is taking place. I understand that my colleagues feel that the state has let down people like the veteran that he cited, but the fact is that previous investigations have not been found to be lawful. That is why we are having to look at the process of investigation. I have said many times standing at this Dispatch Box that I want to ensure that we see the terrorists who cause the vast majority of deaths in Northern Ireland being properly brought to justice. That is what we are working on, and we will continue to work on a system that is fair.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): When the Prime Minister took office, she suggested that her mission would be to tackle “burning injustices”, yet this morning

a report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that, under the Cabinets in which she has served over the past nine years, in-work poverty has risen dramatically. Will that not be the legacy of her premiership?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman raises the IFS report, but in fact that report shows that people are better off when they move into work. It shows that under this Government, more people are in work than ever before, that material deprivation rates have fallen by a fifth since 2010, and that the reason for the relative poverty figures is that pensioners are better off. He might think that cutting pensioners’ incomes is the answer, but actually I do not.

Point of Order

12.56 pm

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Since you took the Chair, you have been a stalwart defender of Back Benchers. You have also stood up to bad parliamentary behaviour like the use of the word “racism”. I am deeply upset that your chairmanship has been undermined dramatically because of the very calm and polite advice you gave to hon. Members—leaders of political parties—that was ignored. Please will you do all you can to ensure that words such as “racist” are not common parlance in this House?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. I am always appreciative of kind words and, in so far as he is proffering sympathy for me and expressing concern about my reputation, I am deeply obliged to him, but I am not a delicate flower and I do not feel any concern on that front. I am simply trying to do the right thing by the House. There was originally, as colleagues of long service will know, a list of unparliamentary words, but that list was discontinued, not least on account of its potentially infinite scope. It was therefore discontinued. The word in question is not of itself unparliamentary. The issue is to judge context and to make an assessment of what is seemly in the Chamber, and I made my own assessment and advised the House and the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) accordingly. It was only when I heard the full flow of the words that I was able to make an assessment, and I think it would be wise for colleagues to bear in mind the general principle that one does not impute dishonour to another Member. That is the first point.

The second point is that I know that there is a degree of latitude in respect of questions to the Prime Minister, but I think it would be appropriate, in the remaining weeks before the summer recess and before a new leader of the governing party takes office, to have some regard to that for which the Prime Minister is responsible. She is responsible for her own policies and for the conduct of her Government and their administration of their affairs, and it is important that questions should be put with that overarching consideration and ambit of responsibility in mind. However, I have said what I have said, and the hon. Gentleman has made his point in his question. I have no wish to prolong the argument, and knowing what a naturally good-natured fellow he is, I feel sure that he has no such ambition either. We will leave it there for now.

Breathing Space Scheme

1 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): With permission, I will make a statement on supporting people in problem debt. This is an issue close to my heart. As a former member of the all-party parliamentary group on hunger and food poverty, I have seen at first hand the hardship that problem debt can cause. Now that I am in a position to bring about change, I am focused on improving the lives of the most disadvantaged.

Problem debt places a heavy burden on households and can lead to family breakdown, stress and mental health issues. The Government have taken steps to prevent problem debt from occurring and to support those who have fallen into it. We have reformed the regulation of consumer credit and widened access to professional debt advice, and we are helping to build individual financial capability. Today, I can update the House on the Government’s plans to go further, with the introduction of a breathing space scheme and a statutory debt repayment plan. I am grateful for the support of the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst), whose private Member’s Bill and ongoing work have made a key contribution to the scheme becoming Government policy.

For people who are just getting by, even a small income shock can provoke a cycle of debt dependence that can be difficult to escape. If then faced with invasive debt enforcement, it is no wonder that many people in problem debt simply disengage. The first step to countering problem debt is to ensure that consumer credit firms are properly regulated, because loans should not be made to people who cannot afford to repay them. The Government have empowered the Financial Conduct Authority to ensure that firms lend responsibly, protecting consumers from over-borrowing. At Budget 2018, we announced new measures to increase access to affordable credit by helping foster a larger, more vibrant social lending sector.

In parallel, we have put in place support to help people make good financial decisions. The new Money and Pensions Service brings together three existing publicly funded money and pensions guidance services into one new organisation, providing free support and guidance on all aspects of people’s financial lives. Importantly, it also has a statutory duty to develop and co-ordinate a national strategy to improve people’s financial capability. Despite those preventive measures, I recognise that many people still fall into problem debt. For such people, further support is required.

Seeking professional advice is a vital step in moving towards a sustainable debt solution. That is why we have increased public funding for free professional debt advice to almost £56 million this year, delivering 560,000 sessions in England, but more needs to be done. The Money and Pensions Service estimates there are up to 9 million over-indebted people in the UK, but only a fraction of them access free debt advice each year. That is why I can announce today that, following consultation, the Government will deliver on their manifesto commitment to introduce a breathing space scheme for people in problem debt.

The scheme has two parts which, together, will protect debtors from creditor action, help them get professional advice on their debt problems, and help them pay off their debts in a sustainable way. Breathing space will provide debtors with a 60-day period in which interest and charges on their debts are frozen and enforcement action from creditors is paused. Creditors must not start new court action, communications with debtors relating to enforcement of their debt must stop, and benefit reductions to reclaim debt will pause. During the time, debtors will have to seek professional debt advice to find a sustainable solution to their debt problem. These protections will encourage people in problem debt to seek advice earlier and give them the headspace to identify the right debt solution for them.

The statutory debt repayment plan is a new debt solution that will extend the breathing space protections to debtors who commit to fully repaying their debts in a manageable timeline. Importantly, the payment plans will be flexible to changes in debtors' life circumstances to remain sustainable over the long term. If someone's disposable income decreases, their payments will go down, and vice versa.

The breathing space scheme will make a real difference to the most vulnerable families across the country, and I recognise the sense of urgency across the House to deliver this policy quickly. I am committed to delivering the scheme swiftly, working closely with key stakeholders to make sure that it works in practice. The Government will lay regulations on the breathing space element of the policy before the end of the year, and we intend to implement it in early 2021. We will continue to develop the statutory debt repayment plan to a longer timetable.

In addition, I am pleased to announce that the Government will go beyond their manifesto commitment in two areas. As many of us hear in our constituencies, people's experiences of problem debt are changing. As I have seen at first hand, it is wrong to assume that over-indebtedness is simply a product of taking out too much credit. Many people struggle to meet essential bills and can end up owing money to multiple creditors in the public and private sectors. For the policy to be successful, it must properly reflect the issues that debtors are dealing with. I can therefore announce today that the breathing space scheme will cover a broad range of debts—not just financial services debts, but arrears owed to utility companies and to central and local government, including council tax arrears, personal tax debts and benefit overpayments. That broad protection will make the policy effective for debtors and fair to creditors.

The House will recognise the strong links between mental health issues and problem debt. Up to 23,000 people in England each year struggle with problem debt while in hospital due to mental health issues. The breathing space scheme must work for everyone facing problem debt. In particular, it must be open to the most vulnerable in society. To that end, I can confirm that people receiving treatment for mental health crisis can enter breathing space without seeking advice from a debt adviser, which could be a significant barrier for many.

The protections will last the entirety of an individual's crisis treatment, followed by a further 30 days to allow them to get back on their feet and decide whether they wish to enter the main breathing space scheme or work out another solution for their debts. As mental health

issues often recur, there will be no limit to the number of times that an individual can enter via this mechanism. I thank the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Dame Louise Ellman), the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) and my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) for their dedicated work on this issue, and I thank the Money and Mental Health Policy Institute for raising this important issue.

Millions of people struggle with problem debt and the burdens that it brings. The Government have committed to helping people take control of their finances and get back on a stable financial footing. The breathing space scheme that I have described today will help to fulfil that commitment, and I commend this statement to the House.

1.8 pm

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I begin by thanking the Minister for his courtesy in giving me advance notice of this statement, which we broadly welcome. There has been a growing consensus for some time about the need for something less dramatic than formal insolvency proceedings which offers hope to people with problem debts that there can be a way out. That is what the breathing space scheme should be—a space to let people get back on their feet, perhaps overcoming a health issue, a period of unemployment or something else that has adversely affected their lives.

There will always be disagreement between the Opposition and the Government on the necessity of the austerity policies that have blighted the country since 2010, but no one can deny that household debt in the UK is large, growing, and problematic for many people. The big change that I have seen in my constituency is that people are using credit not just to buy a car, a new sofa or a washing machine, but to pay their living costs at the end of the month—for food, dinner money, and children's clothes. The worst is when people, unable to take control of their own affairs, go from one short-term credit product to another, compounding the costs and liabilities they are incurring and sometimes ending up in hock to illegal moneylenders as the only option they have left. One of my constituents in such circumstances ended up suicidal.

We want this policy to work, and my questions for the Minister are in that spirit. First, can he say why a 60-day period has been chosen as optimal? Going back to the need to let people overcome whatever problems they face, I have always felt that the period may need to be longer.

Secondly, will the Minister confirm my understanding that all debts will be covered, including public sector debts like council tax arrears and benefit overpayments? I very much recognise the obliteration of local government finances over the past nine years and, alongside colleagues, I presented a petition to Downing Street this morning on how bad it has been for councils like mine in Tameside. Council tax arrears are one of the biggest causes of the bailiffs being called, and we need such arrears to be included, too.

In addition, will the Minister look specifically at the issue of guarantor loans? Under such loans another person, typically a family member, accepts joint liability for the debt. I had another case of this type from a constituent in Stalybridge just this week. If the breathing

[Jonathan Reynolds]

space period does not apply to these loans, the burden will simply pass and offer no relief, which would be counterproductive.

Ultimately, this policy will work only if there are sufficient sources of advice and support for people to access during the breathing space period. It is a reality that such services—citizens advice bureaux, local authority and housing association advice centres, and so on—have been put under massive strain over the past few years. So what strategy do the Government have to significantly improve the capacity in this area? Whatever initiatives have been pursued to date, and whatever merit they have, there is no doubt that we need to go further.

Finally, in the famous words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu:

“There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they’re falling in.”

As well as a change of economic policy, we believe it is time to regulate further the interest that can be charged on overdrafts and credit cards, to look at the marketing of credit to vulnerable people, and to ensure there is real and effective financial education in schools.

There is a lot to do. This statement is a move in the right direction, but let us make sure we keep going in that direction.

John Glen: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his typically positive and constructive remarks, and I will try to address the five key points he raises.

First, the 60-day time period is longer than our manifesto commitment of six weeks and is the product of listening to the consultation responses and to the experience of the mechanism in Scotland. Overall, it is seen as the right solution.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman asked which debts are included. I tried to set out in my statement that the scheme is extremely broad, covering public sector debts and arrears. He asked about bailiffs and their role. Of course, the Ministry of Justice completed a consultation exercise in February and will respond in due course. There is also Cabinet Office guidance on the fairness of debt collection. He makes a reasonable point.

Thirdly, the hon. Gentleman asked about guarantor loans, which are an emerging new category of high-cost credit. Such matters are regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority, and I had a conversation just this morning with its chairman. I spoke to Andrew Bailey, its chief executive, earlier this week on the need to be vigilant across all emerging forms of high-cost credit, which is under ongoing review.

Fourthly, the hon. Gentleman asked about capacity and capability in the area of debt advice. I envisage that the creation of the Money and Pensions Service as a new single entity will bring much better co-ordination of the available advice. As I mentioned, the Government spent £56 million last year, and 85,000 more people were seen than in the previous year. We are looking at how that advice can become consistently of a higher standard.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman asked about the long-term causes and the regulation and marketing of high-cost credit products. Following the recent issues at London

Capital & Finance, I directed the FCA to examine what happened, and I have asked my officials in the Treasury to conduct a separate review of how regulation works. We have to continue being vigilant on this evolving space, and the increased digitalisation of the availability of high-cost credit means that the regulation and oversight needs to keep pace.

I hope that answers the hon. Gentleman’s questions.

Dame Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): I welcome this statement and the Government going beyond their original manifesto commitment. It gives me a chance to thank my citizens advice bureau, which has done fantastic work on debt rescheduling during my 22 years as an MP.

Does the Minister welcome the Church of England’s initiative to teach financial literacy in its primary schools, and would he encourage rolling out such an approach to prevention more widely?

John Glen: I welcome my right hon. Friend’s observations on the Church of England’s interventions on financial literacy. The ongoing challenge is to develop national consistency in the delivery of financial education and advice. A number of initiatives are under way, one of which is trying to get financial services providers, particularly the banks, to work in a more co-ordinated way. I am happy to endorse the work of the Church of England, which has been a significant partner in improving financial literacy across the country.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I am pleased that the UK Government have decided to put this in place and have set out the mechanism for doing so. In Scotland we have the debt arrangement scheme, which was launched in 2004 and significantly reformed in 2011, and a breathing space is built into that scheme.

Over £200 million of debt has been repaid since the reforms in Scotland, and 6,000 people completed a direct payment plan between 2011 and 2018, so I am pleased to see in the consultation responses published today that the Government have looked at how the system works in Scotland and have learned lessons. It is clear that, where the Scottish system has the powers to do so, we have the ability to trailblaze and lead the way.

In 2016, because of the debt arrangement scheme in Scotland, we had the lowest proportion of over-indebted people of any part of the UK. As austerity continues, we continue to see increases in the number of people suffering under the burden of debt. In 2017 there were 2.4 million children living in families with problem debt in England and Wales. StepChange, the debt charity, has said that 60% of those in problem debt fell into it because of an unexpected life event, and not because of poor money management—something external happened that changed their life, meaning they could no longer manage their debt.

I am concerned about why it will take the Government so long to implement the changes. Surely, as they already deal with a similar system in Scotland, most creditors should be able to take on the changes fairly quickly and roll them out over a wider group of people. Could this be done any quicker than 2021, which is the date I have seen in the papers?

John Glen: I thank the hon. Lady for her observations, and she is right that the Government have carefully listened to and observed the experience in Scotland. She asks about the timeline, and I have done everything I can to move this forward as quickly as possible. The challenge is to bring the sector along at the same pace and to ensure that we have complete commitment and sign-up to the process so that it will be a success. I am pleased that the chief executive officer of StepChange has said that he is particularly pleased to see the Government's confirmation that debts owed to the Government will be included in the scheme. We are working very carefully, and this is the timeline to which we have to work.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I thank the Minister for the proposals, which will help some of the most vulnerable and their families and, I believe, save lives. Will he clarify which stakeholders he will engage with to ensure effective implementation, and will they include debt advice charities such as Christians Against Poverty, which does such excellent work in this field?

John Glen: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the excellent work of Christians Against Poverty, which is indeed a key stakeholder. We engage widely with the sector, including the Money and Mental Health Policy Institute, StepChange, the Money Advice Trust and the charity National Debtline—it really is a collaborative effort—and I am pleased with their response to where we have got to.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Debt ruins lives. Debt harms health. Debt damages relationship. Debt holds back children. In extreme circumstances, debt kills. When the Financial Guidance and Claims Act 2018—it established the Money and Pensions Service—was being taken through the House, the Government made a commitment to move on a breathing space scheme. Today's announcement is therefore welcome, particularly the action being taken to defend the interests of those suffering mental ill health. In welcoming today's announcement, I urge the Government to ensure that the new arrangements are properly resourced and that there is a sense of urgency in their implementation, because the sooner they are put in place, relieving that terrible burden that afflicts so many people in our country, the better.

John Glen: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments. He played a significant role in the passage of the legislation that led to today's announcement. He urges me once again on the timeframe, and I can assure him that my Treasury officials are working as rapidly as possible, but we must also ensure that it actually works. One of the questions he asked me previously, about what is included in the scheme and the range of public sector debts, has been a significant driver in those conversations. I acknowledge and take on board his comments.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): I absolutely welcome the breathing space scheme, which will help people facing debts that they cannot repay. I join other Members in thanking citizens advice bureaux and organisations such as the Trussell Trust that help to signpost people to better debt advice. It has told me that young people, in

particular, can get enormously concerned about their mobile phones being cut off, because if they lose their phones they lose their communications and any hope of finding work, for example. Will the Minister confirm that this will cover a wide range of debts and mean that people need not worry about losing their homes or their communications while their debts are sorted out?

John Glen: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for those observations and for mentioning the Trussell Trust, which is headquartered in my constituency and has done a lot of work in this area. The principles underpinning the scheme are based on the Insolvency Service's system and include all debts covered by the system. There are a small number of exceptions—for example, deductions for child maintenance payments—but we have designed this so that it is meaningful. It is not about a holiday from ongoing payments; it is about dealing with arrears and debt. The expectation is that when people join the scheme they will continue to pay for everyday expenses as they occur.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Is the Minister aware of Debt Hacker, a free online tool that I launched here in the House of Commons? It is run by activists and uses FCA rules that are poorly understood by the general public to help consumers to get back their £50—or however much it is—from companies that use extortion to get money out of others. Is he also aware, given his broader role in the Treasury, of the fact that it is mainly NHS and public sector workers who are in this debt trap, because wages have not kept up with housing, energy and other costs?

John Glen: The hon. Lady raises two points. I was not familiar with the Debt Hacker app, but I will seek it out because it sounds like a very worthwhile initiative. I respectfully say to her that in the fourth quarter of 2018 debt as a percentage of household income was 139%, whereas 10 years previously it was 160%. I recognise that households are experiencing strain, but it is not quite as dire as she makes out.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Loan sharks are the unacceptable face of capitalism, but this is a complex area and the Government should proceed with caution. Confidence in the market, and in capitalism more generally, depends crucially on the payment of debt. I very much hope that the Government will consult widely with the industry, particularly with credit card companies, and consider piloting, because there are unintended consequences of Governments, in their dying days, trying to virtue-signal and regulate more but actually doing more damage than good. Therefore, please may we have piloting and widespread consultation?

John Glen: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his observations. This is not virtue-signalling; it is delivering on a manifesto commitment with the sectors involved, carefully and methodically. We rightly have a robust regulator with powers to deal with exploitative credit providers. As I indicated earlier, we are not complacent. I observe his concerns about ensuring that we implement this appropriately and with the wide assent of the industry.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): I welcome the breathing space scheme, which will certainly be helpful in Blaenau Gwent, because we discovered that Wonga lent £1 million a year to our borough's residents. I suspect that a 60-day period will not be enough. The fact is that although citizens advice bureaux are great, we have insufficient guidance and support in our borough. I think that 90 days might be necessary, or perhaps even more, so I ask the Minister to think carefully about that possibility.

John Glen: We certainly keep all matters under review, but the 60-day period has not come from nowhere; it has come from deep engagement with the sector. As Joanna Elson, the chief executive of the Money Advice Trust, has said,

"this new scheme could well be a game-changer in our efforts to tackle problem debt as a society."

I recognise that there are a range of views, but we have looked at what is out there and considered the Scottish experience, and we believe that this is the right policy response.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Unless I am much mistaken, the hon. Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien) is in danger of being rather a naughty man. I am advised that he beetled into the Chamber halfway through the response from the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman—*[Interruption.]* I was advised that he came through the double doors. I do not know whether he toddled out for some reason and then came back. If he is telling me—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) is chuntering from a sedentary position, and gesticulating as well, and in a manner not altogether helpful at this juncture to the Chair. If the hon. Member for Harborough says to me explicitly that he was here at the very start of the statement, I am happy to indulge him. Otherwise, I would say that he should count his lucky stars, because after all he did get in at Prime Minister's questions, so he has had a jolly good day.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): I take your advice, Mr Speaker. You think I was not here at the very start, and you are surely correct, so I will sit down.

Mr Speaker: Well, it is merely a question of remaining seated. After that Socratic dialogue, we will leave it for now. The hon. Gentleman can bank his PMQ. Very well done.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Financial difficulties are considered an adverse childhood experience. Facing problem debt in the family as a child can perpetuate cycles of poor mental health, low achievement, poor employment opportunities, prison, drug addiction and so on. I am very pleased that the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) earlier drew attention to ACEs. Will the Minister assure me that the breathing space scheme will include advisers being trained in adverse childhood experiences and trauma, so that the problems of financial hardships are not perpetuated into the next generation?

John Glen: The hon. Lady makes a very reasonable point about the nature of the training for debt advisers. I cannot give her a specific commitment on that, because there are so many partners involved, but I will look into it and see what can be done to advance that very reasonable observation about the quality of advice given.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I welcome the proposals, although it has taken us since 2017 to get to this point and it is going to take another two years to get the first part operational. I am glad the Minister is moving swiftly and not dragging his feet.

Two problems for people who get into debt, particularly over tax credits or benefit clawback, are the interest charges that are applied as they try to repay and the management fees charged on top by debt-recovery agencies, which mean that the debt increasingly expands. The Minister could have a direct input on both those things; why does he not put a ceiling on those charges, rather than simply using a freeze?

John Glen: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point, but that is not an area for which I have direct responsibility. Reclaimed overpayments—for example, from universal credit—will be included in the scheme. I cannot comment on things that are outside my control, but I hear his point about doing this as quickly as possible.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Ind): The announcement of the scheme is brilliant news and I welcome the statement enormously, and particularly the parts on the inclusion of Government debt in the scheme. I also welcome the fact that the Government have recognised the effect that debt has on people's lives and their ability to get out of debt. However, I urge the Minister to look into the Government's own policies—I suspect he knows what I am coming to. The five-week universal credit wait is a big issue. Advance payments are not the solution because they themselves are a debt and are putting vulnerable people further into debt. As I have said many times, the advance payment for the most vulnerable should be a grant, not a loan. As it is, we are handing out advance payments to around 60% of claimants. We are handing out the money anyway, so it is not going to cost us anything. It is just a cash-flow situation.

The Work and Pensions Committee has recently heard moving and horrendous testimonies from women who have been forced into sex work because they cannot make ends meet. We heard stories of women going into a brothel for around three days, working 20 hours out of 24 and coming out with £150 of earnings, and that gives them a roof over their heads as well. As our Prime Minister leaves office, I cannot believe that is the legacy she wants to leave behind. Please will the Minister look into this issue? It is also a Government debt.

John Glen: I acknowledge the hon. Lady's deep interest in and work on this topic over several years. She has raised points to which it is difficult for me to respond because they are outwith my responsibilities. As she will know, in the Budget we announced a £1.7 billion package of additional financial support for universal credit. I acknowledge that the hon. Lady disagrees with one element, but that additional support did involve the

reduction of the maximum deduction from the standard allowance, from 40% to 30%. I cannot speak for a policy area for which I do not have responsibility. I am delivering a breathing space scheme that covers a wide range of debts and reaches deep into public sector debts, which I was keen for it to do from the outset.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): As I set out in a recent Westminster Hall debate, the amounts being deducted from universal credit are a significant part of the reasons people fall into problem debt. I agree that a lot of that is down to Department for Work and Pensions policy, but I have seen many examples of people whose tax credit overpayments are being deducted from their universal credit, and of people being told that they have overpayments dating from 2006 or 2011, when they were supposed to have been written off. The average of £1,200 being deducted from people's universal credit is contributing to their not having enough to get by or to pay their bills. Will the Minister and the Treasury please look into this issue as a matter of urgency and allow people to appeal against such deductions?

John Glen: The hon. Lady will know that, as I said in response to the previous question, that is an issue of the administration of benefits and is the responsibility of the DWP. I will certainly make her observations clear to my colleagues in Government. Universal credit overpayments will be included from day one. I will make sure that I fully address the hon. Lady's points and write to her on the detail.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I very much welcome the statement and the action that will be taken from today, because research shows that each year more than 100,000 people who are in debt attempt suicide. The scheme has to be helpful in giving them the support they need and improving mental health. One suicide crisis period, particularly for young men, is early adulthood; will the Minister liaise with colleagues to ensure that financial education and support is available not only in schools but in colleges and universities?

John Glen: The hon. Lady makes a sensible point about the need for appropriate financial education at all levels. It needs to start early and endure through adolescence and into early adulthood. Several initiatives are under way to try to improve the quality of financial advice. The setting up of the Money and Pensions Service and its broader remit in this area is one part of that, but there are other partners, including our banks, through UK Finance, which is keen to do more. I very much take on board the hon. Lady's observations.

Businesses: Late Payments

1.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst): With permission, I wish to make a statement about the Government response to the "Creating a responsible payment culture" call for evidence, which I have published today.

The Government are committed to supporting small and medium-sized enterprises to start well and grow, including through a network of 38 growth hubs throughout England that provide advice, guidance and support. As part of our industrial strategy, we have an action plan to unlock more than £20 billion of investment in innovative and high-potential businesses. Where we see practices that unfairly constrain SMEs' finance choices, we are prepared to act. For example, we recently removed a barrier that was preventing some SMEs from using invoice finance because of prohibitive contract terms imposed by their customers. The new measure is expected to provide a long-term boost to the UK economy worth almost £1 billion.

Last year, we launched a call for evidence asking for views on how to create a responsible payment culture for small business. Although a number of measures are already in place to tackle late payment—from the prompt payment code to the ability to charge interest on late payments and the increased transparency through the payment practices reporting duty—the call for evidence told us that there is more to do to improve the payment landscape. That is why I am announcing today that I will now take further and firmer action to tackle the scourge of late payments while maintaining a holistic approach to cultural change by using all the avenues available to us in this space.

I will shortly launch a consultation to seek views on strengthening the small business commissioner's ability to assist and advocate for small business in the area of late payments through the provision of powers to compel the disclosure of information. I will also seek views on the merit of the commissioner's potentially being able to issue penalties for poor payment practices. In respect of large businesses that have poor or unfair payment practices, we want to seek views on whether the commissioner should be able to apply sanctions, such as binding payment plans or financial penalties.

I am also announcing today that responsibility for the voluntary prompt payment code is to move to the small business commissioner and be reformed. This will unify prompt payment measures with the commissioner's other responsibilities and address weaknesses in the operation of the current code. We have seen the impact of the strengthening of the code since our announcement in October: earlier in the year, we saw the removal from the code of five businesses and the suspension of 12 others. The next compliance round is currently under way.

I will take a tough compliance approach to large companies that do not comply with the payment practices reporting duty. The legislation allows for the prosecution of those who do not comply. I will use this enforcement power against those who do not comply, where necessary. We are already writing to the businesses that we have assessed as being within scope to remind them of their duty.

[Kelly Tolhurst]

The Government will launch a business basics fund competition, with funding of up to £1 million, which will encourage small and medium-sized enterprises to utilise payment technology. We have recognised that tech adoption has had a positive impact on the productivity of small businesses. This competition is coupled with the small business commissioner's strategy to deliver advice, signpost and provide a clear pathway for small businesses when they feel that they need support.

I also intend to establish a ministerial-led group to bring together key Government Departments to act on improving prompt payment across both the public and private sectors. We are working with UK Financial Investments and the financial sector to review the role that supply chain finance plays in fair and prompt payments, including the potential for an industry-led standard for good practice in supply chain finance. This review will report back to the Business Secretary by the end of the year.

We also want to bring greater transparency to how supply-chain finance is reported in company accounts and assessed in audits. Working with the Financial Reporting Council, we want to develop guidance and build that into its sampling of companies' accounts. Supply-chain finance can provide an affordable finance option for SMEs, but they need to be assured that the terms are fair.

Our modern industrial strategy aims to make Britain the best place in which to start and grow a business, and removing barriers to growth is key to that aim. The response to the call for evidence and the package of measures that I am announcing today will ensure that we will continue to tackle the issue of late payments. I offer great thanks to the Federation of Small Businesses and its Fair Pay campaign, which has campaigned so hard for movement from the Government. I also thank the hundreds of businesses that have taken part and engaged comprehensively with the Department in assessing the call for evidence.

Finally, I thank the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee for its significant work on this issue and the work that it will continue to do. I am sure that it will hold us to account on the improvements that we are announcing today. I will place a copy of the Government's response in the Libraries of both Houses today. I commend the statement to this House.

1.42 pm

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): Unfortunately, I have only just received a copy of the Minister's statement. I do not know why there was a delay, but it was not particularly helpful in preparing my response. [Interruption.] The Minister has just graciously apologised.

Late payment is believed to be the cause of 50,000 business failures each year, at a cost to the economy of £2.5 billion, along with thousands of jobs. Those are figures from the Federation of Small Businesses. The Minister is right to pay tribute to that organisation for the brilliant work that it does in advocating for small businesses on this issue and on so many others.

In her press statement, the Minister reported a fall in the scale of the problems facing small businesses, but let me caution her on that. She cited the excellent work of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee,

but it has suggested that it has evidence that payment terms are growing longer to mask some of these problems. Perhaps she can address that through some of the proposals that she has outlined.

We welcome the steps announced today as an important start in tackling the scourge of late payment. I tabled amendments to the Enterprise Bill that would have given the small business commissioner powers to insist on binding arbitration and fines for persistent late payment. The Government rejected those amendments, so we put the proposals in our 2017 manifesto, along with requirements for anyone bidding for a Government contract to pay their suppliers within 30 days. It is good to see the Government catching up with us today in their proposals.

The small business commissioner does great work with the £1.35 million in his revenue budget and, as I understand it, 12 members of staff at his disposal, but there are limits to what he can do. Although the £3.8 million recovered by the commissioner is important to the businesses affected, it is a fraction of the money withheld by late payers, which is in the tens of billions of pounds on any of the estimates available to us. What extra budget will the commissioner be given to discharge the additional responsibilities that the Minister is proposing, and what is the timescale for the consultation?

Accountability of company boards is a step in the right direction, but it will be important to compare the experience of the supplier with the reported practice in company accounts. How will the Minister ensure that what is reported is the time from the date of supply of goods and services rather than the date of recording the invoice, which any accountant knows can be significantly different and is often subject to delay when invoices are mysteriously lost or queried by accounts departments? How will this add to the existing duty to report? When will the consultation on giving the powers on the duty to report to the small business commissioner take place?

As the Minister told us, a number of companies that are members of the prompt payment code have been found not to comply with the code. The scandal of Carillion is an example of abuse of that code; we saw payment times of 120 to 180 days becoming the norm. Giving the policing of that code to the small business commissioner is a sensible idea, so will the Minister say what additional resources for these powers will be given to him?

The use of project bank accounts would have prevented the £2 billion loss to 38,000 suppliers in the Carillion fiasco. What consideration are the Government giving to extending the use of project bank accounts? I also note that the Government are pledging from 1 September to force bidders for Government contracts of more than £5 million to pay 95% of their invoices within 60 days. That is in line with the prompt payment code, but only with the lower end of its requirements. Why not make it a 30-day requirement?

One complaint of businesses is that the public sector is the source of some of the worst practice. The Minister mentioned the public sector in her statement. Another complaint is that smaller firms are often at fault in delaying payments. When does she expect action to be taken on public sector and other small business delays?

The problems of late payment need significant changes in practice. Today's statement announces a series of measures which, if properly resourced, could make a

significant difference. Businesses deserve a change of culture. The economy and the country need a change in practice. In broadly welcoming these measures, I hope that the Government's delivery matches the rhetoric.

Kelly Tolhurst: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for the fact that he did not receive a copy of my statement in sufficient time. That was not my intention at all. I hope that he will understand, following the many debates that he and I have had in the House, that that is not how I tend to work with him. I thank him for recognising that this statement should have an impact on the late-payment problems of many small businesses. One thing that has been made absolutely clear to me since I became a Minister—and actually prior to being elected, when I was a small business owner myself—is that late payment is always raised by companies that deal with large organisations. I am very pleased to be able to move forward on this matter.

The amount of money owed in late payments has halved. I wish to recognise the work that has been done by the small business commissioner since he took up his role one and a half years ago. He has collected more than £3.5 million in late payments. The hon. Gentleman is right to question his role and when the consultation will take place. We want that consultation to happen quite quickly. One of the key things that came out of the call for evidence was that people wanted more powers to be given to the small business commissioner. They saw his role as, in effect, an umbrella role encompassing a number of enforcement abilities for him to act on behalf of small businesses.

The consultation will happen soon, and I would like it to take place with speed. I reiterate that, as we seek views on whether we should allow the small business commissioner to apply sanctions such as binding payment plans and financial penalties, that would be a massive step change and step forward. The small business commissioner has been very vocal in requesting more powers to enable him to represent and help the small businesses that come to him.

We will also be seeking views on whether the small business Minister should have the ability to refer topics to the small business commissioner for investigation. The small business commissioner will currently investigate only once a complaint has come from a small business, so we are looking at other ways in which investigations could be carried out. Obviously, I am giving hon. Members just a sample of what will be included in the consultation.

The hon. Gentleman is quite right on the matter of boards. On the back of the Chancellor's announcements in the spring, we are pleased to give audit committees the power to review payment practices and for that to be included in the annual report. We are working with the Financial Reporting Council and the frameworks department at BEIS to work out the best way for that to happen. The new strategic reporting requirement was introduced in January. We are asking the FRC how the payment reporting duty is covered by that new duty, if at all. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we will legislate to make that happen if necessary.

The Chartered Institute of Credit Management has worked hard on this issue over recent months, especially on the strengthening of the voluntary prompt payment code in October. We are pleased that cross-examining the data gathered under the payment reporting duty has

helped with compliance with the voluntary code. We and the CICM believe that the best place for that duty is with the small business commissioner, so that the commissioner is, in effect, a one-stop shop and an easily identifiable pathway for small businesses.

The hon. Gentleman is right to talk about project bank accounts. Some hon. Members present, including my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), have lobbied me in the past on the matter of retentions. We have told the industry that we expect it to come to a consensus on a way forward, and we will take action if it does not.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have announced that from 1 September any company bidding for Government contracts over £5 million will be expected to pay 95% of their invoices within 60 days. If they do not achieve that target, they will not necessarily be able to bid for further contracts. In April 2019, we announced our new ambition that 90% of undisputed invoices should be paid to small businesses within five days.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): Like the Minister, I ran a small business, so I recognise the challenge of late payments for small businesses. It is to the credit of this Government that they created the role of small business commissioner. The Minister said that she is holding a consultation on additional powers for the small business commissioner, who has often said that he needs more powers. Will she be a little clearer about when those powers might be available to him, and whether they will include the power to fine businesses that fail to honour their commitments? The Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee has heard about many businesses that signed up to the prompt payment code but failed to adhere to its terms, and the small business commissioner needs a little bit more beef to get his teeth into that issue. Finally, will she consider making it mandatory to add interest to overdue accounts, because that would give businesses that are delaying payments a real incentive to get their payments made on time?

Kelly Tolhurst: Primary legislation would be required to give further powers to the small business commissioner, so we will seek views and consult. We do want to give the small business commissioner further powers—for example, the ability to apply sanctions to businesses that do not comply with requests for information, court orders or financial penalties. Such sanctions could include binding payment plans.

My hon. Friend asked whether we would consider making it mandatory to apply interest to overdue accounts. There is currently low take-up of the application of interest to invoices, so there needs to be an education piece for small businesses, which we very much hope to achieve through the small business commissioner. With all these elements coming under one roof, he can launch an ambitious PR strategy to enable small businesses to understand what powers already exist for them.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I thank the Minister for advance sight of her statement, which in our case arrived in plenty of time for us to look at. We welcome initiatives to curb late payments, but let us be frank: this does not go nearly far enough. For anyone tuning in to last night's Tory hard Brexit hustings, it will come as no

[Drew Hendry]

surprise that the UK Government remain opposed to taking the steps required to protect Scottish business. Does the Minister have the good grace to agree that it is now beyond a joke that, in place of serious policy steps, her statement merely proposes some minor technological measures and platitudes on best practice? And she did not fully answer this question, so can she confirm that she has looked at the Scottish Government's project bank account scheme? Has she learned any lessons about how that is protecting smaller contractors and subcontractors on public procurement projects?

With the Federation of Small Businesses stating, "If all payments were made on time 50,000 more businesses could be kept open each year",

it is clear that small business needs legal protection, so does the Minister now regret her Government's failure to support the Construction Industry (Protection of Cash Retentions) Bill, with which my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) aimed to stop late payments in that sector? Indeed, does she regret her Government's failure to extend that sort of protection across the economy to all small and medium-sized enterprises?

Kelly Tolhurst: I stand here today and make announcements, but we also need to recognise that this is about culture. We want to use all the tools in the box to legislate and take action where possible, but we also want to work with the industry and businesses to change the culture. It is not right that large firms take advantage of smaller businesses through late payments, so today we bring forward our response to the call for evidence, to stem the scourge of late payments.

The hon. Gentleman mentions project bank accounts. As I briefly outlined in my response to the previous question, project bank accounts and the use of retention is obviously a concern for many people. It is part of the whole late payment arena. That is why, as I have said, we have worked with the industry and heard the views of both sides. A consensus has yet to be found in the industry. The challenge that we have set is that the industry must come to a way forward or we will take action.

To answer the hon. Gentleman's question, I have indeed looked at some of the work that has gone on in Scotland and at what has happened in Northern Ireland. I highlight what the Federation of Small Businesses said today:

"Small businesses will be delighted with today's announcement. FSB has worked very hard with government to create a whole-board approach to late payment within the UK's large companies, and empower Audit Committees to look after the supply chain. Together with measures to strengthen the Small Business Commissioner's powers and reform the Prompt Payment Code, the measures today could finally see an end to poor payment practice."

Andrew Griffiths (Burton) (Con): The words that my hon. Friend just spoke were those of my constituent, Mr Mike Cherry. There can be no greater praise than that from such an advocate for small business. The FSB supports these measures, so I commend her on them.

Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the main challenges is not late but prompt payment? Far too many big businesses continue to extend payment terms—150 days, 180 days or even more. That is simply not

acceptable and is unfeasible for many small businesses. Will my hon. Friend add that to her to-do list and really make a difference for small businesses?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank my hon. Friend for his question and recognise his particular interest as my predecessor in this post. He is absolutely correct: prompt payment is a particular concern for small businesses, and some large companies alter their payment terms. We are seeking views on giving the small business commissioner more powers because he acts for small businesses that have struggled with getting prompt payment. Currently, his powers are not binding; we feel that if his powers were binding, that could be part of his suit of armour in tackling late and non-payments.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): I call the Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, Rachel Reeves.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker.

When our Select Committee looked into this issue, many small businesses insisted on giving evidence in private, so worried were they about retaliation from the big businesses that they supplied. Larger businesses, including Morrisons, Aldi and WH Smith, are not signatories to the prompt payment code, while Boots pays suppliers at a discount for the privilege of their being paid on time. The power imbalance is so great now between bigger and smaller businesses that. I urge the Government and the Minister to look again, make the prompt payment code mandatory and bring down the period to a benchmark of 30 days.

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank the hon. Lady and highlight again the significant work that her Committee has done on this issue, including with our Department. She is absolutely right to highlight the power imbalance, which is why many small businesses feel that they are unable to speak out. That is why we are seeking views in our consultation on powers for the small business commissioner. We will seek to enable the Small Business Minister to make a referral to the small business commissioner; to give the commissioner investigatory powers similar to those of the Groceries Code Adjudicator; and to empower him to carry out an investigation without the small business involved having had to report the issue. There is a suggestion that the process could be anonymised.

The hon. Lady raises an important point, and I am very much aware of it. It will be very much part of my drafting, with the team, in regard to the consultation.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I welcome this statement from the Minister and I know that she is committed to ensuring that small businesses are dealt with fairly.

The project bank accounts introduced by the Northern Ireland Executive have already been mentioned. That measure now applies to hundreds of millions of pounds of Government contracts and ensures that the money goes not to the main contractor but directly to the subcontractors when they have completed the work. That stops the main contractor holding on to the money or bargaining with the small companies and means that the small companies do not have to take the initiative,

which they are sometimes afraid to do. Will the Minister work with Northern Ireland officials to ensure that the lessons learned there can be applied here?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for raising that. I highlight his particular interest in this area and the fact that he was one of the Ministers responsible in Northern Ireland when project bank accounts were introduced there. He is right that there are absolutely some merits in such accounts; as he knows, I have taken a particular interest in the subject and I will continue to work on it. The Government are clear that where project bank accounts can be used with Government contracts, they will be, although they are not always a suitable measure in some large contracts.

Today, I have announced a suite of tools to tackle late payments. Am I going to stand here and say that in future we will not have to do anything more? Of course not. Part of government and what we need to do in a changing economy and business environment is to make sure that we keep looking at ways to make things easier for small businesses.

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (LD): I thank the Minister for advance sight of her statement. She talked about the challenges facing small businesses. Brexit, of course, will cause huge disruption to small businesses' supply chains, given the added bureaucracy and tariffs.

This statement on late payments is welcome, but may I ask the Minister again the specific question put by the Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves)? Why not make the prompt payment code mandatory—compulsory for large businesses? Why is there is further delay with consultations and what have you? She should make it mandatory, as we have been arguing for.

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank the hon. Gentleman for welcoming the statement and the moves that the Government have made today. He is absolutely right about the prompt payment code: it is voluntary. As it stands, there are more than 2,000 signatories to it; they sign up and commit to paying 90% of their invoices within 60 days. As he will know, the Government initiated the new duty on companies to report biannually on payment practices. To date, we have had more than 15,000 reports for over 7,000 companies. That data has enabled the Chartered Institute of Credit Management to scrutinise the voluntary code payment data.

We have seen action. Five businesses have been removed from the code and 12 have been suspended. As I have outlined today, when people are not complying with the legislation, we will take action. We are continuing to move forward to strengthen the prompt payment code and close any holes and weaknesses that there are.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): When it comes to cash retentions, the Minister said twice that it was up to industry to find a way forward, but they are

actually a Government responsibility. It is about 40 years since it was first recommended that the use of cash retentions in the construction industry be phased out. In my time as an MP, the Government have consulted twice on the issue, voted down amendments to the Enterprise Bill, and refused to back both my private Member's Bill and that of the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous). Instead of listening to the large, tier 1 contractors, will the Minister pledge to take action and give a timescale for the phasing out of the use of cash retentions in the construction industry?

Kelly Tolhurst: The hon. Gentleman raises the issue of retentions. He says that this is not for industry, but for the Government. I have spoken to industry representatives and businesses about this issue, and it is clear that the industry has not come to a single way forward to deal with this. We hope that the measures that I have announced today on supply chain finance will make a big difference. With regard to cash retentions, I have been clear that if industry cannot come to a consensus on a way forward, the Government will step in and take action.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I welcome the Minister's statement, and I thank her for meeting me after I introduced my Public Sector Supply Chains (Project Bank Accounts) Bill earlier this year. However, the measures she has introduced are actually recommendations from the 2013 inquiry that I led into late payments. Six years on, this is a little late, although I recognise her commitment. These measures will be no comfort to Neil Skinner, who owns a business in my constituency and lost £176,000 when Carillion collapsed. That was not a one-off; we know that there are other Carillions out there. Some 380 small businesses closed directly as a result of Carillion's collapse. I cannot understand why she is so reticent after decades of this issue and why she will not act on project bank accounts.

Kelly Tolhurst: I recognise the hon. Lady's passion and commitment. As I have said to her in previous meetings, I am happy to continue to work with her on this issue. Project bank accounts have value. I have announced the measures we are taking, following the call for evidence. I understand that she is disappointed in the time it has taken to bring these measures forward, but we are taking action. These bad practices have been happening not only in recent years but for decades, and this Government are finally taking action.

The hon. Lady is right to mention her constituent and the losses that his business suffered through the collapse of Carillion. Carillion's debt was estimated to be £900 million at the end, which excluded £500 million of supply chain finance. That is why we will work with the Financial Reporting Council to find ways to bring transparency to companies' accounts and reporting, which we hope will address any larger failures in the future.

Nuclear Submarine Recycling (Reporting)

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

2.13 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the Government to prepare a strategy for recycling out-of-service Royal Navy nuclear submarines and to report annually on progress, to consult on extending decommissioning powers in Part 1 of the Energy Act 2004 to include the recycling of Royal Navy nuclear submarines, and to publish estimates of the taxpayer liability associated with such submarines; and for connected purposes.

Britain still has every nuclear submarine that it has ever had. There are 13 old nuclear submarines tied up in Devonport in Plymouth and seven tied up in Rosyth. When I was elected in 2017, I said that I would make safely, securely and sustainably recycling these submarines one of my priorities. I have asked the Prime Minister two questions at PMQs about the lack of a funded plan to recycle them. I have helped to put together a cross-party campaign with the hon. Members for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman) and for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan). We have met Ministers, submitted proposals and encouraged the questioning of the Public Accounts Committee, which published an excellent report on the subject today. We now present our arguments and proposals in this Bill. The Bill has cross-party backing from a range of colleagues who are all as passionate as I am to get these nuclear submarines recycled safely and securely, and I am grateful to see so many of them in the Chamber.

Many people are not aware that we still have all the submarines that have served in the Royal Navy. The 13 stored in Devonport and the seven in Rosyth are potentially just the start of many more to enter storage. The oldest submarine stored in Devonport is HMS Valiant, which was launched in 1963 at the height of the cold war. The submarines can be seen on Google Maps—if anyone watching this debate zooms in on Plymouth, on the left-hand side of the city, at No. 3 basin in Devonport, they will see lines of nuclear submarines, many of which have been there for decades.

It would be easy for me to make cheap headlines by saying that these nuclear submarines pose a safety risk, but populism is not my style. I want to be clear that there is no immediate safety risk to our local communities from these submarines. Babcock does all it can to look after the submarines, ensuring that there are no leaks and no risks to our communities. I thank the company and its staff for their work, but Plymouth and Rosyth cannot be asked to look after the submarines indefinitely without a plan for their disposal.

This is a personal matter for me. I am the son of a submariner who served on HMS Swiftsure and HMS Conqueror and worked on refitting and extending the operational lives of many of these submarines as an engineer in Devonport—my family know these subs well. It is a point of curiosity not lost on my old man that one Pollard served on them, and his son is busy trying to chop them up and dispose of them, but both Pollards are doing what is in the national interest.

We already have a civil nuclear programme dealing with the clean-up of our civil nuclear past. The taxpayer-funded Nuclear Decommissioning Authority is working

on cleaning up 17 old civil nuclear sites, but its work does not currently cover decommissioned nuclear submarines. The taxpayer has an unlimited liability for the clean-up, as clearly stated in the Energy Act 2004, and rightly so. We know that nine of the 20 submarines retired since 1980 contain nuclear fuel. They are not currently a risk, but they need to be dealt with. My Bill seeks to prepare the ground for the extension of the unlimited taxpayer liability for civil nuclear clean-up to these old Royal Navy submarines. If we extend the line of credit from the Treasury, work can begin, and we can genuinely deal with our nuclear legacy.

These submarines are not only taking up valuable space in our dockyards but costing the taxpayer millions of pounds a year in storage and maintenance costs. The Public Accounts Committee has today released a report that puts the cost to the taxpayer at £30 million a year. That money could and should be used for dismantling and defuelling the submarines and finally dealing with these retired boats.

The report warns that the Ministry of Defence is reaching a “crisis point” in terms of space and will run out of space to store submarines by the mid-2020s. In the next four years, three more Trafalgar class submarines will need to be stored somewhere, as they are replaced by the new Astute class subs being built in Barrow. The Prime Minister told me in this Chamber that they will be stored at Devonport, taking our number of old retired submarines up to 16. A decade later, the four Vanguard class Trident subs will need to be stored when they are taken out of service and replaced by the new Dreadnought class submarines, but where will they go? There is no space at Devonport, and Rosyth is closed for more submarines. That is why we need a funded plan to deal with the ones we have and make space for the ones that will come out of service soon.

Instead of further delaying this decision, it is clear that the Government need to act now. I know that Rosyth has plans for the dock space currently used by the submarines, and I want No. 3 basin in Devonport to be used to enhance the base-porting location for the brilliant new Type 26 frigates we will get, and hopefully the Type 31 frigates in due course.

Over a year ago, I helped to kick off this campaign with colleagues from all parties. We wrote to the Prime Minister urging her to fund a defuelling and dismantling strategy. These submarines will not go away on their own. Although they have been hidden out of sight for many years, the longer this recycling project drags on, the more expensive it becomes to deal with them. Retired submarines have been ignored by Governments of all colours for more than 50 years. They need to be dealt with properly—I think all parties can unite on that—to secure a safe and decent future.

A properly funded defuelling and dismantling strategy—broadly, submarine recycling—would present opportunities to invest in skills and innovation. It would also foster greater collaboration between the defence and civil nuclear sectors. The workforce already moves between those sectors, as does the science of decommissioning, but at the moment the Government still deal with them in two distinct silos. There is an efficiency for the public purse in collaborating, and the future really must be more joined up between the ministerial and official level and the work on the ground and in the docks. Decommissioning is highly skilled and technical work that creates good

jobs and supports the local economy and community. Above all, recycling these old nuclear submarines is in the national interest. Plymouth and Rosyth cannot be asked to store old nuclear submarines indefinitely. That is why we need a properly funded plan for these submarines, using the same principles as in the civil nuclear clean-up programme, because they must be recycled safely, securely and sustainably.

We know that once people find out about these submarines, they are concerned about what will happen to them. We also know that once people have seen them—whether on Google Maps, in person by driving alongside the docks in Devonport and Rosyth, or on the warship tours in the dockyard in Devonport—they have no choice but to think about what should happen to them. That is why, on behalf of the hon. Members for Berwick-upon-Tweed and for Dunfermline and West Fife, I am presenting this Bill as part of a campaign that will not rest until we win. I am doing so to highlight these subs and to demand—politely, but firmly—that a solution is found. We need to acknowledge that these nuclear submarines exist and need to be dealt with. We need a proper plan from the MOD for recycling these submarines, with a clear timeframe, and we need to extend the unlimited taxpayer liability to ensure that this essential work can be delivered. That is what my Bill will do, and that is why it has cross-party support. I hope Ministers will pick it up and run with it.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Luke Pollard, Anne-Marie Trevelyan, Douglas Chapman, Dr Julian Lewis, Meg Hillier, Mrs Madeline Moon, Ruth Smeeth, Sir Gary Streeter, Richard Harrington, Dr Alan Whitehead, Jamie Stone and Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi present the Bill.

Luke Pollard accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 408).

Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Bill

Consideration of Bill, not amended in the Public Bill Committee

[Relevant documents: First Report of the Joint Committee on the Draft Parliamentary Buildings Bill, Governance of Restoration and Renewal, HC 1800, HL Paper 317; Government response to the Report of the Joint Committee on the Draft Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Bill, May 2019, CP 90.]

New Clause 1

EXAMINATION BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL

“(1) The Comptroller and Auditor General may carry out an examination of—

- (a) the Sponsor Body; or
- (b) the Delivery Authority; or
- (c) both the Sponsor Body and the Delivery Authority

under section 6 of the National Audit Act 1983.

(2) For the purpose of an examination of the Sponsor Body or the Delivery Authority, or the Sponsor Body and the Delivery Authority, under section 6 of the National Audit Act 1983, the Comptroller and Auditor General shall have a right of access at all reasonable times to relevant documents held or controlled by a person in circumstances in which that person has or had a contractual obligation to supply goods or services directly or indirectly to the Sponsor Body or Delivery Authority, and the Comptroller and Auditor General shall be entitled to require from such a person holding or accountable for any such document such information and explanation as are reasonably necessary for that purpose.

(3) For the purposes of subsection (2) a person has a contractual obligation to supply goods or services indirectly to the Sponsor Body or Delivery Authority if and only if that person has a contractual obligation to supply goods or services that arises from a contract which is a subcontract in relation to a main contract between the Sponsor Body or Delivery Authority and another person or body.

(4) For the purposes of subsection (3), a contract is a subcontract in relation to a main contract if its performance would fulfil, or contribute to the fulfilment of, an obligation to supply goods or services in the main contract.

(5) In subsection (2) “relevant documents” means documents that relate to the contractual obligation to supply goods or services.”—(Mark Tami.)

Brought up, and read the First time.

2.23 pm

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment 1, in clause 2, page 2, line 16, at end insert—

- “(f) to require the Delivery Authority when allocating contracts for construction and related work to have regard for the company’s policies on corporate social responsibility, including those relating to the blacklisting of employees or potential employees from employment.”

Amendment 6, page 2, line 21, at end insert—

- “(h) to undertake, and publish, an annual audit of the companies that have been awarded contracts for the Parliamentary building works, with a view to establishing their size and geographical location.”

[Mr Deputy Speaker]

Amendment 7, page 2, line 44, leave out “desirability of ensuring” and insert “need to ensure”.

This amendment requires the Parliamentary Works Sponsor Body, in exercising its functions, to have regard to the need to ensure that educational and other facilities are provided for people visiting the Palace of Westminster (rather than requiring it to have regard to the desirability of ensuring that such facilities are provided).

Amendment 4, page 2, line 46, at end insert—

“(h) the need to ensure that economic benefits of the Parliamentary building works are delivered across the nations and regions of the United Kingdom, in terms of contracts for works and in any other way the Sponsor Board considers appropriate.”

Amendment 5, page 2, line 46, at end insert—

“(h) the need to conserve and sustain the outstanding architectural, archaeological and historical significance of the Palace of Westminster, including the outstanding universal value of the World Heritage Site.”

Amendment 8, in schedule 1, page 10, line 20, at end insert—

“() See also paragraph 7A, which makes provision about the appointment of the first external members.”

This amendment signposts the new paragraph 7A inserted by amendment 9 (which deals with the appointment of the first external members of the Parliamentary Works Sponsor Body).

Amendment 9, page 12, line 2, at end insert—

“Appointment of initial external members

7A (1) The person who, immediately before the commencement day, was the chair of the shadow Sponsor Body is to be treated as having been appointed on that day as the chair of the Sponsor Body in accordance with paragraph 2.

(2) Appointment by virtue of sub-paragraph (1) is to be treated as being for a term of 3 years.

(3) A person who, immediately before the commencement day—

(a) was a member of the shadow Sponsor Body (other than the chair), and

(b) was not a member of either House of Parliament,

is to be treated as having been appointed on that day as a member of the Sponsor Body in accordance with paragraph 3 (external members).

(4) Appointment by virtue of sub-paragraph (3) is to be treated as being for a term ending with the last day of the period of 3 years beginning with the day on which the shadow Sponsor Body was established.

(5) An appointment by virtue of sub-paragraph (1) or (3) ceases to have effect at the end of the period of 1 month beginning with the commencement day unless, before the end of that period, the appointment is confirmed by a resolution of each House of Parliament.

(6) Paragraphs 2, 3 and 6 do not apply in relation to a member who is appointed by virtue of sub-paragraph (1) or (3).

(7) In this paragraph—

“the commencement day” means the day on which section 2(1) comes into force;

“the shadow Sponsor Body” means the body, established in July 2018 in connection with the restoration of the Palace of Westminster, which is known as the shadow Sponsor Body.”

This amendment provides for those who were external members of the shadow Sponsor Body immediately before clause 2 comes into force to be appointed as the first external members of the Parliamentary Works Sponsor Body.

Mark Tami: I rise to speak to new clause 1 and amendment 6 on my behalf and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), and to amendments 8 and 9 on my behalf and that of the right hon. Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin).

New clause 1 seeks to give statutory powers to the Comptroller and Auditor General to examine the preparedness of the Sponsor Body and the Delivery Authority to undertake the parliamentary building works required. Importantly, that power would come now, rather than looking at the project in the years to come. The new clause would not mandate the Comptroller and Auditor General to do it, but it would give him the power and the opportunity to do so if he considered it appropriate. For public confidence, it is vital that this project delivers and is seen to deliver value for money for the taxpayer. There is clearly uncertainty about what exactly we will find when we start the work on the building. As we have already seen with the Elizabeth Tower, we can actually find some quite large increases in costs.

It is not currently easy for the CAG and the National Audit Office to access a company’s records of contracts. They can look at a contract between the Government and a body in the private sector, but the NAO does not have access rights to such companies’ accounts. While that is not detailed in the new clause, I hope the Government will look at it. Greater access and transparency is vital in this respect. In saying that, we do not want to put extra burdens on small and medium-sized enterprises and other companies looking to tender for work. In fact, as I will explain, we have to do everything to ensure that they actually tender, but I ask the Minister to look at this issue, because it will be important in the future.

Amendment 6 is very straightforward. It calls for an annual audit of all the contracts awarded under the programme so that we can see both the size of the companies and, importantly, where they are and where the money is spent around the country. This project, by its very nature, is based in London, but it should not just be a London-centric project. This is a national Parliament, and the work needs to be spread across the whole of the UK. I know that other amendments also look at that.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I entirely agree that where work has to be done, it should be spread around the country. Is the right hon. Gentleman envisaging that the audit should take into account the policy issues? For example, will it look at whether it is good value to move MPs out of this building, or whether there is some easier way of doing this without something so fundamental?

Mark Tami: As someone who has been involved in this from day one, I would say that we have looked at this very carefully, and the decision to decant from here was not taken lightly. A lot of work went into that, and I think we have made the right choice.

The two amendments in my name and that of the right hon. Member for Derbyshire Dales provide that the external members of the shadow Sponsor Body, including the chair, will be automatically transferred to the statutory Sponsor Body on the creation of that

statutory body. As a member of the shadow board, I can say that I greatly value the work and experience that the external members of the shadow board have brought to bear, and I think it is important that that carries on. The amendments cover the members who only last year went through a fair and open competition, based on merit, to be appointed to the shadow Sponsor Body. Given that the shadow Sponsor Body has only recently commenced its work, it is important to retain these members, for now, for the continuity of the restoration and renewal programme. I am grateful to the Minister for agreeing in Committee to work with the right hon. Gentleman and me on these amendments, which I hope the Government will accept.

These amendments will transfer all the external members of the shadow Sponsor Body to the statutory Sponsor Body. The chair will be appointed for a term of three years from the date the Sponsor Body is established in statute. The terms of the other external members of the Sponsor Body will be three years from the date the shadow Sponsor Body was established in July 2018. Once these terms have expired, the chair of the Sponsor Body will be responsible for setting the members' fixed terms, which cannot exceed three years. The Bill provides that, in doing so, the chair must have regard to the desirability of ensuring that appointments do not all expire at the same time. These amendments are a practical way forward, and I hope the House will accept them.

John Redwood: I am very happy that there should be proper audit and review, and I think the right spirit was struck by the right hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) in speaking about his proposal. However, I would like to raise the bigger policy issue. The underlying Bill he is seeking to amend says that the Delivery Authority is

“to formulate proposals relating to the design, cost and timing”

of the works, so it is not a done deal. I am very pleased it is not a done deal, because I think a lot of work needs to be done before committing to the plans that this House has not had a great deal of time to consider in this forum. It has been considered elsewhere, but perhaps other MPs have views that ought to be taken into account before we decamp from this important part of the Palace and embark on such fundamental works. When the audit looks into these matters, I hope it will take into account the wider issues of value for money and convenience, and the functions of this building.

2.30 pm

I pay tribute to the way in which a number of contractors and their staff are doing fundamental works to the Elizabeth Tower, while enabling us to use this building as if there were no interruption. They have done a remarkable job of not intruding on the work of Parliament. So far they have run a very safe site, which we all welcome. It shows that fundamental works can take place while we are using the buildings in the way that was intended. It is a good model. There are also a lot of roofing works going on at the moment, which again shows that these things can be done without fundamental and expensive change.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Is the right hon. Gentleman suggesting that because the Elizabeth Tower works are going on while we are sitting here, we

could somehow remain in parts of the Palace of Westminster while the works on it are carried out? Will he reflect on which parts of the Elizabeth Tower are used for parliamentary business and which parts we are hindered from accessing as the works are going on?

John Redwood: Of course, when the works need to move on to parts of the Palace that MPs use more often and more directly, alternative arrangements will need to be made. However, I do not think that means that all MPs need to move out of the old Palace for a long period of time, when it has been shown that bits of work can be done around the historic Palace without everybody having to decamp.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman is being kind in giving way. To support my hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray), in my 14 years in this Parliament, I do not think I have been in the Elizabeth Tower once. I think that strengthens the argument that has just been made from the Scottish National party's Front Bench.

John Redwood: I do not think it does at all, because I have also pointed out that there are a lot of roofing works going on. The hon. Gentleman is using the parts of the building that are being reroofed without being interrupted in his work. Again, I pay tribute to those who are carrying out the works without the need for fundamental change.

If we want value for money, we need to ensure that before any full plans are adopted, the Delivery Authority has done a proper job of analysing the options.

I also make a more fundamental point about our democracy. I know that there are many Members here who do not want to restore a proper independent democracy in Britain and are doing their best to ignore the wishes of the British people, as expressed in the referendum. It would be doubly ironic if they not only had their way on that, but said that we cannot use the historic Palace in the way that was intended for a long period. That would be a symbol that the public's wish—

Mark Tami *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. We need to keep to the Bill and the amendments. I know that a man of great stature like the right hon. Gentleman would not wish to lead the House where it is not supposed to go. I think that he was giving way to Mark Tami.

Mark Tami: To reinforce your point, Mr Deputy Speaker, I was about to say that we have had these arguments for ever and a day. We could have them again, but this debate is about the governance.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Hence I am sure Sir John will now go back to where he wanted to be.

John Redwood: I am very willing to do so. As I say, I welcome the principle that where works are conducted, there needs to be a proper audit. However, I go back to the intervention that I made at the start of the debate, when I said that any audit should also look at the policy, because I note that the legislation we are being

[John Redwood]

asked to approve today makes it very clear that the policy has not been finalised. We are setting up authorities and bodies to sort out both the policy and the implementation, so I submit that the audit must apply to the policy as well as to the implementation.

Neil Gray: I will speak to amendment 4, which appears in my name and those of colleagues not just in the Scottish National party, but across the House. The amendment would insert something that presently does not appear anywhere in the Bill, but which is critical for the project to enjoy not only political support, but the support of the public, particularly in the devolved nations.

Nowhere in the Bill is there a commitment that the project will see benefit derived outside London. However, clause 9, which is about spending issues relating to the project, extends and applies to Scotland. That means that taxpayers in Scotland will pay for their share of these works on a project in London but, with the way the Bill is currently drafted, will get nothing in return. We have had warm words, but according to what the Bill actually says, which is what matters, this will be another massive capital project in London, which already enjoys a huge share of UK capital spending—a third of it goes to London and the south-east.

Why is this important? Of all spending, capital spending derives the greatest economic benefit, bringing higher growth and employment to the areas where it occurs. Right now, London and the south-east benefit from a third of all UK capital spending. This multibillion-pound project will widen that gap and, as it has been designated a UK-wide project, there will be no Barnett consequential. I think that this project should go beyond Barnett and that there should be a capital investment fund, proportionate to the total cost of the project, to be allocated on a shared basis to the nations and regions. Perhaps it could be a requirement that the money is spent on restoring and renewing old buildings in those areas.

If amendment 4 does not pass, there will be nothing in the Bill to mandate the Sponsor Board or the Delivery Authority to ensure that any spending, any procurement or even one single job is gained outside London, where the project will obviously be based.

John Redwood: Does the hon. Gentleman recall that some £400 million of common taxpayers' money was spent on the Edinburgh Parliament, and no equivalent English Parliament has been granted? This is the Parliament of the Union, so we all share in it. His fellow countrymen and women voted to stay in that Union and are proud of their Union's Parliament.

Neil Gray: It is for the former Secretary of State for Wales to promote the idea of an English Parliament, not for a Member of the Scottish National party.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I applaud the hon. Gentleman on his amendment. I will be happy to support it if he presses it to a Division. If we are really serious about dealing with the huge geographical wealth inequalities within the British state, surely we should debate moving this Parliament outside London and the south-east.

Neil Gray: I thank my hon. Friend for that point. He will be aware that I pushed that idea when I sat on the first Joint Committee that reviewed the options appraisal. Unfortunately, I was outvoted 11 to one on that occasion, but it is something that the SNP has looked on favourably in the past.

Obviously I do not expect any kind of quota system for a nations and regions fund, which would fall foul of procurement law, but I do want something that ensures that the Sponsor Board and Delivery Authority have to at least be cognisant of discernible UK-wide benefit.

Why do we need to have this debate now? Look at what happened with the London Olympics. I am a massive sports fan and a former athlete, although I did not get to such heights as the Olympic games. However, I was a supporter of the London Olympics. As a fan, I watched it with interest. It was a fantastic event. However, it took a massive fight by my colleagues who were here at the time to ensure that there was even a semblance of UK-wide benefit. The Scottish Government received a fraction of what they should have had in Barnett consequential, and the lottery good causes funding for Scotland was raided to help pay for the games. Only now, seven years on, are we starting to see some of that charity money returning, but it will be spread over several years and many groups needed that money years ago. Estimates at the time put the Scottish contracts won from the London Olympics in the tens of millions, when £7 billion of contracts were up for grabs.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: My colleague and good friend is making a powerful speech. In describing the raid on the Scottish lottery budgets at the time of the Olympics, he is highlighting that what is happening here is another not very well disguised London subsidy from the pockets of Scottish taxpayers. This is why the Union is creaking. I say to Scottish Tory MPs who acquiesce in this: "You are not Unionists if you are doing this; you are submissionists. You should be making sure that Scotland gets its fair share of any subsidy that goes to London."

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Come on—let's stick to what the debate is about.

Neil Gray: Mr Deputy Speaker, I thought it was a perfectly reasonable intervention.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am the judge of that, not you, Mr Gray. Come on!

Neil Gray: Returning to the London Olympics, at the time, 4,200 Scottish companies registered their interest in providing services, while fewer than 200 actually secured any business. Most galling of all was that £135 million of legacy funding was made available for grassroots sport, but to be distributed by sports governing bodies south of the border. No extra funding was made available for Scottish sports governing bodies. There is no doubt that that experience left a bitter taste. We are not here to debate the London Olympics, but that is the last major infrastructure project similar in status to the restoration and renewal project, which is London-based, without full Barnett consequential and with a similar delivery model—I will come back to that.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I was there during the London Olympics and remember only too well the wrangling that went on because of the Barnett consequential issue. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to want something on the face of the Bill that assures the rest of the UK that it will get some sort of benefit from this project. If it does not, we will have years and years of the type of wrangling we had over the London Olympics, and what a waste of time that was.

Neil Gray: I totally agree, which is why I am pushing these amendments.

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is making the case that there is too much capital expenditure in London and the south-east on this project. I remind him of the massive expenditure on the two aircraft carriers built in Rosyth in southern Scotland, at enormous expense for the Union's taxpayers, for the benefit of Scottish companies and Scottish labour.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. We have a debate on amendments and Members are meant to be speaking to those amendments. I am not going to let the debate drift wherever people decide they want it to drift to. We will now go back to Mr Neil Gray. We need to get back to where we should be.

Neil Gray: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I have been referring to a relevant project, which was similar in status to the one under discussion today and one from which we should have learnt lessons. My colleagues and I have done our very best to be constructive in all our dealings on this issue, but there will come a point where we will have to ask for how long we can be ignored on an issue of fundamental importance to us, which is the fair share of resources. I fully expect this project to go beyond £10 billion, when all is said and done. If the project is Barnett-ised, that would mean a transfer just shy of £1 billion to Scotland. Right now, the Government are unwilling to contemplate not only some form of capital investment spin-off, but even a subtle instruction to the Sponsor Board to ensure contracts are secured across the UK. That is not acceptable and there must be a revision of that approach.

On the other amendments, we will support Labour's amendment 1 on blacklisting companies. Amendment 5 is a little bit concerning for me. I understand the intention from the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), but as I have said before this project will throw up irreconcilable conflicts which will make for very difficult decisions. One will be the conflict between access for members of the public versus heritage. Amendment 5, as well-intentioned as it may be, will make it far more difficult to make this place more accessible to disabled people. Besides, if this is just going to be a project to empty everything out and return it all back as it was but a bit cleaner, then what on earth is the point? The building contributes to the culture here, which is elitist, inaccessible and out of date, and that must change. We support amendment 6 as a way of improving the Bill, but it does not in itself satisfy our desire for greater emphasis to be placed on the Sponsor Board and the Delivery Authority to ensure the project has discernible UK-wide benefits.

In conclusion, I intend to press my cross-party amendment 4 to a Division to test the willingness of the Government to do more than just talk about this being a UK-wide project. We have seen what happens in the past: they are no such thing. We need concrete action to confirm that.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I will do the rather unusual job, Mr Deputy Speaker, of talking to my amendment, which is amendment 5. I am delighted that the shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), added her name to it. I am sure that will help to persuade the House that it would be a worthy addition to the Bill.

Amendment 5 adds an additional consideration for the Sponsor Body to have regard to. It is a probing amendment, but if anybody annoys me I will press it to a Division and see what the House thinks. I speak with my hat on as the chairman of the all-party group on archaeology and as a proud, sometime jobbing archaeologist.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: There are a lot of fossils around here.

Tim Loughton: There are certainly a lot of fossils on the Scottish National party Benches. [*Laughter.*]

2.45 pm

I thank the Minister for meeting me on this subject the other day—I know he takes an interest in it—and I pay tribute to the work done by the previous Leader of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom), who worked over such a long time to make the Bill possible and put so much of her energy into it.

I support the Bill. I support the arrangements for the status, role and functioning of the parliamentary works Sponsor Body. It is a huge undertaking, as I think we all acknowledge, which we absolutely need to get right. I do not want to do anything to make the Bill in any way unduly prescriptive and impede the flexibility of members of the board, who face a huge and challenging task to help to restore and rebuild the Palace. I get all that and I take no issue with the need to move out of this place as soon as possible for the work to be done. What slightly concerns me, however, is that all the amendments we are considering today, and indeed all the amendments that were considered in Committee and during the other stages, are really about process.

There are lots of perfectly valid considerations about the companies that will undertake the work, the economic benefit that should flow across the nation and the membership of the Sponsor Body. Those are legitimate debates to have, but at no point does any amendment actually refer to the unique archaeological, historical and constitutional significance of the building about whose work and future we are talking. No amendment mentions that. At no point was it even discussed in Committee. I was very surprised, when I read the Committee stage in *Hansard*, that it did not come up once. That is why my amendment, which is supported by Historic England and the all-party group on archaeology, is necessary. I was specifically tasked at our last meeting to raise this issue. The archaeological community is concerned about the absence of the consideration of heritage in the Bill.

I know that we have moved on, but when the underground car park was built some 40 or 50 years ago archaeological rigour was not quite as thorough as it might have been. It is likely that part of Edward the Confessor's original palace—a hugely significant building both to the nature of this whole area and its interrelation with Westminster Abbey—was lost in the construction of that car park. That was a piece of archaeological vandalism. We must absolutely make sure that, in the considerable work that will need to take place in this Palace, the full archaeological integrity and importance of the building—what is under it, what is on it and what is next to it—is appreciated and that we do not lose the opportunity to investigate more the history of this place or destroy, in our pursuit of getting a building that is more sustainable, user-friendly and so on, all that in the process.

John Redwood: These are very important considerations and I am glad my hon. Friend is raising them. One of the problems in dealing with a building that has 1,000 years of history on its site, as a royal palace and as legal and government buildings, is to know which era or eras one is most concerned about, what one is trying to conserve, and what one can hope to re-use or conserve. Does he have any thoughts on that complexity when there is so much history on site?

Tim Loughton: I will come on to that in a minute. It is said that all archaeology is destruction, because when you take something out of its context you cannot return it to that context. It is therefore absolutely essential that the context of what we find—part of archaeology is what you do not find and might have expected to—is absolutely respected and recorded in order to fit together the jigsaw puzzle, particularly for such an important building over so many centuries, and, most likely, over 1,000 years.

Dame Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): I reassure my hon. Friend that at the pre-legislative scrutiny stage, which I had the privilege of chairing, archaeological significance was indeed touched on. A number of members of the Committee had the opportunity to tour these premises and it became very clear to us that there is great deal more than one can actually see. The deeper we go in any excavation work the more unknown are the important artefacts that may remain below. There was also the rather tragic but true fact that about 17 chimney sweeps are unaccounted for. When we come to deconstruct and reconstruct the building, we need to be very mindful that there may be human remains deep down or within the building—[*Interruption.*] It is a fact and we need to be very respectful in how we go about these works.

Tim Loughton: My right hon. Friend makes a very valid point. I had not considered the prospect of mummified chimney sweeps as part of the archaeological excavations. I am pleased to hear that this issue was considered in pre-legislative scrutiny, which makes it even more surprising and even more of an omission that it did not make its way into the Bill. It is absolutely crucial.

My right hon. Friend and I entered this House on the same day back in 1997 and I have travelled around an awful lot of it, but there are still parts of it that I have not explored. I was privileged enough to go right up into the roof of Westminster Hall during repair work on the beams. I saw the original graffiti when some of

them were restored and the ways they had been put together. However, there was a great sadness at that stage. We lobbied through the all-party group on archaeology for a dendrochronology investigation of the beams, because it is likely that when their last major restoration took place in or around 1820, many of them originated from the hulls of ships broken in Portsmouth dockyard, as happened in many cases—an old part of my house is made from beams of ships that, it is thought, came from the 15th century. It is highly likely that some of the ships used here took part in the Battle of Trafalgar. We might have a major part of this country's long history within the confines of this Palace, yet despite our entreaties no investigation took place when the work was going on, even though that would have made it much easier and given us yet further explanation about how this place was put together. It is really important that we do not miss such opportunities, which we will not have again.

Neil Gray: I have great sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's amendment and I understand what he is trying to achieve. However, one of the great conflicts in this project will be between the need to restore heritage and the need to deliver greater access, particularly for disabled Members and disabled members of the public. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that his amendment, as it stands, tips the balance in favour of heritage, and where does he feel the balance needs to be struck?

Tim Loughton: I absolutely do not accept that—the two are not mutually exclusive. The list of considerations that the Sponsor Body must “have regard to”—not “have a veto on” or “be a more important consideration”—includes “value for money”,

“safety and security of people”,

the protection of the environment, being “sustainable”, ensuring that it is accessible to visitors, accessible to people working here with disabilities—absolutely—“improved visitor access”, and ensuring that

“educational and other facilities are provided for people visiting”.

I absolutely agree with all those—they are exceedingly crucial and worthwhile—so why is there a problem with adding that the Sponsor Body should “have regard to” the fact that this is a unique building?

It is not just a UNESCO world heritage site. Probably uniquely among UNESCO world heritage sites in this country, it is a working building where history is still being made. The history of the fabric of the building still has relevance to the ongoing organic development of our constitution and the way we govern this country. That is why it was so important that when people said, “Why don't we just turn this into a museum and have Parliament move into a purpose-built building?”, the point was made that that would completely ignore the importance of the heritage, history and cultural background of this place, which we could not repeat in a soulless, characterless, heritage-less, new, modern building. It would completely change the whole character of what we do here.

John Redwood: Again, an additional complication is that this is a complete Victorian rebuild of an earlier building, which also reflects the Victorian view of the history that predated the building. We therefore have a double time capsule: it is a piece of Victorian Britain and it is their view of the previous few hundred years.

Tim Loughton: My right hon. Friend is dealing with the really modern stuff—I will go back a bit further in a minute.

As you know more than many, Mr Deputy Speaker, the Palace of Westminster is one of the United Kingdom's most famous landmarks for UK citizens and it attracts thousands of tourists every year. The reason Parliament is committed to investing billions of pounds in the restoration and renewal programme is to protect the Palace, which is falling down, and its historical legacy for future generations. Considering that this could well be the whole nation's most ambitious and costly restoration project ever undertaken, it seems remarkable, extraordinary and bizarre that heritage is not listed as one of the matters to which the Sponsor Body should "have regard to." It should not "take precedence", but it should just "have regard to". That is why my amendment inserts, as an additional regard:

"the need to conserve and sustain the outstanding architectural, archaeological and historical significance of the Palace of Westminster, including the outstanding universal value of the World Heritage Site."

What could be controversial about that? I am not trying in any way to impede disabled access. I want disabled access to work in a complementary way so that people, whether they are disabled, come here as tourists or are UK citizens, can continue to appreciate this building's historical importance. By putting an historical and archaeological consideration in the Bill, it would and should mean that people with disabilities have equal access to be able to appreciate the archaeological and historical features of the building. It would not just be that the lift cannot go somewhere, so they will not see some of the building's features that they might like to.

As I said, this is a living piece of history. Great things have happened in this building, which still shapes our constitution. Last year we celebrated the centenary of women at last getting the vote. The cupboard in which Emily Wilding Davison—[*Interruption.*] Perhaps I could have a little bit of attention from other Members on these Benches. The cupboard where Emily Wilding Davison hid on the night before the census, in 1911, was one of the most significant wheezes of the whole suffragette movement. It happened here, and the significance of that is that she was able to put the address of this place on the census form. Women were not able to stand for election or become MPs, and they were not even able to access the Public Gallery, bizarrely. That happened in this place, but that cupboard was completely neglected. It was only some years ago when Tony Benn pointed out that that was a really significant part of our history, yet it was just a cupboard full of computer servers. It is still just a cupboard full of computer servers, but at least it has some historical narrative next to it, and it did feature in a rather louche BBC drama, "Apple Tree Yard", which probably got more interest in it than anything else we might say in this place.

Neil Gray: In some ways, the hon. Gentleman is making the point that I referred to about the balance that will have to be struck between what he wishes to see in heritage being protected and people being able to access the building. He will know that access to that particular cupboard is by stairs in Westminster Hall. It will not be easy to provide step-free access or a lift facility to get there, so where does he see the balance

being struck in preserving heritage—the steps in Westminster Hall and that cupboard—and allowing access for disabled people?

Tim Loughton: The hon. Gentleman does not know. Access might be provided through the cloisters if there were some compromise between access and—[*Interruption.*] That is what it is all about. It is impossible to compromise between two things if one of them is listed in the Bill and the other is apparently inconsequential. That is the whole point.

3 pm

Let us take an example. Last year, as part of the 100th anniversary of the suffragette movement, there was for a long time a very imaginative display in Westminster Hall, part of which involved the reconstruction of the flue gallery from which women had had to listen to the proceedings of an all-male membership. That gallery, where the hot air went out, was reconstructed, and several of us recorded some of the debates that had taken place in those days. I was asked to play the part of William Pitt the Younger, which I think I did with some aplomb, and for many months my voice boomed up through the reconstruction of the flue.

We should recognise and respect the historic significance of objects such as that cupboard. It might even be reconstructed somewhere if it proved completely impossible to facilitate disabled access to it without causing huge architectural damage, but if that is not on the face of the Bill it is not a consideration. It might actually help people with disabilities to be able to enjoy more of the archaeological and cultural heritage of the place as well.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): The explanatory notes are quite helpful. Page 3 states:

"Parliament has a clear role in approving the...cost and timing of the R&R Programme."

However, it also states that Parliament has a clear role in "approving the design". Does the hon. Gentleman not take any comfort from the fact that all his concerns—and, indeed, the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) about access—can be addressed when Parliament as a whole is considering, and having an input in, the design of the final project?

Tim Loughton: What is the downside of including the archaeological and historical significance of the building on the face of the Bill as an equal consideration? For some reason, the hon. Gentleman wants to discriminate against the uniqueness and the constitutional historical importance of the building. If anyone is guilty of discrimination, it is him. I just want to see everything on a level playing field because of the significance of the building.

Great things have happened in this building. The hon. Gentleman may not agree about this one, but in 1305 the trial of William Wallace took place here, and we all know what happened to him. In 1649 there was the trial of Charles I, which absolutely changed our constitution. The fact that we are where we are today, and the fact that the only person not allowed into this Chamber is the sovereign, results from an event that took place a few yards from this Chamber. The trial of Thomas More in 1535 is integral to the relationship

[*Tim Loughton*]

between England and the Church of Rome, and to the supremacy of the monarch as the head of the Church of England.

Then there is the discovery recently—I say recently; it was in 2005—of the remains of the King’s High Table. I think it is a disgrace that that table is not on display in the Palace of Westminster. In 2005, some work was being undertaken in Westminster Hall because of subsidence on the steps. In the course of an archaeological excavation, people took up some of the flagstones—quite rightly, to explore what was going on—and discovered some table legs, made of perfect marble from Dorset. It transpired that they were part of the sovereign’s High Table, which features in mediaeval tapestries showing the king seated at it, in his High Chair, presiding over banquets in Westminster Hall. That was one of the original purposes for which the Hall was built.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): We do not know that.

Tim Loughton: We do not know that for sure, and I defer to the hon. Gentleman’s expertise, but it is a good story—

Chris Bryant: It may not be true.

Tim Loughton:—and we should have part of that story—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. It might be more helpful to the Chamber if the hon. Gentlemen had this discussion afterwards.

Tim Loughton: If the hon. Gentleman turned up to meetings of the all-party parliamentary archaeology group more often, we could have the discussion there.

Mr Deputy Speaker: It has nothing to do with what we are discussing, or listening to, in respect of the Bill.

Tim Loughton: That table is part of the heritage of this place. It is thought that it may have been broken up by Cromwell to symbolise the fact that the monarchy was over and the new rule had begun. It is a really important part of the Palace’s heritage, and I think that it should be brought back from the museum and displayed here, with a considered explanation of where its origins and historical significance may lie.

If we look at the façade of the whole Palace, we see, for instance, the inspiration that came from the Henry VII chapel in Westminster Abbey, going back to the late 15th and early 16th centuries.

It is remarkable that what I have described in those few vignettes has made this such an important building, and continues to contribute to its importance. People come here not just to see the building with all its wonderful statues, carvings and other features, but to see the living embodiment of a Parliament that is working and doing its daily business in this place. Much of what we discuss is relevant to what we can see in the basement, in the roof, in Westminster Hall or in the Chapel of St Mary Undercroft.

After detailed evidence sessions, the Joint Committee concluded that the Bill should

“recognise the significant heritage which the Palace of Westminster embodies.”

The Government welcomed that recommendation in principle, and said that they would look into it further; but alas, since then—as we heard earlier from my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman)—we have heard no new arguments for not listing heritage in the Bill.

I know that the Minister will argue that the considerations that I am trying to insert in the Bill are covered by planning law, and by the various agencies—English Heritage, as was, and others—which will have an input. However, things that have happened in the past have led to the neglect or destruction of major features in the House. I think it is crucial—and sensible—that when the Sponsor Body is carrying out all its other important functions, someone should be able to ask, “And how does that preserve, or promote, or make more accessible or available or better explain, the archaeological, historical and architectural importance of this building?” That is all I am asking. I do not think it unreasonable, and I think that many others, in another place, will advance a similar argument. Many of them have, perhaps, been in the Palace for many more centuries than I have, and will talk with more authority.

Chris Bryant: Centuries!

Tim Loughton: Quite.

I think that mine is a reasonable amendment. I think it is an oversight that it has not been included in the Bill, and I hope that the Minister will come to his senses, agree with the amendment, and add it.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I do not disagree with anything that my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) has just said. If his amendment were incorporated in the Bill, I would have no worries about it. However, I am not sure that he should have as many worries as he has articulated. I served on the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee. Those who are involved in this project or have taken an interest in it may disagree on many things, but one thing on which they are absolutely agreed is that we must preserve, 100%, the historical and architectural integrity of this building. Indeed, my approach to the renewal and restoration of Parliament is based on that premise. I hope that when we return to this place after the work has been done, we will notice hardly any difference. No doubt there will be better disabled access and no doubt computer systems and lighting systems will all work much better, but in the architectural significance to which my hon. Friend refers, we should notice no difference.

Mark Tami: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that our ignoring the need for this work and putting it off for 70 or 100 years has led to the loss of important stonework and so forth? It has been allowed to go to rack and ruin.

Sir Edward Leigh: That is a valid point and I think we all agree with it.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham is wrong on one point, however. It is possible at the moment to get a wheelchair into the Crypt chapel and into that cupboard he was talking about through the Cloisters. Incidentally, the Cloisters have lain empty for a long time. They were used just as offices, but they are an extraordinarily interesting part of this building. That area is not on the line of route; the public are

totally unaware of it. It is a medieval remnant; it should be open to the public, and should be used as public open space. We could have done that years ago; instead, the Cloisters have been empty since—I think—Conservative or Labour researchers moved out.

Tim Loughton: I would have mentioned that. The Cloisters are rather interesting because of the bomb damage during the war. The Labour research unit was there, and in one office—I doubt its occupants realised this—is the medieval altar of one of the early Plantagenet kings from when this was a royal palace. Nobody ever sees it; it is not appreciated, and it is not in the guidebooks at all. That sort of thing needs to be flagged up and made accessible.

Sir Edward Leigh: My hon. Friend has done a service in flagging up these historical vignettes, because they are extraordinarily interesting. I think everybody agrees with him that this place is not a museum; the whole point is that it is a living building. History is being made at the moment in our debates, at a most interesting political time, and all these little historical facts need to be incorporated into the restoration and made available to the public. I am perfectly happy with the amendment. I suspect that the Minister might say that it is not necessary, but this issue has been flagged up and it will be an important part of the debate.

You, Mr Deputy Speaker, will not want me to engage in past controversies about whether we should decant or associated issues, but—this is particularly relevant to new clause 1, and I refer to my days on the Public Accounts Committee—I have long thought that this will be the biggest feeding frenzy in the Exchequer for years and that there is a real risk it will get out of control. This is where the SNP has a valid point. The public will not forgive us if we allow this work to become a feast for the architects, surveyors and all the rest. Without getting into all the controversy over whether we should decant or not—I accept that we have to decant for a time—what has worried me is that once we leave this building and we lose control, it will be possible for the Delivery Authority to become a sort of self-perpetuating institution, spending taxpayers' money without our having any adequate control, as guardians of the taxpayer. We should always spend this money not as if it is somebody else's money but as if it is our money. We should always think, "What would we do if it was our money? Would we do this work in this way?" The SNP has a perfectly valid point.

I do not agree with the SNP plan to make this place a museum, however. Even if it became a museum, we would still have to do all the work, because this is a world heritage site. We have to make this building safe from fire and flood and to repair the general dereliction that comes with time. We as parliamentarians should not worry too much about whether we should decant; we should worry instead about the taxpayers and about doing a good job. We are repairing this building and not trying to create anything new and fantastic. I am very happy to improve disabled access and so forth, but that is where we should start, and we should constantly take control of costs, which is where new clause 1 comes in.

3.15 pm

I have worked for years with the National Audit Office and I think it is a superb institution, but I hope the Minister can deal with what worries me. New clause 1 says:

"the Comptroller and Auditor General shall have a right of access at all reasonable times to relevant documents held or controlled by a person in circumstances in which that person has or had a contractual obligation to supply goods or services directly or indirectly to the Sponsor Body".

That is the nitty-gritty; that is key. The mischief will come not from the Delivery Authority; it will come with our contractors and subcontractors. We must have the ability through the NAO to bore down into the detail and hold these people to account.

I will take the advice of the Minister on new clause 1. He might well say that it is not necessary, but I hope that he does not just dismiss it. I know it is an attitude in reserve of Ministers to say, "It's not necessary; it's already covered by something else" but we must have some mechanism for holding these people to account, otherwise the taxpayer could catch a tremendous cold.

I am perfectly happy with the other amendments; I am perfectly happy that the Delivery Authority should "have regard for the company's policies on corporate social responsibility",

but it would do that anyway; that is modern procurement practice. I am perfectly happy that it should consider the value of work that comes to the regions, as called for in amendment 4; this again is good modern practice. However, these points in a sense are all subsidiary. We do not want PACs in the 2020s and 2030s informing us time and again that this project has cost not £4 billion, but £5 billion, £6 billion, £7 billion or £8 billion and that we have been out of this building for not four or five years, but for six, seven, eight, nine or 10 years.

We have to take a grip now, and the way to do that is not to hand control to the Delivery Authority. I am not saying that it is in any way wrong, and it is certainly not corrupt, but many of its advisers and experts come from the world of architects, surveyors and builders and they have a certain ethos, and if we tell them we want a gold standard operation and that cost is of no importance, they will take us for a ride. They will not do it deliberately or corruptly, but I firmly predict that we will have PAC hearing after PAC hearing and we will be shocked at the waste of public money.

Craig Mackinlay: I hear what my right hon. Friend says about the Comptroller and Auditor General having access to the records under new clause 1, but I am concerned that there is not a sufficient value-for-money assessment and that we might be, to put it in general language, taken for a ride with this project.

Sir Edward Leigh: Value for money is what the PAC and the NAO are about. That was a very good intervention.

I hope the Minister can convince us that his No. 1 concern is safety—this is a world heritage site and we do not want it burning down or flooding—but the No. 2 consideration must be value for money. That is what worries me—again, without going into past grief—about many of the present plans. We have heard about architectural significance from my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham, and I am worried about the proposal to demolish Richmond House. It is an important modern building that has won architectural awards, but I am worried not just that we might be knocking down a listed building but that this would again create an opportunity for waste. I will always look

[Sir Edward Leigh]

for the cheapest option, and I have been arguing that if we have to leave the Chamber—I accept the decision of the House that we will leave for a time—we should use the courtyards to build a temporary Chamber rather than knocking down large parts of Richmond House.

Unfortunately, we have told the Delivery Authority that there has to be an exact replica of where we are standing, with the same size Chamber, the same height and the same width in the Division Lobbies. I am not sure that that is entirely necessary—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) is shaking his head. If I am wrong, I am wrong, but I am saying that if we can have a cheaper option with a narrower temporary Chamber that can be used for other purposes afterwards, and if we have to have electronic voting and not go through wide Division Lobbies, we should consider all those options. This is not a matter for today, but it all comes down to value for money, and it is important that we highlight these matters in these debates.

John Redwood: New clause 1 seems to imply, in answer to a question I was asking earlier, that the Comptroller and Auditor General would have a duty to examine policy value for money with regard to how much work is done, the timing of the work, whether we need to move, and so forth. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is absolutely fundamental that that should be part of the process, because the way in which the most money is likely to be wasted is through policy error rather than through contractors slightly overdoing a contract?

Sir Edward Leigh: Yes; my right hon. Friend has made a worthwhile intervention, and perhaps I have been too unfair on contractors. My experience of public sector contracts over the years is not so much the importance of those in the private sector who work for us, as that it is our fault for treating these projects like a Christmas tree. We have our own prejudices and policies, we constantly change personnel, and we add things on to the Christmas tree. The private sector—either correctly or incorrectly, depending on the way we feel—then takes the opportunity to charge us more and more. We have to grip this now.

I am slightly worried about amendment 9, and perhaps the Minister, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin) who tabled the amendment, can reassure me that there is nothing in it that takes away the democratic right of us in this Chamber to elect the members of the Sponsor Body and to dismiss them if necessary.

Mark Tami: The intention is to avoid a cliff edge, because we could lose their experience at a crucial time. That is why it was felt that we really need those people to carry on and then have a system where they are subject to elections and are replaced. We did not want to have a cliff edge at the start of the project.

Sir Edward Leigh: I take some reassurance from that. I was trying to understand the amendment. I have no problem with my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales, who is doing a good job, but I do not want us to give away our democratic right to elect the people we think should be on the body.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Kevin Foster): Just to clarify, the amendments cover only the external members, not the parliamentary members, so parliamentary members will be appointed in the usual way and will not transfer in that way.

Sir Edward Leigh: I do apologise. I am glad that I raised this matter, however, because that has reassured me that we will constantly have control over who we send on to this body. I think I can end there. I hope the Minister will reassure me that even if he cannot accept new clause 1—I accept that that is often the default position of Ministers—he will be able to argue that the Comptroller and Auditor General really can drill down into all these contracts, because that will be absolutely vital.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I rise to speak to the amendments standing in my name on the Order Paper, and with your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would also like to talk briefly about some of the other amendments. Before I do that, I thank the Minister for the way in which he has conducted himself during this process. I accept that this has not necessarily been a party political process, but he has sought to engage with me and colleagues on my side of the House at every stage of the process. We have not always agreed, but he has always been there to consult, and I am most grateful for the way in which he has conducted himself.

I want to speak briefly to amendment 5, to which the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) spoke so admirably that it has the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), the shadow Leader of the House. I also want to speak to amendments 8 and 9, tabled by the right hon. Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin), to which the right hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) has just referred.

We believe that these amendments are self-explanatory and straightforward. As the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham mentioned, this is a world heritage site, and the intrinsic value and history of the site must be in our minds throughout the lengthy process. We therefore believe that amendments 8 and 9 are common sense, and I will certainly be supporting them.

Moving on to new clause 1, I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier)—I am unsure whether my right hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) said this while moving the amendment, but I believe that she is currently chairing the Public Accounts Committee and is therefore unable to be in the Chamber—for her work. In basic terms, the new clause aims to ensure that this multibillion-pound taxpayer-funded project gets the most effective scrutiny possible. The hope is to highlight to the public that the utmost efforts have been made to ensure that the strongest possible audit of the project's value for money has been carried out. Given the value of the contracts involved—we have heard suggestions of a total project spend of between £5 billion and £10 billion—it is particularly important that we set up the necessary scrutiny.

The new clause would ensure that effective access arrangements were in place to allow the Comptroller and Auditor General to scrutinise the relevant information held by contractors, subcontractors and grant recipients

of the bodies. To date, there has been no clear commitment that the CAG will be granted value for money access. The current uncertainty could be overcome through the provision in the Bill of a suitable right of access for the CAG, which would be helpful and not at all detrimental.

New clause 1 is not prescriptive in defining what the CAG would do, because that would undermine his independence; it simply ensures that appropriate scrutiny is recognised in statute. By writing the new clause into primary legislation, companies would know that the eyes of the CAG were on them and that all their work would be available. That level of audit is vital to ensure true value for money and to keep a lid on overspending.

Amendment 7, which is in my name, relates to the provision of the education centre. Again, the Minister has shown an interest in that particular area. The amendment focuses on securing the future and developing the capacity of our fantastic education centre in the renewed Palace. The Minister made some important points in Committee about allowing a degree of flexibility within the Bill to prevent prescriptive legislation from hindering the creation of future innovative facilities. Indeed, as he stated, facilities that

“we might have considered sensible 30 years ago may not necessarily be the other facilities that we consider sensible today.”—[*Official Report, Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Public Bill Committee*, 4 June 2019; c. 27.]

The same logic could be applied to the creation of future facilities, so the amendment is intentionally open, allowing for future ideas to develop with the renewed Palace.

However, there is no question but that the creation of an education centre must be unambiguously defined within the Bill. Let us not forget that the current education centre is a temporary building that will no doubt be removed during the restoration works. The education team does a brilliant job of engaging young people in Parliament and politics, and that success must continue on the renewed parliamentary estate. It is therefore crucial that a concrete commitment is made to guarantee the refurbishment of our vital education services. The education centre cannot be an optional extra. It plays a vital role in helping schoolchildren to develop a political understanding and in engaging the politicians and public servants of the future.

Indeed, as we have already heard, the intrinsic value of the Palace of Westminster stems from the history that has been made within its walls. The educational opportunities of experiencing the history created in this place at first hand are invaluable, so education facilities must take centre stage in the planning of the restoration works. We have been presented with a unique opportunity to enhance the education centre and to allow for wider engagement, particularly with younger audiences.

I am sure that Members throughout the House will agree that awareness of and political engagement with Parliament is a vital part of encouraging people to become politically active and politically engaged. The education centre should be part of the legacy of this programme of restoration and renewal, to encourage greater awareness and involvement in Parliament. Such engagement with parliamentary politics is more important now than ever.

The restoration and renewal process is a project of national significance, and it would be a mistake to overlook the opportunity to create an innovative new

education or learning centre at the heart of Parliament. While the cost of renewal will be high, the benefits will be great. We could create a newly refurbished education centre with accessible, modern resources for those wishing to visit the building and engage with the work of both Houses.

Amendment 7 would secure the creation of an education centre while allowing flexibility within the Bill, which the Minister called for in Committee, for the creation of future unforeseen facilities. Such flexibility would keep the door open to new ideas and changing technologies leading to new demands on facilities. Again, I thank the Minister for his positive engagement in this area.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch for her work on amendment 6 and to the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) for his work on amendment 4. Both amendments cover the important area of spreading work around the United Kingdom, and I moved a similar amendment in Committee.

3.30 pm

I am sure the House will agree that this project presents a fantastic opportunity for any company to work on a building of such historic significance, and it is only right that regions and nations across the UK should have the opportunity to benefit from it economically. Crucially, amendments 6 and 4 are not prescriptive and do not restrict the legislation or define how the Sponsor Body or the Delivery Authority should spread economic benefits around the country, nor do they define which companies should be awarded the contracts. The sole aim of the amendments is to provide the public with confidence that, wherever possible, the Sponsor Body and the Delivery Authority will make efforts to ensure that opportunities are provided to relevant companies across the whole country, as opposed to being given solely to companies in London and the south-east.

In highlighting where the work is going, the hope is that the project's positive impact on the UK as a whole will be clear to the public. Unless we measure and monitor what is happening, people and businesses may lose out. I see that the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr Prisk) is in his place, and he made an excellent point in Committee that this would be a way of demonstrating the project's value to the whole country and, therefore, of selling the project to the whole country. I have not forgotten his telling contribution in Committee.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I am pleased to have signed amendment 6, the key part of which is the annual audit of companies. My experience, from a distance, was that Wembley started as an important national stadium—admittedly for England—but the endgame was that many of the companies involved did not have any local accountability. I am afraid that the Football Association lost control of the project, so it is important that this place has an annual audit to know who is building the project, what they are doing and whether they are doing it properly.

Christian Matheson: As a trade union official during the construction of Wembley, I have mixed memories of the conduct of that project, but my hon. Friend makes a fair point. Amendment 6 is not onerous, and it would allow for an audit that gave us the opportunity to keep a

[*Christian Matheson*]

handle on where the work was going and how much of it was being spread around—no more, no less, but at least it would give us an opportunity to see what was happening.

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): The point I was trying to make in Committee was simply that, yes, this is a substantial investment—many billions—but, equally, if we get this right, it is a huge investment in trades and crafts right across the country. My only problem with the audit notion is that it is post decision making. If we are to make sure that there is a reasonable sharing of the procurement process, the policy needs to be set before the contracts are issued, not afterwards.

Christian Matheson: The hon. Gentleman is right that this could be a bonus for the whole nation. That is covered by amendment 4, but if the Sponsor Body, the Delivery Authority and the main contractors know they will be audited and under scrutiny, I hope that will help to focus and concentrate their minds on where they give the contracts.

Sir Edward Leigh: This is an important point. Of course we must not tell the Comptroller and Auditor General what to do, but in recent years we have tried with the National Audit Office not just to do this post hoc, as we did in the past when, years after the event, we would look at some scandal or waste of public money. The Comptroller and Auditor General now tries to look at these contracts as they come on stream. He started to do that with the Olympics and, although we cannot tell him what to do, I hope we can encourage him to look at this as it goes through.

Christian Matheson: As a distinguished former Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, the right hon. Gentleman is able to give the House that guidance, for which I thank him.

John Redwood: The project will also reveal part of our industrial history. When the building was first constructed, it drew on crafts and skills from across the country, and some of the companies involved might still be around in one form or another and be able to bid again. It was a national endeavour, not a London endeavour.

Christian Matheson: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for pointing that out; he is right. Perhaps the successor companies of some of those original suppliers will be able to bid—what a lovely connection that would be.

Some of the work for this project can clearly only be done in London. Obviously we are not going to move the Palace clock, stock and barrel to another part of the country, so the work has to be done in London. But efforts must be made, where possible, to include a diverse geographical range of companies. It is an opportunity to change old habits and step outside the old London-centric focus in which projects in our capital city are so frequently dominated by large London businesses—the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Dr Drew).

Chris Bryant: I hate to correct my hon. Friend, but I am going to anyway. Quite a lot of the work will not be done here. The parts of the clock are currently not in

London but elsewhere in the country, and the cast-iron roofs have all been made elsewhere in the country. There is a real opportunity to build old trades, which perhaps we have not used for a very long time, all across the country. There could be benefits for every part of the country.

Christian Matheson: If I am going to be corrected, I would choose always to be corrected by my hon. Friend. The point I am making is that whatever is made elsewhere in the United Kingdom will eventually have to be installed here in London, but he is absolutely right, and the amendments show that we hope to encourage such opportunities. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside pointed out in Committee that in practical terms that would require the widespread promotion and advertisement of contracts across the country. Market engagement and involvement must begin early and reach as widely as possible to include geographically diverse companies. I re-emphasise that the amendments are deliberately open and do not prescribe which companies should be considered; they would simply ensure that contracts were measured and monitored with consideration of the geographical context and the value context.

Furthermore, amendments 4 and 6 focus on the size of businesses bidding for contracts. This project provides us with the opportunity to upskill and invest in small and medium-sized enterprises as well as larger businesses. We must ensure that we support our thriving and exceptional small business sector, which regularly still feels cut out of large Government contracts. Efforts must be made to integrate small specialist companies and prevent big companies from winning contracts and subcontracting to companies that they already know and work with, rather than opening things up more widely.

Without placing those promises and that scrutiny in primary legislation, there is no guarantee that the Sponsor Body will not disregard any lack of geographical diversity. I see no harm in placing such a guarantee in the Bill. I hope that all Members recognise that it is a practical, common-sense amendment.

Mark Tami *rose*—

Christian Matheson: I give way to my next-door neighbour from Alyn and Deeside.

Mark Tami: Before my hon. Friend moves on from procurement, the other point, particularly for smaller companies, is that the actual cost must be kept to a minimum. If it costs about £10,000 to enter the process, small companies will not risk that sum of money, because it means a lot to them, whereas it means nothing to big companies.

Christian Matheson: My right hon. Friend from the other side of Boundary Lane in Chester is absolutely right. We have to encourage small and medium-sized enterprises not simply by telling them that it would be good to bid for the contracts, but by making it as easy as possible for them, and by identifying and removing the barriers.

Finally, amendment 1, which stands in my name, is about corporate social responsibility and blacklisting. I remind the House of my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests—I am a proud member of Unite the

union and the GMB, and I have received support from both in the past. However, I remind the House that I have tabled the amendment on my own initiative and with the support of hon. Members, not at the behest of any trade union, because we believe that it is the right thing to do.

In Committee I tabled an amendment that might be considered stronger than amendment 1. That previous amendment called for the Delivery Authority to proscribe from the bidding process any firm that had been involved in blacklisting and had not subsequently signed a recognition agreement with a UK-registered trade union. The amendment was narrowly defeated. Nevertheless, I did welcome at the time the Minister's strong condemnation of blacklisting as a practice, and the support of other hon. Members in Committee. We can condemn, or we can take action. Aside from legislating to outlaw blacklisting, this project is the most direct influence we can have on making a stand against this terrible practice, because this House, along with their lordships' House, is the ultimate client and can set the terms.

I remind the House that blacklisting is pernicious. It destroys lives, it is dangerous, and it is still going on. Skilled and qualified tradesmen are still refused starts, or are finished up on a job after just a couple of days, without explanation. If a workers' name appears on a blacklist, it may well be because he or she has been a trade union representative or—more likely—because they have in the past complained about poor health and safety standards. Construction is a dangerous business. Site managers are under pressure to keep costs down, but that can lead to lower standards. Too often, the men or women who have been willing to stand up for their fellow workers and challenge lax health and safety regimes are the ones who have been marked down as troublemakers, when the truth is that in many respects they do their employers a service.

I remind the House of the scale of the problem. The Consulting Association is the most recent example of an organised blacklist—that we know of. In 2009, its offices were raided by the Information Commissioner's Office, and it was found to be running an organised blacklisting operation, with 3,300 names. In the 2008-09 financial year, subscribers spent £87,749 on name checks. That means that, at £2.20 for each check, 39,886 names were checked. I emphasise that that was in just one year.

Amendment 1 gives the House another opportunity to make a statement and take a stand against blacklisting. I have listened to colleagues, and the amendment is less prescriptive than the one considered in Committee.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): My hon. Friend mentioned both Houses leading the way; in 2013, the Welsh Government introduced a ban on the involvement of companies that blacklist and do not recognise trade unions in the public procurement process, such as the building of new schools and hospitals. That ban is already in place and it is working well. Because of those Welsh Government contracts, lots of organisations in Wales have cleaned up their act and now work constructively with trade unions and make sure that they have the most constructive processes, particularly in respect of health and safety.

Christian Matheson: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for that illustration of how action of this kind can raise standards. When we raise standards in the

construction sector, we save lives. It is a dangerous sector and whenever standards are allowed to fall, workers are regularly harmed, maimed and injured.

Neil Gray: I commend the shadow Minister for tabling the amendment; we will of course support him in his endeavours. He talks about taking a stand; of course, the House of Commons did not take a stand on the contract for the Elizabeth Tower and suffered immense reputational damage as a result. Does he agree that now is the opportunity to take a stand and ensure that that reputational damage does not continue?

Christian Matheson: We did take a reputational hit on that contract, unfortunately. The hon. Gentleman says that this is the opportunity; the fact is that there will not be many more opportunities, because we are the principal client on this programme so can set the terms.

The amendment is a lot simpler than the one tabled in Committee: it simply calls for the Delivery Authority to take account of a bidding firm's policies on corporate social responsibility, including on blacklisting. It does not mention proscribing any transgressors from bidding and it does not mention trade union recognition agreements, but it does ask that CSR is considered. As I have just said, as the ultimate client for the programme, we would be doing the right thing if we put this requirement in the Bill. In doing so, we would send the message to the construction sector, and to workers in this dangerous industry, that we take the matter seriously and take their health seriously.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent point. Does he agree that the changes made to the wording of the amendment since Committee give more scope to the authority to have regard to a company's policy on corporate social responsibility other than in respect of blacklisting? Have I read that correctly? If so, perhaps my hon. Friend could give the House an example of where else that might be valuable for the promotion of the highest standards in contracts.

Christian Matheson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, but what we have tried not to do is to be too prescriptive in what we tell the Delivery Authority to do. The Minister had expressed concerns about being too prescriptive in the past. As long as companies can demonstrate that they have a corporate social responsibility policy—they might want to bring various different factors into that—that would be a start.

3.45 pm

The Bill does nothing more than ask for that CSR programme. It is not prescriptive. It does not tell the authority who to give the contracts to or how to go about allocating contracts. It simply asks that, when considering bidders for work, it takes into account CSR policies. As most legislation on blacklisting relates only to data protection law, which has not been updated for several years, it would be important to place this amendment in the Bill to remind all and sundry that we consider it important in this most prestigious of contracts.

After the Committee stage, I was contacted by the chief executive of Sir Robert McAlpine—a construction company that I have been repeatedly critical of in the past with regard to its practice of blacklisting. That

included, I say to the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray), being critical about its being awarded the Elizabeth Tower contract. The chief executive assured me that the company was no longer involved in the practice. He said:

“I wanted to take the opportunity to share with you our commitment to ensuring that blacklisting stays firmly in the past... We have a zero tolerance policy towards blacklisting, illegal or unfair recruitment practices, and while blacklisting is part of the industry's history, I can assure you that it has no place now or in the future at Sir Robert McAlpine. We are the first UK construction companies to gain Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority accreditation—positioning us as a leader in the industry. Despite this being an industry-wide problem, we were one of only eight companies that settled the claims brought by the unions and other groups in the High Court.”

I make this point and quote from the letter for two reasons: first, as he has taken the trouble to contact me, it is right that he is given the right to reply after I had been very critical of him; and, secondly, it demonstrates that there are firms that do see blacklisting as a problem and no doubt have developed CSR policies that I am sure they would be only too pleased to present to the Delivery Authority. Indeed, those firms that have abandoned blacklisting would surely be only too pleased to see this amendment in the Bill because in putting a marker down, however gentle, we are helping to stop the race to the bottom and requiring standards, which as McAlpine tells me, it is already meeting.

For those firms that have not abandoned blacklisting, they will be given pause for thought as they seek to apply for contracts, or seek to give contracts out to their subcontractors. I remind the House that existing laws on blacklisting are weak, based largely around data protection laws with some gangmasters legislation. All Members say that they are appalled by blacklisting—the Minister told us that very strongly in Committee and I believe him—but this is a gentle amendment, which allows us in the gentlest terms to put our money where our mouth is. Yes, we should condemn, but we should also do something about the problem in one of the few major construction contracts in which we will have any direct influence. I therefore commend the amendment to the House.

Kevin Foster: It is a pleasure to reply to the fantastic debate that we have had this afternoon. I thank all hon. and right hon. Members who have engaged with this important Bill from the Joint Committee through to Second Reading and Committee stage, and now today on Report. The input of all Members has been invaluable, and I particularly appreciate the kind remarks from the shadow Minister about the engagement that we have had. Similarly, I have also had a constructive engagement with the spokesperson from the Scottish National party, the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray), in taking this project forward. Clearly, there is a consensus across the House that this work is essential for the safety of our staff and visitors, to establish better facilities to support the Palace's function and to ensure that it can continue to be the home of this UK Parliament for generations to come.

Before addressing the main amendments, it is worth saying that there is not a “do-nothing” option here now. Just carrying on patching and mending is more expensive than taking the decision to grasp hold of this project and move on. This decision is not just about spending money. We will carry on doing that. This is a decision

about whether we want to set up a governance body to do the work in an organised and structured way that is clearly accountable to this House, and with a Sponsor Body that has the majority of parliamentary members who, again, would be accountable to Members both of this House and of the other place.

Let me turn to the amendments. I always think it is nice to start on a positive note, so I will start with amendment 7 on education, which was moved by the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson), who made some very good points in Committee. Having reflected on those points afterwards—and having had discussions with the hon. Gentleman, to which he alluded—we will certainly accept and support this amendment. The hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts said when we were discussing heritage issues that there are going to be decisions to be made all the way through this project, and although we were keen to have a Bill that is a framework allowing the Delivery Authority to get on practically, it did seem rather inconceivable that Members in this House or the other place would support a project that did not include an education centre. As an inevitable part of the project, it makes sense to make an education centre a need, rather than a desire. This does not unduly constrain the ability of the Sponsor Body to take the project forward. Therefore, the amendment will enjoy my own support and I am sure that it will also enjoy broad support across the House.

Amendments 8 and 9 relate to the transfer of the shadow Sponsor Board's external members—not the parliamentary members. When the Sponsor Body comes into existence, there will be a need to reappoint parliamentary members, who will form the majority of the body via the usual ways. The amendments are about transferring the external members. The right hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin) made the powerful point that we have just got the Sponsor Body going—I think it was last year—and gone through a full recruitment process for external members; therefore, rerunning the process a year later may not produce a benefit, but could produce inconsistency. As we look forward to 2021, when the main votes on business cases and the main estimates will be presented to this House with comments from the Treasury, there is a need for consistency. As Members will have noted, the amendments would slightly alter the terms; the chair would have a slightly different term from the other external members. Terms can last for up to three years, so the chair would come to a point whereby there was effectively a phasing of appointments, and we are liaising with external members of the Sponsor Body in that regard.

Although we felt that the original drafting of these amendments gave a flexibility, it was one that was very unlikely to be exercised. This would have produced a situation whereby people who had just been appointed and were just getting into this incredibly complex project would find themselves having to reapply for their roles, with debates about whether they would initially be prepared to do that. However, I certainly support the amendments as tabled today, and the Government believe that they propose no threat or danger to the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) gave a passionate speech, setting out his superb knowledge of the archaeology and history of this Palace, including its outstanding

value as a world heritage site. My hon. Friend made important contributions in this debate and on Second Reading, in which he reminded us how easy it is to overlook, and in some cases destroy, our heritage when undertaking extensive building projects. In particular, he cited the damage that was believed to have been done to the old palace of Edward the Confessor when the underground carpark was built. I am sympathetic to his point and, like all of us here, I am keen that the work is undertaken in a way that preserves the unique heritage of this building for future generations while respecting the fact that there is no intention for this building to become a museum; it has to continue to be a functioning Parliament for visitors, the staff who work here and others.

Chris Bryant: I am happy that the Minister is, as I understand it, supporting the amendment to which he is referring. But let us just be a little bit careful about some of the things that are often portrayed as absolute facts of our history in this building that turn out to be myths invented by the Victorians, such as the fact that the two red lines are two swords' lengths apart. They are not. In fact, they only appeared in the 19th century when people could no longer wear a sword in the Chamber.

Kevin Foster: It is always a joy to hear another expert on the history of this building.

We have some concerns about the wording—not the thrust—of what my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham has said. For example, the Government recognise the significance of the Westminster UNESCO world heritage site designation, but note that that encompasses an area larger than just the Palace of Westminster: it also includes Westminster abbey and St Margaret's church. I am mindful of the possibility that the inclusion in the Bill of the UNESCO status of the Palace of Westminster could be misinterpreted. The Government also share the concerns of the Joint Committee that explicit provision aiming to protect the heritage of the Palace could override opportunities to renew and enhance its purpose.

I appreciate the evidence supplied by Historic England and congratulate it on its solutions for ensuring the preservation of heritage on other projects, such as Lincoln castle, Manchester town hall and St Paul's cathedral, while also increasing disability access. I certainly encourage the Sponsor Body to engage early with Historic England about the works so that it can learn from those projects.

It is also worth noting that the House is not its own planning authority: in seeking planning permission, there will be the usual protections. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on archaeology, my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham made a passionate case. If he is prepared to withdraw his amendment, there could be some useful engagement with him, his group and Historic England, to look for appropriate wording that could be inserted into the Bill in the other place. That would cover the legitimate concerns he has picked up.

I thank the right hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside and the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) for tabling new clause 1, which relates to the role of the Comptroller and Auditor General, whom it would provide with the right to carry out examinations of the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the

Sponsor Body and Delivery Authority under section 6 of the National Audit Act 1983. Such examinations are commonly known as “value-for-money assessments”.

The new clause also makes specific provision for a right of inspection and interrogation in respect of information held by contractors and subcontractors for the purposes of the conduct of value-for-money assessments by the Sponsor Body and Delivery Authority. Although I am sympathetic to the principle behind the new clause, the Government are unable to support it due to the potential impact on small suppliers, which, unlike larger contractors, might not be able to engage with that type of audit.

It is worth noting that scrutiny of the Sponsor Body and Delivery Authority is already provided for in the Bill. Existing legislation also ensures scrutiny of contractors—for example, section 6 of the National Audit Act 1983 already applies to the Sponsor Body and Delivery Authority. That provides for the Comptroller and Auditor General to carry out examinations of the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the Sponsor Body and Delivery Authority, given that the Bill requires the accounts of both bodies to be examined and certified by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Additionally, article 5 of the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000 (Rights of Access of Comptroller and Auditor General) Order 2003 means that, for the purposes of their audit function, the Comptroller and Auditor General will have the right to inspect and interrogate information held by the Sponsor Body's and Delivery Authority's contractors and subcontractors. The Bill provides that the Comptroller and Auditor General will have the same powers as they do in respect of any public body when it comes to audit and examination.

Subsections (2) to (5) of the new clause go beyond the Comptroller and Auditor General's current powers in relation to other public bodies. That is the provision allowing the Comptroller and Auditor General to access documents and information held by contractors and subcontractors for the purposes of their value-for-money assessments. Those subsections would be an extension of the Comptroller and Auditor General's powers. The Comptroller and Auditor General's current powers, provided for in section 8(1) of the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000, allow for the Comptroller and Auditor General to access documents and information held by contractors and subcontractors for the purposes of their audit functions only.

John Redwood: Will the Minister remind the House of the latest estimate of the total cost of the whole project and the timing of the payments—how many years?

4 pm

Kevin Foster: I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention. To be clear, the Bill is about setting up the governance framework. I can reassure him that once the Sponsor Body is established, it will set to work on a business plan and detailed set of costings, which then need to be approved by Parliament; it cannot go ahead and implement the project without doing so. There will also be Treasury commentary on the estimates that come before this place. We will reflect on it in engagement with the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, but it is almost certain that the NAO will wish to look at the quality of the Treasury's work, so that the Public Accounts Committee can make recommendations to the House.

[Kevin Foster]

It would clearly be inappropriate to modify the Comptroller and Auditor General's powers on the face of the Bill. Any extension of powers should be properly considered, fully consulted on and effected globally, and should not be done as part of this specific case. Indeed, such an extension of powers could make the parliamentary building works less attractive to potential contractors.

It is worth pointing out that the Bill already puts in place transparent and accountable funding mechanisms for the parliamentary building works. Schedule 2 specifies that the Delivery Authority is required to prepare a statement of resources, which must be submitted to the Sponsor Body annually for the latter's review and approval or rejection. If the Sponsor Body accepts the statement provided by the Delivery Authority, it will be reflected in the estimate prepared by the Sponsor Body and submitted to the Estimates Commission for the financial year to which the statement relates.

It is almost certain that the Sponsor Body will be subject to extensive parliamentary scrutiny, and its parliamentary members may, for example, answer oral questions in this House and the other place. I hope the right hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside feels reassured that there is a range of abilities to audit and that it is unnecessary to press his new clause.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): The Government have just announced their net zero strategy. Will the work of the Delivery Authority take account of that strategy, and will the terms of reference include this building being net zero ready?

Kevin Foster: The Delivery Authority and Sponsor Body will be required to adhere to any legislation that has been passed in this place. Members have touched on disability issues and heritage issues. The Bill also refers to environmental considerations. We are keen to ensure that this is not a question of one interest automatically trumping another. Heritage issues will not automatically trump disability issues, and disability issues will not automatically trump environmental issues. There will be a range of choices to be made by Sponsor Body members, and they will then be held to account by Members on their decisions and how the project is taken forward. We certainly know that not taking the project forward will not improve the environmental impacts of this Parliament—in fact, quite the opposite.

I turn to amendments on which there is more disagreement, starting with amendment 1, tabled by the hon. Member for City of Chester. As he rightly said, I made it clear in Committee that I see blacklisting as a scourge. It is an inappropriate and shameful practice. However, we have concerns about particular aspects of the amendment, even though we appreciate the intentions behind it.

Provision is already made in legislation against blacklisting. The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 already provide mechanisms by which the Delivery Authority will be able to look into the practices of prospective suppliers in relation to blacklisting. In particular, it is also open to the Delivery Authority to exclude a provider from participating in a procurement where it can demonstrate a violation of obligations in the field of national social and labour law. That would

include a breach of anti-blacklisting legislation. I could go into the Employment Relations Act 1999 (Blacklists) Regulations 2010 in more detail, but I am sure the hon. Gentleman is very familiar with them.

It is a mandatory requirement for potential suppliers to declare that they have not breached any of the exclusion grounds, including labour law obligations. A completed declaration is also required of any organisations that potential suppliers may rely on to meet the selection criteria, including essential subcontractors. If a prospective supplier declares that they have been found to be in breach of the anti-blacklisting legislation by a court or tribunal, it would be reasonable for the contracting authority to ask to see details of the judgment.

The Government believe that the Bill provides mechanisms to address the concerns that the hon. Gentleman rightly raised. For example, it would be open to the Sponsor Body and Delivery Authority to make specific provision within the programme delivery agreement between the Sponsor Body and the Delivery Authority provided for in clause 4. Such provision could require construction companies to declare their policies on corporate social responsibility for the Delivery Authority to consider. Of course, whether such provision is made in the programme delivery agreement will be for the Sponsor Body and Delivery Authority to agree upon, but I am sure that members of the shadow Sponsor Board here today—including the right hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside—are listening carefully to the issues that he and other Members have raised.

While I understand the principle behind the amendment, the Government do not consider it necessary. We consider that the current legislative framework and the Bill's provisions already include the necessary safeguards to ensure transparency, accountability to Parliament through the period of the parliamentary building works and ongoing scrutiny of the parliamentary building works. Parliamentary Committees will also have the opportunity to scrutinise works that are ongoing. While the Government cannot support the amendment, we believe many measures are in place that will allow us not only to tackle blacklisting but to ensure there is constant accountability to this place on the widest range of environmental, social and labour legislation, and to ensure that this project is an exemplar of them all.

I now turn to amendment 6 and the amendment from the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru—amendment 4—which are on a similar theme of looking to spread the work across this United Kingdom. In many ways, I welcome the enthusiasm of the hon. Members for Airdrie and Shotts and for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), the right hon. Members for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) and for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) and the hon. Members for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) and for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) in wanting to make this project one that really represents the whole Union, so that for generations to come and decades for come, Scottish Members of Parliament will be able to see in this House the symbols of being part of this Union Parliament.

Where I have concerns, sadly, is in how this amendment relates to procurement law. The Delivery Authority will need to create a level playing field as per the public procurement rules. Within these parameters, it is of course open to the Delivery Authority to encourage nations and regions across the UK to participate fully

in and to benefit from the works processes. For example, the Delivery Authority may take steps to ensure that companies UK-wide are aware of the bids process by taking out advertising in regional media outlets and perhaps by doing roadshows, as Heathrow airport has done. However, in developing its procurement strategy and assessing bids, it would not be lawful to factor in the geographical location of companies. Adjusting the playing field in the way the amendment prescribes would, I am advised, expose the Delivery Authority to challenge under procurement law.

Neil Gray: I thank the Minister—well, I think I thank the Minister, who has just said he is not going to support my amendment—but this will not of course fall foul of procurement law, will it? There is no prescription here, and no quotas are set out. All the amendment does is to reiterate some of the comments that have been made by this Minister and previous Ministers and Leaders of the House that this will indeed be a UK-wide project with discernible benefits across the UK. Why on earth can a very wide-ranging amendment such as this not be enacted to guarantee the words of the Minister, unlike in the case of the Olympics, where that did not happen?

Kevin Foster: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his overall constructive intervention. The problem is where the amendment says

“in terms of contracts for works”,

which implies a change to how the Sponsor Body would assess procurement, and where it says

“and in any other way”,

which is an unusually wide statement to put in a piece of primary legislation and could in effect give the Delivery Authority and the Sponsor Body in particular very wide range to do things that may not have been the intention of this House. Unfortunately, while I appreciate the intention of amendment 4, it is not one that the Government can recommend the House to accept or support.

Stewart Hosie: Will the Minister give way?

Kevin Foster: I will now move on—I am conscious of the time I have been going on for—to amendment 6, which is on the similar theme of having a report. Again, I appreciate the intention behind this amendment, which is the wish to spread this work across the United Kingdom. I have been clear that this is about spreading it not just to the nations, but to the regions. We all wish to see it go to places such as the south-west of England—the hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth), a fellow south-west MP, is in her place—and to make sure that this work is shared.

What we do not think is right is to put this in the part of the Bill that the amendment suggests. Given the intention for reporting, this could be put in the part of schedule 1 that already lists, for example, the annual statement of accounts and the report on the building works that must be presented and laid. It would make sense to work on such an option and present in the other place something that sums up these areas, without putting it where it would look unusual and making sure that we do not violate the procurement rules.

Mark Tami: I am pleased to hear that the Minister will look at this proposal in the other place. All amendment 6 asks for is an annual report to see how we

are doing at spreading the work around. Hopefully, we will do very well, but I think we need a report to see whether the work is being spread around or is still stuck in the south-east.

Kevin Foster: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for the intention of his intervention. We have listened to Members’ submissions, but we feel it would be better to introduce an amendment to schedule 1 in the other place, because it would sit more appropriately with the other reports that will be made.

I have outlined the Government’s position on the amendments. I welcome the broad level of consensus that has been achieved and look forward to the Bill making further progress.

Mark Tami: On the basis of what the Minister has said, I will withdraw new clause 1. However, we will keep the matter under review, because the project involves very large sums of money, as a number of Members have made clear.

I welcome what the Minister said about amendment 6. We will certainly return to it in the other place. I am delighted that amendments 7, 8 and 9 will be supported by the Government.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the clause.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 2

THE PARLIAMENTARY WORKS SPONSOR BODY

Amendment proposed: 1, page 2, line 16, at end insert—

“(f) to require the Delivery Authority when allocating contracts for construction and related work to have regard for the company’s policies on corporate social responsibility, including those relating to the blacklisting of employees or potential employees from employment.”—(*Christian Matheson.*)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 211, Noes 132.

Division No. 421]

[4.11 pm

AYES

Abrahams, Debbie
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, Jonathan
Austin, Ian
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Gavin Shuker*)
Blackman, Kirsty
Blomfield, Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bruce, Fiona
Bryant, Chris
Buckland, Robert
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn

Cadbury, Ruth
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chapman, Douglas
Cherry, Joanna
Coaker, Vernon
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crausby, Sir David
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Daby, Janet
Dakin, Nic
David, Wayne
Davis, rh Mr David
Day, Martyn
De Cordova, Marsha
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh

Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Drew, Dr David
 Duffield, Rosie
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Evans, Chris
 Fellows, Marion
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Forbes, Lisa
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Furniss, Gill
 Gaffney, Hugh
 Gapes, Mike
 George, Ruth
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hermon, Lady
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hoare, Simon
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Khan, Afzal
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Murray, Ian
 Newlands, Gavin
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Percy, Andrew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pidcock, Laura
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rees, Christina
 Reynolds, Emma (*Proxy vote
cast by Mr Pat McFadden*)
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Robinson, Mary
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip (*Proxy vote cast
by Vicky Foxcroft*)
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Swinson, Jo

Tami, rh Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Mr Robin
 West, Catherine

Western, Matt
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Phil
 Wishart, Pete
 Wragg, Mr William
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Thangam Debbonaire and
Chris Elmore

NOES

Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Blackman, Bob
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Cash, Sir William
 Chalk, Alex
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, Colin
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Costa, Alberto
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Davies, Glyn
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, Michelle
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, rh Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Eustice, George
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Freer, Mike
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Graham, Luke
 Grant, Bill
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Hair, Kirstene
 Hall, Luke
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Hinds, rh Damian

Hollinrake, Kevin
 Holloway, Adam
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick
 Jack, Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Kerr, Stephen
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Malthouse, Kit
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 Menzies, Mark
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, David
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Parish, Neil
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Shannon, Jim
 Simpson, David
 Smith, Chloe (*Proxy vote cast
by Jo Churchill*)
 Smith, Henry
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew

Stewart, rh Rory
Stride, rh Mel
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Swire, rh Sir Hugo
Thomson, Ross
Throup, Maggie
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tredinnick, David
Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
Vaizey, rh Mr Edward

Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Theresa
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill

Tellers for the Noes:
Wendy Morton and
Iain Stewart

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment 1 agreed to.

Amendment made: 7, page 2, line 44, leave out “desirability of ensuring” and insert “need to ensure”— (*Christian Matheson*).

This amendment requires the Parliamentary Works Sponsor Body, in exercising its functions, to have regard to the need to ensure that educational and other facilities are provided for people visiting the Palace of Westminster (rather than requiring it to have regard to the desirability of ensuring that such facilities are provided).

Amendment proposed: 4, page 2, line 46, at end insert—

“(h) the need to ensure that economic benefits of the Parliamentary building works are delivered across the nations and regions of the United Kingdom, in terms of contracts for works and in any other way the Sponsor Board considers appropriate.”—(*Neil Gray*).

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 203, Noes 117.

Division No. 422]

[4.25 pm

AYES

Abrahams, Debbie
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, Jonathan
Austin, Ian
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Gavin Shuker*)
Blackman, Kirsty
Blomfield, Paul
Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Cadbury, Ruth
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chapman, Douglas
Cherry, Joanna
Coaker, Vernon
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crausby, Sir David
Creagh, Mary

Creasy, Stella
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Daby, Janet
Dakin, Nic
David, Wayne
Day, Martyn
De Cordova, Marsha
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, rh Nigel
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Drew, Dr David
Duffield, Rosie
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Evans, Chris
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, rh Caroline
Forbes, Lisa
Foxcroft, Vicky
Furniss, Gill
Gaffney, Hugh
Gapes, Mike
George, Ruth

Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glindon, Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goodman, Helen
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hayes, Helen
Hayman, Sue
Healey, rh John
Hendry, Drew
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Hill, Mike
Hillier, Meg
Hoare, Simon
Hobhouse, Wera
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Khan, Afzal
Kyle, Peter
Lake, Ben
Lamb, rh Norman
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Lefroy, Jeremy
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Mills, Nigel
Monaghan, Carol
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Moran, Layla

Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Stephen
Murray, Ian
Newlands, Gavin
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Percy, Andrew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pidcock, Laura
Platt, Jo
Pollard, Luke
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Rees, Christina
Reynolds, Emma (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Pat McFadden*)
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Shuker, Mr Gavin
Siddiq, Tulip (*Proxy vote cast by Vicky Foxcroft*)
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Snell, Gareth
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
Starmer, rh Keir
Stephens, Chris
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sweeney, Mr Paul
Swinson, Jo
Tami, rh Mark
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Timms, rh Stephen
Turley, Anna
Twigg, Stephen
Twist, Liz
Vaz, Valerie
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Wragg, Mr William
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Alan Brown and
Marion Fellows

NOES

Afolami, Bim	Kerr, Stephen
Afriyie, Adam	Kwarteng, Kwasi
Aldous, Peter	Leadsom, rh Andrea
Amess, Sir David	Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Andrew, Stuart	Lewer, Andrew
Bellingham, Sir Henry	Lewis, rh Brandon
Blackman, Bob	Loughton, Tim
Blunt, Crispin	Mackinlay, Craig
Bone, Mr Peter	Maclean, Rachel
Bottomley, Sir Peter	McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
Brereton, Jack	Menzies, Mark
Bridgen, Andrew	Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Brokenshire, rh James	Milling, Amanda
Bruce, Fiona	Milton, rh Anne
Cash, Sir William	Moore, Damien
Chalk, Alex	Mordaunt, rh Penny
Chope, Sir Christopher	Morgan, rh Nicky
Churchill, Jo	Morris, David
Clark, Colin	Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth	Nokes, rh Caroline
Clarke, Mr Simon	Offord, Dr Matthew
Costa, Alberto	Parish, Neil
Donelan, Michelle	Penning, rh Sir Mike
Drax, Richard	Philp, Chris
Duddridge, James	Pincher, rh Christopher
Duguid, David	Prentis, Victoria
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain	Pursglove, Tom
Dunne, rh Mr Philip	Quin, Jeremy
Ellis, Michael	Quince, Will
Evennett, rh Sir David	Redwood, rh John
Fabricant, Michael	Robinson, Mary
Ford, Vicky	Rutley, David
Foster, Kevin	Sandbach, Antoinette
Freer, Mike	Shannon, Jim
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Simpson, David
Grant, Bill	Smith, Chloe (<i>Proxy vote cast by Jo Churchill</i>)
Greening, rh Justine	Smith, Henry
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic	Spencer, Mark
Hair, Kirstene	Stephenson, Andrew
Hall, Luke	Stewart, rh Rory
Hammond, Stephen	Stride, rh Mel
Hands, rh Greg	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Harrington, Richard	Swire, rh Sir Hugo
Harris, Rebecca	Thomson, Ross
Harrison, Trudy	Throup, Maggie
Hayes, rh Sir John	Tolhurst, Kelly
Heappey, James	Tomlinson, Justin
Heaton-Jones, Peter	Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
Hinds, rh Damian	Vickers, Martin
Holloway, Adam	Villiers, rh Theresa
Huddleston, Nigel	Walker, Mr Robin
Hughes, Eddie	Warman, Matt
Hurd, rh Mr Nick	Watling, Giles
Jack, Mr Alister	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Javid, rh Sajid	Wiggin, Bill
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Williamson, rh Gavin
Jenkin, Sir Bernard	
Jenrick, Robert	
Johnson, Dr Caroline	
Kawczynski, Daniel	
Keegan, Gillian	

Tellers for the Noes:

Iain Stewart and
Wendy Morton

Question accordingly agreed to.

Schedule 1

THE PARLIAMENTARY WORKS SPONSOR BODY

Amendments made: 8, page 10, line 20, at end insert—

“() See also paragraph 7A, which makes provision about the appointment of the first external members.”

This amendment signposts the new paragraph 7A inserted by amendment 9 (which deals with the appointment of the first external members of the Parliamentary Works Sponsor Body).

Amendment 9, page 12, line 2, at end insert—

“Appointment of initial external members

7A (1) The person who, immediately before the commencement day, was the chair of the shadow Sponsor Body is to be treated as having been appointed on that day as the chair of the Sponsor Body in accordance with paragraph 2.

(2) Appointment by virtue of sub-paragraph (1) is to be treated as being for a term of 3 years.

(3) A person who, immediately before the commencement day—

(a) was a member of the shadow Sponsor Body (other than the chair), and

(b) was not a member of either House of Parliament,

is to be treated as having been appointed on that day as a member of the Sponsor Body in accordance with paragraph 3 (external members).

(4) Appointment by virtue of sub-paragraph (3) is to be treated as being for a term ending with the last day of the period of 3 years beginning with the day on which the shadow Sponsor Body was established.

(5) An appointment by virtue of sub-paragraph (1) or (3) ceases to have effect at the end of the period of 1 month beginning with the commencement day unless, before the end of that period, the appointment is confirmed by a resolution of each House of Parliament.

(6) Paragraphs 2, 3 and 6 do not apply in relation to a member who is appointed by virtue of sub-paragraph (1) or (3).

(7) In this paragraph—

“the commencement day” means the day on which section 2(1) comes into force;

“the shadow Sponsor Body” means the body, established in July 2018 in connection with the restoration of the Palace of Westminster, which is known as the shadow Sponsor Body.”—(*Mark Tami.*)

This amendment provides for those who were external members of the shadow Sponsor Body immediately before clause 2 comes into force to be appointed as the first external members of the Parliamentary Works Sponsor Body.

Third Reading

Queen's consent signified.

4.38 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mel Stride): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I give my thanks to my fellow Devonian Member of the House, the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend for Torbay (Kevin Foster), for all the work that he has put into the earlier stages of the Bill, not least because he arrived on the Bill after its Second Reading. He has done an excellent job in liaising with others and getting himself over all the considerable detail of the matters that we are discussing today. I also thank those who served in Committee and those who contributed on Report.

I shall not dwell on the Bill for too long, as there is a high level of consensus across the House, and of course it is a Bill for Parliament as a whole and not for the Government in particular. It is important that we protect, restore and renew the parliamentary estate, not just because there are 3,000 or 4,000 people working here who have a right to work in a place of safety that is not falling apart around our ears, quite literally in some instances, but because the estate—the building and this

Chamber in particular—is a symbol of the cradle of democracy that has inspired many millions all around the world. It is a symbol of our heritage, rooted in that sense of democracy.

The estate is also a positive symbol of defiance. One thinks of this Chamber and these buildings as having been forged out of the great fire of 1834, but this Chamber itself burned down in its former incarnation during the final days of the blitz, when Westminster Hall was also struck by incendiary bombs. The difficult decision had to be taken as to which one to save, given that there were not enough fire appliances to save both. With Westminster Hall being almost 1,000 years old, the decision was taken to save the older part of the Palace, which was undoubtedly the right decision. This Chamber rose out of the ashes at the end of the second world war and serves as a great inspiration to our country, and it is important that we do the right thing by the estate.

As my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary has amply outlined, the Bill sets the governance structure for the work that will be required to bring everything up to the standards that we should expect. It will ensure that the work runs to time, runs to budget and has a high emphasis on ensuring value for the taxpayer.

Of course, one of the reasons why the Bill is in such good shape is the excellent work of the Joint Committee that conducted pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft Bill. I extend my thanks to my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) for her excellent chairmanship of that Committee. It should be noted that, in broad terms, the Committee endorsed the approach that the Bill takes. I also thank my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom), my predecessor as Leader of the House, for all her excellent work in pushing the project forward and for taking the Bill through its Second Reading.

The consensus across the House has extended to the Government drafting some of the amendments that we have agreed this afternoon. Most notably, we drafted amendments 8 and 9, which were in the names of my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin) and the right hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami)—I will call him my right hon. Friend because he was my sparring partner during my days in the Whips Office—who spoke so powerfully about the importance of ensuring that the shadow Sponsor Body is transferred, subject to various requirements depending on when the appointments and the terms of office fall due.

We also worked with the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) on amendment 7, which relates to education facilities. We absolutely accept that such facilities are not just desirable but necessary. We thank him for the constructive way in which he engaged with my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary on that matter. There were many other contributions, and two amendments—amendments 1 and 4—have now passed by way of Division in addition to those that I have mentioned. We look forward to examining them and to considering whether they might be improved or changed in some way when this Bill goes to the other place, but that is down to the will of the House.

I conclude by thanking the Bill team, all those involved in the restoration and renewal programme, the Whips, the PPSs—my hon. Friends the Members for Ochil and

South Perthshire (Luke Graham) and for Banbury (Victoria Prentis)—the Clerks, the Opposition Front-Bench team and, in particular, the shadow Leader of the House for having sponsored the Bill. The Bill has been improved during its swift progress, and the House has risen to the occasion. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.44 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I endorse the Leader of the House's full list of thanks to save the Official Reporters having to record it again. I am pleased to support the Bill, as amended, and I thank the Chairs in Committee—my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson) and the hon. Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter)—and the other members of the Committee for debating the Bill on 4 June. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) and the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), for taking the Bill through. I understand that it was quite a pleasant affair—[*Interruption.*] Perhaps I should not have used the word “affair”!

Her Majesty's Opposition support the Bill, which follows a long process of assessing and reviewing the state of the Palace of Westminster and of determining how best to proceed. The House debated and voted on restoration and renewal on 31 January 2018, and agreed that the Palace of Westminster is in need of restoration and renewal.

I thank both former Leaders of the House, the right hon. Members for Aylesbury (Mr Lidington) and for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom), for unlocking the difficulties and allowing the passage of the Bill—particularly the right hon. Lady, who is here in the Chamber.

The House resolved by 234 votes to 185 that immediate steps be taken to establish a shadow Sponsor Board and Delivery Authority. I thank the members of the shadow Sponsor Board, who will hopefully step out of the shadows and become fully fledged members. These bodies will be able to make strategic decisions on the restoration and renewal programme so that the Palace of Westminster can be secured as the UK Parliament for future generations.

The Parliamentary Works Sponsor Body will have overall responsibility for restoration and renewal, will act as a single client on behalf of both Houses and will be empowered to form a Delivery Authority. The Parliamentary Works Sponsor Body will hopefully also have responsibility for the northern estate programme.

On Report, hon. Members touched on the successful London Olympics project, and one of the key things is that the project had an end date, so I suggest that the Leader of the House looks at arranging a proper schedule so that restoration and renewal does not run into never-ending dates for completion. It is important to have a date for completion.

I, too, thank the Joint Committee, chaired by the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman), for scrutinising the draft Bill and making recommendations. The Joint Committee reported on 21 March 2019, and it said that the basic structure of governance proposed by the draft Bill is correct.

This has not been mentioned but, now Parliament has agreed that there is a climate change emergency, I understand that, within the necessary constraints of

[Valerie Vaz]

heritage and conservation planning, the refurbishment will support the energy efficiency of the buildings by using more energy-efficient building fabrics, including, where feasible, in the Palace of Westminster.

I am delighted that the education centre has been accepted and will be in its new place, as it will be a key part of the legacy of the building works. It should be established and remain in place during the works on the northern estate and the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre. I know from experience that my constituents love the education centre, and it is important in helping them to understand what democracy is about so that they know exactly what we do in this place. The education centre is a fantastic building, showing the reality of sitting in the Chamber and in the House of Lords, so I thank the Leader of the House.

I heard what the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office said about the Comptroller and Auditor General, and I hope some sort of oversight can be agreed. The Government mentioned cost and value for money approximately 13 times in their response to the Joint Committee's report, so it is vital that we all agree that costs should be kept in check, particularly for taxpayers and for Parliament.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester did a grand job of addressing amendment 1 on blacklisting, and I am delighted that the House has accepted that amendment. The Leader of the House will know that the Employment Relations Act 1999 (Blacklists) Regulations 2010 prohibit the compilation, use, sale or supply of trade union blacklists. It is a terrible thing to be on such a blacklist, which destroys lives, and I am pleased that the House has spoken and that it will not be the case, certainly in terms of contracts.

Talking of contracts, one of the key considerations that Opposition colleagues are keen to proceed with in restoration and renewal—the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) addressed this in amendment 4—is the need to ensure that the economic benefits are available to all countries and regions of the UK, not just London. There used to be something called contract compliance, so contracts can be worded in such a way to include that. We know that some European countries—dare I mention Europe?—are able to benefit their own companies in that way without falling foul of state aid rules. I certainly think that contracts could be worded in such a way as to make those benefits available to the whole country. I know that it has been accepted now, but perhaps the Leader of the House could write to the shadow Sponsor Body to suggest that it looks at that.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Anybody with experience of local government will know that a contract has to include every item. If it does not, there will be a lot of additional costs that were never expected. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Valerie Vaz: Absolutely. I know that my hon. Friend had a very good career as the leader of a local council, so he knows all about it.

Turning to heritage, the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) made a valuable and robust contribution, and I agree with every word he said—I must declare an interest, because my daughter is an archaeologist. This is a unique building and we must

protect it. I understand the Minister's point about the distinction of a UNESCO world heritage site, which is slightly different, but it is an historic building. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) suggested that we should have a craft school, which is something they do in Scotland. Perhaps Historic England could link up with Historic Environment Scotland and do something somewhere in the middle of the country—

Kevin Foster: In Walsall, perhaps?

Valerie Vaz: Yes, I would love that. We have a great manufacturing tradition and there are many skills.

Mark Tami: Many of the skills that we will need are currently very limited, whether those of stonemasons or people who can work on the thousands of windows in this place. We need to train those people, because those skills are not readily available. We will be importing those skills if we do not train people.

Valerie Vaz: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. For me, having apprentices is a key consideration. It is also a good opportunity to make the workforce more diverse. I do not know whether the Leader of the House is aware of this, but there is a specific company that employs only women builders, decorators, plumbers and electricians. I think that looking at that would be a good way of showing that we are diverse. I would have liked to see the heritage aspect included in the Bill, but the Minister has suggested that there will be discussions, particularly in the other place, where there is a lot of expertise on heritage—he might regret that slightly. I am glad that the amendments have been won. Perhaps the Government will consider making them slightly stronger. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester will be very happy to work with the Government on any future wording.

Finally, we have a duty to protect this amazing building. I know that lots of hon. Members have worked hard, whether in Bill Committees or through contributions they have made in discussions with House authorities, including the Minister. It affects all of us. We might not be here when the building is finally restored to its glory and is in its best condition, but we do this for future generations. Her Majesty's Opposition are absolutely delighted to support the Bill as amended.

4.54 pm

Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): I am delighted to see you in the Chair again, Madam Deputy Speaker, for my second speech in two days—my first contributions from the Back Benches since 2014—on another subject about which I feel so passionately. Yesterday, I talked about my passion for this place, this much-loved Parliament, in the context of the need to ensure that everybody who comes here to visit or to work is treated with dignity and respect. Today, I shall talk briefly about my other passion: making sure that Parliament is a safe and modern place for all those who work in it and for the hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.

It was no mean feat—in fact, it was quite a great achievement—to introduce the Bill and to make progress where countless other Governments have failed. I pay tribute to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your commitment as a member of the House of Commons Commission, and to the shadow Leader of the House,

the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), and the representatives of other parties on the Commission, for their commitment to making progress on this issue. The Bill is a significant tribute to all those who serve on the Commission, who were so determined to see that we take action.

Since the repairs made after the second world war, very little has been done to restore the Palace's fabric. It is clear that 80% of the cost of R and R will lie in mechanical and engineering works. There is no doubt that we have almost left it too late. There have been 66 fire incidents since 2008. There are regular masonry falls, with the potential to cause serious injury. There are constant leaks—in the Palace rather than the Cabinet—blockages and failures of systems, and there is of course the ever-present risk of an asbestos leak, which would have us move straight out of here.

I wish to pay tribute to those with whom I worked closely over the past couple of years. I pay tribute, first, to those who served on the original Joint Committee, the advice of which has been so fundamental to the making of progress; to the programme team, particularly Tom and Kate, who did such a fantastic job; to the superb Leader's Office team, particularly Joanna and Rob, who have done a marvellous job; to the joint Select Committee, particularly my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman); to the shadow Sponsor Board itself—I wish Liz Peace every success as she takes it forward; to the Bill Committee, with huge thanks to the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), who literally jumped in and got stuck straight into the Bill, and what a fantastic job he has done; and to the Cabinet Office Bill team, particularly Ellen and Tim.

I pay particular tribute to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), who has been such a supporter and advocate of restoration and renewal, and to the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), who has been a superb Chair of the Public Accounts Committee and has proven herself to be a completely determined advocate for the restoration of this place. It has been a vital, cross-party effort. Finally, I pay tribute to my now ex-Parliamentary Private Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), who was a huge support to me personally as we tried to persuade Members right across the House to back the Bill. I am so glad that, between us all, probably with some fraught conversations and a bit of persuasion—with no bullying, of course, because that would not be acceptable, but with some strong persuasion and strong argument—we have got there.

As we send the Bill to the other place for consideration, I would really like the Delivery Authority to consider looking into three issues that are critical to value for money and to the securing of a modern and functioning democracy. The first is the Elizabeth Tower. You will know as well as I do, Madam Deputy Speaker, that this has been a fraught issue. Elizabeth Tower is being restored. It is probably halfway through its restoration—a significant cost to the taxpayer—and will be open long before we leave this place. It is my strong desire that, once the restoration work starts and we have decanted out of here, Elizabeth Tower should remain open to members of the public. It will have been expensively restored, and the programme team have confirmed that having Elizabeth Tower remain open would not add to the cost or complexity of R and R. I urge the Delivery

Authority to ensure that that happens and that we do not end up putting the Elizabeth Tower under wraps again, having just reopened it.

The second issue to consider is the availability of the second Chamber in Westminster Hall—the Grand Committee Room—which, in itself, will not be significantly affected by restoration and renewal. It is a more complicated matter because, of course, there will be building works, earth movers and so on all around the Palace, but we should give it consideration, bearing in mind that the decant option gives us only 75% of the footprint of the Palace. If we want to try to snaffle some of that back, we could keep the Grand Committee Room as our second Chamber throughout. That would enable us to provide more space for valuable Committee rooms and so on in Richmond House during the decant period. I urge the Delivery Authority to consider retaining access to that second Chamber, certainly through St Stephen's entrance, and potentially keeping the Jubilee Café open as a place for Members and visitors to be able to eat and get cups of tea. The second Chamber is a particularly useful place, and I urge colleagues to consider that point seriously.

I have one final point to make in the context of the entire project. I have some concerns about the proposed way in which the media will be facilitated during the decant period. I met the head of the Lobby on a couple of occasions to discuss the needs of the media. I am aware that, under the current proposals for decant, the amount of space for the media is proposed to be considerably restricted to potentially half what it currently has. There is also a proposal to put a glass screen between members of the press and the temporary Chamber. I urge the Delivery Authority, if it takes on the northern estate programme, to reconsider that and ensure that the press has adequate space. Day in, day out, we see the consequences of different Parliaments around the world not having a free press to scrutinise their work. We constantly see the consequences of dictators who try to shut down the freedom of the press and what that does to their societies and their communities, and I would hate for us to do anything that did not permit the freedom of the press that we so value in the United Kingdom.

I am so glad to see this vital legislation moving forward and that the House itself has come to accept that, if we want to stay here for decades to come and pass this great Palace on to future generations, we simply must get on with it. I will stay close to the R and R programme over the coming years, and I look forward to the establishment of a professional Delivery Authority that will be tasked with ensuring good value for taxpayers' money and with ensuring our legacy.

5.2 pm

Neil Gray: I do not plan to detain the House for very long. You will be pleased to know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that my speaking notes had to be ripped up after the result of that last vote. We are very pleased that the SNP secured the amendment of the Bill with the support of Members from all parties, for which I am very grateful.

It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom). She perhaps inadvertently provided several thanks not just to me but to the likes of the right hon. Member for Alyn and

[Neil Gray]

Deeside (Mark Tami) for the service that we provided through all stages—from the Joint Committee to the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee, the Finance Committee, the Sponsor Board and various other incarnations in which we have been involved. Certainly thanks must also go to her, as she was the first Minister who took this project very seriously and started to drive it forward. The House must thank her for her efforts in this regard. Previously, the Government were rather lukewarm and standoffish about the project.

I want to pick up on some of the points that the right hon. Lady made, because they were very sensible and should go on the record. The suggestion about Elizabeth Tower should be considered. I know that she and others have made that point before, and it is right that the relevant bodies consider it. I think she understands that her idea about Westminster Hall might present a greater challenge. Discussions need to be had with the contractors and the programme board about whether it would be possible, given the fact that we are looking for a full decant to make it easier for the contractors to work, but certainly it should be considered.

The right hon. Lady was absolutely right to make her point about facilities for the media. Under the current proposals, their facilities would be greatly downgraded from the already inadequate facilities they currently have, so that issue definitely needs to be looked at as part of the decant process.

I thank Joanna Dodd and Michael Everett in the Clerks team for their assistance in drafting our amendments, which were successful in the end, and SNP researcher Eoin Bradley, who provided support on the Bill. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie), who is soon to be a Privy Counsellor; he provided a great service for us on the House of Commons Commission. He and I have worked closely together throughout the process leading up to this point. His replacement will be my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart)—[*Interruption.*] Indeed, he should also be a Privy Counsellor. My hon. Friend led on Second Reading and has been heavily involved in this process to date.

I thank the new Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), for his approachability and willingness to engage. Although we disagreed on my amendment 4, he was willing to engage and we had a very forthright, honest meeting and discussion about it. I have a challenge for the current Leader of the House—not to sabotage amendment 4, which has just been passed and which is about ensuring that there is discernible benefit across the nations and regions of the United Kingdom when the Bill moves to the other place. We will be watching closely and with great interest.

5.6 pm

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I will not repeat the many thanks outlined by the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom), the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) and others, because they have listed everybody that I would list. However, I pay tribute to them and particularly to the members of the original Joint Committee, who really set the tone.

It seems a long time since 31 January last year, when we were on a knife edge here—not knowing. I hot-footed it here from my daughter's hospital bed to ensure that we could get the amendment through, but we were really not sure what was going to happen. I give real credit to the former Leader of the House for taking up the ball and running with it, and ensuring that the Bill reached this position today. I also thank the Ministers since then who have picked up the pace.

It is really important that we get on with this now, and there is a real will to do so. As Members, we need to keep a very close eye on the process. The Public Accounts Committee will certainly do that, although probably not under me. I think my term of office will have almost come to an end—if I am still here—by the time we move out, so I will leave a note to my successor. The National Audit Office is already looking at how it can engage with the process, although there are still some discussions to be had about how that will work.

I urge Ministers to look again at amendment 6. I apologise for not being here when the Minister discussed it—I was chairing the Public Accounts Committee—but I thank him for the assurances that it will be looked at in the other place. It seems to me that amendment 6 follows neatly on from amendment 4, which has been adopted, because for amendment 4 to work we will need some sort of audit of how the work is going. Amendment 6 is a very simple measure, so I welcome the fact that the Minister has agreed to look at it and I know that colleagues in the other place will do so.

It feels like a long journey since January last year, but this has actually been going on since 2016 in this Parliament, and of course it has been decades coming. The key lesson is that we must ensure not only that we move out, get the work done and move back, but that no future Parliament allows the future, modernised, refurbished, restored Parliament building to fall into such disrepair. If this building is going to work for successions of future MPs, peers, staff and members of the public who visit, and if it is to remain the icon of democracy that it was set up to be, we need to maintain it in the future. We must make sure that that is part of the plan now—I lay a warning for our successors. That cyclical maintenance, boring though it may be, is vital so that we are not in this position again in our dotage. I can imagine the former Leader of the House sitting up in the Public Gallery and getting very frustrated if we come here as we get older. Let us hope that we do not have to do that, and that future Members will be good custodians of this building, as we and some of our predecessors have sadly not been in the past.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): With the leave of the House, we will take motions 3 and 4 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)).

CAPITAL GAINS TAX

That the draft Double Taxation Relief and International Tax Enforcement (Israel) Order 2019, which was laid before this House on 13 May, be approved.

INCOME TAX

That the draft Double Taxation Relief (Cyprus) Order 2019, which was laid before this House on 29 April, be approved.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

Question agreed to.

Visa Processing Algorithms

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

5.10 pm

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): This is an important debate about technology, automation, the Home Office, immigration and people's lives. I came to the House in 2010 and have since often raised issues to do with technology, and I also feel that a better debate on immigration has often been needed, so the opportunity to spend two hours and 20 minutes debating this subject is an unexpected but welcome surprise. However, I do not intend to detain the House for much longer than the half hour originally estimated, although I will be happy if other Members wish to.

I want to start by saying that I am happy to call myself a “tech evangelist”, having worked as an engineer in the tech sector for 20 years before coming into Parliament. Since then, I have worked to champion technology and how it can make all our lives better; I was the first MP to mention the internet of things in this place, for example. Over the years, I have also raised concerns about the impact of technology, especially with a Government who refuse to put in place a regulatory framework that reflects its potential for harm as well as good, and who, critically, refuse to accept that the impact of technology on society is a political choice.

Along with others, I have been highlighting the potential harms of algorithmic decision making, artificial intelligence and data exploitation for years, yet the Government have done nothing. In fact, we now learn that they have done worse than nothing: they have taken advantage of the current regulatory chaos to implement algorithmic management in secret.

On 9 June, the *Financial Times* revealed that the Home Office was secretly using algorithms to process visa applications, which is making a bad situation worse. I say that because of my experience as a constituency MP in Newcastle with a significant level of immigration casework—I will talk more about that. I am also chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Africa. We are currently conducting an inquiry into UK visa refusals for African visitors to the UK. We have met the Minister—we are grateful for that—and our report will be published next month. Furthermore, I am chair of the all-party parliamentary group on diversity and inclusion in science, technology, engineering and maths; algorithmic bias is one important example of how the lack of diversity in STEM is bad for tech and society.

According to the *Financial Times* journalist Helen Warrell, the Home Office uses an algorithm to “stream” visa applicants according to their supposed level of risk—grading them red, amber or green. The Home Office says that that decision is then checked by a real-life human and does not impact the decision-making process, which is the most ridiculous justification for algorithmic decision making ever—that it does not make any decisions! Presumably it is just there to look good. We must not forget the inevitability of confirmation bias in human decision making, which was raised by the chief inspector of borders and immigration.

The Home Office refuses to give any details of the streaming process, how risk is determined or the algorithm itself. That lack of accountability would be deeply

[*Chi Onwurah*]

worrying in any Department, but in the Home Office it is entirely unacceptable, particularly when it comes to visa processing. The Home Office is broken. We know that it is unable to fulfil its basic visa-processing duties in a timely or consistent manner. If we add to that a powerful and unregulated new technology, Brexit and bias, we have a recipe for disaster.

I know that there are many able and hard-working civil servants in the Home Office, though fewer than there were. When I say that the Home Office is broken, it is not a criticism of them, but of the resources they are given to do their job. The all-party parliamentary group for Africa received detailed and, at times, excoriating evidence from a whole range of people and organisations—academics, artists, business owners, scientists and family members—who had been wrongly denied entry to the UK. I will give just a few examples.

LIFT, the world-famous London International Festival of Theatre, applied for visas for well-known artists from the Democratic Republic of the Congo for a performance exploring their experience of civil war. They were denied visas on the basis that UK dancers could perform those roles. We also heard from the Scotland Malawi Partnership, which highlighted a case where a high-profile musician invited to the UK from Malawi was given a visa rejection letter from UK Visas and Immigration that essentially stated, “We reject your visa because [insert reason here].”

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way and wholeheartedly endorse everything she is saying. We have worked closely together. I chair the all-party parliamentary group on Malawi and assist her on the APPG for Africa. As she says, these examples are just the tip of the iceberg. She is right that we should not blame the individual decision makers in the Home Office. It is the policy, the lack of resourcing and, as I think she is getting to, the increasingly broad-brush approach to the use of automation. This is damaging the whole of the UK and everything the Government say about wanting to make Britain a great country to come to; that simply will not be the case if people cannot get through the door.

Chi Onwurah: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. Unsurprisingly, as we have worked together in the all-party parliamentary groups, I agree with everything he said. In fact, he anticipates some of the points that I will come on to make.

Our APPG also heard of ordained ministers and priests being denied visas either because they did not earn enough—as if they had taken a vow of poverty—or because the Church of England is not considered a reputable sponsor. We heard of a son unable to reach his father’s deathbed and grandparents unable to see their grandchildren.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I have seen similar cases, particularly when somebody wants to bring a member of their family over here. I will not go into great detail, but I had a case where an individual was dying of cancer, which meant that her husband would have to give up his job to look after their four kids. The problem was trying to get somebody from her home country to come here to look after her until she died. It took a long time for us to sort that out, but eventually they were allowed a visa to come here. Nine

times out of 10 with visas or even leave to stay, there are major problems with the Home Office. My hon. Friend is right; something has to happen. The Home Office is under-resourced and has a lack of personnel. It might tell us that it can put an application through in a given time, but it does not happen that way. People often turn up at our surgeries, and they are sometimes very distressed about the way these things are handled.

Chi Onwurah: I really thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, because he is of course absolutely right. He raises a heartbreaking case, but he also hints at the fact that, as a consequence, we as MPs are seeing more casework and having a higher case load. That in itself is putting more pressure on the Home Office because we raise cases and ask for them to be reviewed. It takes longer to effect a decision—a final, just decision—and the people concerned have their lives disrupted, in some cases heartbreakingly so, for a longer period of time.

I want to mention the case of a United Kingdom mayor who was denied the presence of their sister at their inauguration, presumably because they were not considered to be a credible sponsor. Finally of these national cases, Oxfam has highlighted that, because of visa rejections, only one of the 25 individuals from Africa expected to attend a blog-writing training course at the recent London School of Economics Africa summit was able to do so. Non-governmental organisations and so on are trying to support in-country skills development, but it is often the case that it is very difficult to bring people, particularly young people, working for Oxfam or other NGOs to this country for training.

The Minister should know that her Department is notorious for a culture of disbelief, with an assumption that visitors are not genuine. I will give one example from my own constituency. Last year, the University of Nigeria Alumni Association UK branch chose to hold its annual meeting in Newcastle—by the way, it is a fantastic location to hold all such events—but a significant number were initially denied visas on the grounds that they might not return to Nigeria. These were all businessmen and women, academics or Government workers with family in Nigeria. After my intervention, their visas were approved, but that should not have been necessary.

Entry clearance officers are set independent targets of up to 60 case decisions each day, and our all-party group investigation found that this impacted on the quality and fairness of decision making. Home Office statistics from September 2018 show that African applicants are refused UK visas at twice the rate of those from any other part of the world. When visitors are denied entry arbitrarily, the UK’s relationship and standing with those countries is damaged, as has been mentioned, and we lose culturally and economically. International conferences and events, new businesses, trading opportunities and cultural collaborations are being lost to the UK because of the failings of the Home Office.

The last report on visa services from the independent chief inspector in 2014 found that over 40% of refusal notices were

“not balanced, and failed to show that consideration had been given to both positive and negative evidence.”

Last month, it was announced that the six-month target for deciding straightforward asylum cases is being abandoned. This was a target that, as the Home Office’s

own statistics show, was repeatedly missed. In 2017, one in four asylum cases was not decided within six months, while immigration delays have doubled over the past year, despite a drop in cases. As a constituency MP, I know from personal experience about the significantly longer delays to visa applications.

This is a failing system, but it is run for profit. Applicants are routinely charged up to 10 times the actual administrative costs of processing applications. For example, applying for indefinite leave to remain in the UK costs £2,389, while the true cost is just £243. Fees for refused visas are not refunded and there is no right of appeal for the refusal of a visit visa application. Within the process, even communication with the Home Office is monetised: people are charged £5.48 to email the Home Office from abroad and non-UK-based phone calls cost £1.37 per minute.

The fact that the Department has reputedly lost 25% of its headcount under the austerity agenda must be part of the reason for these failures, but there is also the culture of disbelief, which I mentioned earlier, the hostile environment, of which we have heard much, and the impact of Brexit, because what staff do remain are being moved on to Brexit preparation. It is in this environment that the Home Office decided that the answer was an algorithm.

According to the Home Office, the use of algorithms in visa processing is part of an efficiency drive. They are being used not to improve the quality of decision making, but to make up for a lack of resources and/or to drive further resources out. As an engineer, I often say that whatever the problem is, the answer is never technology—at least, not on its own. I will say categorically that algorithms should not be used for short-term cost savings at this stage in their evolution as a technology.

Let me define what we are talking about. An algorithm is a set of instructions, acting on data entered in a particular format, to make a decision. If the algorithm learns from performing those instructions how to make better decisions, that might be called machine learning. If it both learns from performing its instructions and can act upon data in different and unpredictable formats, it might be considered to be artificial intelligence—might, but not necessarily is, because not everything that is artificial is intelligent.

Critically, algorithms are only as good as their design and the data they are trained on. They are designed by software engineers, who tend to come from a very narrow demographic—few are women, from ethnic minorities or working class. The design will necessarily reflect the limits of their backgrounds, unless a significant effort is made for it not to.

There are many examples of problems with the training data for algorithms, from the facial recognition algorithm that identified black people as gorillas because only white people had been used to train it, to the match-making or romantic algorithm that optimised for short-term relationships because the training data showed that they generated more income, due to the repeat business. Unless algorithms are diverse by design, they will be unequal by outcome.

Algorithms are now an integral part of our lives, but without any appropriate regulation. They drive Facebook's newsfeeds and Google's search results; they tell us what to buy and when to go to sleep; they tell us who to vote

for and whom to hire. However, there is no regulatory framework to protect us from their bias. Companies argue that the results of their algorithms are a mirror to society and are not their responsibility; they say that the outcomes of algorithms are already regulated because the companies that use them have to meet employment and competition law. But a mirror is not the right metaphor; by automating decision making, algorithms industrialise bias. Companies and especially Governments should not rely on algorithms alone to deliver results.

I hope that the Government are not accepting algorithms in their decision making processes without introducing further regulation. The Home Office has denied that the algorithm for visa streaming takes account of race, but it refuses to tell us anything about the algorithm itself. Home Office guidance on the “genuine visitor” test allows consideration of the political, economic and security situation of the country of application, or nationality, as well as statistics on immigration compliance from those in the same geographical region, which can often be proxies for race.

When I announced this debate, many organisations and individuals sent me examples of how Home Office algorithmic decision making had effectively discriminated against them. Concerns were also raised about other automated decision making in the Home Office—for example, the residency checks in the EU settlement scheme, which uses a person's Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and Department for Work and Pensions footprints to establish residency, but does not consider benefits such as working tax credit, child tax credit or child benefit. All those benefits are more likely to be received by women. Therefore, the automated residency check is likely to discriminate against women, particularly vulnerable women without physical documents.

We do not know whether the visa processing algorithm makes similar choices, whether it was written by the same people, or indeed whether it originated in the private sector or the public sector. The Home Office says that algorithmic decisions are still checked by people—a requirement of GDPR, the general data protection regulation—but not how much time is allowed for those checks, and has admitted that the purpose of the algorithm in the first place was to reduce costs.

Unfortunately, the Government's track record on digital and data does not give confidence. When the Tories and Liberal Democrats entered Government in 2010, big data was a new phenomenon. Now it drives the business model of the internet, but the Government have done nothing to protect citizens beyond implementing mandatory European Union legislation—GDPR. They are happy to preside over a state of utter chaos when it comes to the ownership and control of data, and allow a free-for-all to develop in artificial intelligence, algorithms, the internet of things and blockchain. In 2016, for example, the DWP secretly trialled the payment of benefits using shared ledger or blockchain technology. Despite the privacy implications of using a private company to put sensitive, highly personal data on to a shared ledger that could not be changed or deleted, we still do not know what the process was for approving the use of this technology or the outcome of the trial. The Government should have learned from the Care.data debacle that the misuse of technology damages public trust for a long time.

[Chi Onwurah]

I like to consider myself as a champion of the power of shared data. I believe the better use of data could not only reduce the costs of public services, saving money to be better used elsewhere, but improve those services, making them more individual, more personal, faster and more efficient. However, I am not the only one to raise concerns. Algorithmic use in the public sector was recently debated in the Lords, where it was estimated that some 53 local authorities and about a quarter of police authorities are now using algorithms for prediction, risk assessment—as in this case—and assistance in decision making. Now that we find it being used in the Home Office, it is essential that the Government—I am glad to see the Minister here today—answer the following questions. I have, I think, 11 questions for the Minister to answer.

Will the Minister say whether this algorithmic visa processing is part of machine learning or artificial intelligence? Is the algorithm diverse by design? Will the Minister say whether the algorithm makes choices about what data is to be considered, as with the settled status check example? Who was responsible for the creation of the algorithm? Was it the Home Office, the Government Digital Service or a private sector company? What rights do visa applicants have with regard to this algorithm and their own data? Do they know it is being used in this way? How long is their data being stored for and what security is it subject to?

What advice was taken in making the decision to introduce this algorithm? Did the Government consult their Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport or the Cabinet Office? Does the duty of care in the Online Harms White Paper from DCMS apply to the Home Office in this case? What redress or liability do applicants have for decisions that are made in error or are subject to bias by the algorithm? What future algorithms is it planned to introduce into visa processing or elsewhere? Finally, why is it that journalists—in this case, from the *Financial Times*, as well as Carole Cadwalladr—seem to have identified and brought attention to the misuse of algorithms but the Government or any of their regulators who are supposedly interested in this area, such as Ofcom or the Information Commissioner's Office, have not? Will the Minister say which regulator she feels is responsible for this area?

A Labour Government would work with industry, local authorities, businesses, citizen groups and other stakeholders to introduce a digital Bill of Rights. This would give people ownership and control over their data and how it is used, helping to break the power of the monopoly tech giants, while ensuring a right to fair and equal treatment by algorithms, algorithmic justice and openness. We need to be able to hold companies and Government accountable for the consequences of the algorithms, artificial intelligence and machine learning that drive their profits or cost-cutting. A Labour Government would protect us not just from private companies, but from the cost-cutting of this Government, who I suspect either do not understand the consequences of their technology choices or do not care.

I hope that the Minister can reassure me and answer my questions and that she can demonstrate that the use of algorithms in the Home Office and elsewhere across Government will be subject to proper transparency, scrutiny and regulation in future.

5.37 pm

The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes): I congratulate the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) on securing this debate. I welcome her passionate contribution and recognise the importance of this issue and the sensitivities around it. She described herself as a tech evangelist and she has brought a great deal of knowledge and experience to the House in this debate and with some of the wider issues that she has consistently raised in the House since she arrived in 2010. I hope that the House will forgive me if I spend a bit of time focusing on the wider visa and immigration system before moving on to the specific points that the hon. Lady made, because she raised some wider concerns about the Home Office and the borders and immigration system.

We welcome people from all over the world to visit, study, work and settle here. We welcome their contribution and the fact that Britain is one of the best countries in the world to come and live in. That is why we operate a fair system, under which people can come here, are welcomed and can contribute to this country. However, we need a controlled system: because this is one of the best countries in the world to live in, many people wish to come here. A controlled system, where the rules that make that possible are followed, is what the Government are building and that is certainly what the public expect.

At the end of 2018, we published a White Paper on the future borders and immigration system, which will focus on high skills, welcoming talented and hard-working individuals who will support the UK's dynamic economy, enabling employers to compete on the world stage. Following its publication, we have initiated an extensive programme of engagement across the UK, and with the EU and international partners, to capture views and ensure that we design a future system that works for the whole United Kingdom.

Just last week, as part of that engagement and as part of London Tech Week, I enjoyed the opportunity to participate in a roundtable with members of Tech Nation, where I was joined by the Minister for Digital and the Creative Industries, my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Margot James). That occasion is always a great opportunity for Ministers to engage in cross-Government work, to understand the challenges that our future visa system may provoke, and to understand how those who are actually using the system have been finding it and what aspirations they may have for the future.

When discussing the scale of our visa system, I always think it important to remind the House of just how large it is. Thousands of decisions are made every single day, the overwhelming majority of which are completed within published service standards and enable people to visit the UK, to study here, to work here, or to rebuild their lives here. In 2018, UK Visas and Immigration received more than 3.2 million visa applications, of which just under 2.9 million were granted. The service standard for processing a visit visa is 15 working days, and last year UKVI processed 97% within that target. As I have said, the UK welcomes genuine visitors, and more than 2.3 million visitor visas were granted for leisure, study or business visits—an increase of 8% in the past year.

The scale of the work that UK Visas and Immigration undertakes means that it has always used processes that enable it to allocate cases in as streamlined, efficient,

and rapid a manner as possible to deliver a world-class visa service. It allocates applications to caseworkers using a streaming tool that is regularly updated with a range of data. The tool is used only to allocate applications, not to decide them. Decision makers do not discriminate on the basis of age, gender, religion or race. The tool uses global and local historical data to indicate whether an application might require more or less scrutiny.

As the hon. Lady explained so comprehensively, an algorithm is a series of instructions or a set of rules that are followed to complete a task. The streaming tool which is operated by UKVI decision-making centres is an algorithm, but I should make it clear that it is not coding, it is not programming, it is not anything that involves machine learning, and, crucially, it is not automated decision making. It is, effectively, an automated flowchart where an application is subject to a number of basic yes/no questions to determine whether it is considered likely to be straightforward or possibly more complex. As I said earlier, the streaming tool is used only to allocate applications, not to decide them.

Chi Onwurah: I thank the Minister for the remarks that she is making, and also for the way in which she is responding to my own remarks. She has said that the algorithm is used for allocation purposes. I understood that it was also used to assess risk. That is the “red, amber, green” traffic-light approach, which is about something slightly more than allocation.

Caroline Nokes: I am glad that the hon. Lady has made that point, because I was just about to deal with it.

As I have said, a decision maker assesses every application against the immigration rules, on its individual merits, and taking into consideration the evidence provided by the applicant. The effective streaming of applications ensures that those requiring more detailed and closer scrutiny are routed to appropriately trained assessing staff. It is essential in delivering enhanced decision quality by developing robust decision-making structures, and—as the hon. Lady just mentioned—directing a risk-led approach to decision manager reviews. Streaming does not determine the decision; it determines only the process that is undertaken before a decision officer assesses the application and the requirements for decision manager assurance.

Since 2015, UKVI has developed a streaming tool that assesses the required level of scrutiny attached to an application. It is regularly updated with data relating to known immigration abuses, and with locally relevant data. It is also used to prioritise work—for example, when the applicant has paid a priority fee for faster processing.

Streaming indicators can be positive as well as negative, and might include a previous history of travel to the UK and other Five Eyes or EU countries, or previous compliance with immigration rules. The streaming might indicate potential safeguarding concerns. It could also be used to indicate criminal records and of course a sponsor with a very good record of associated compliance. Use of the streaming tool creates a globally consistent approach and supports an objective data-driven approach to the consideration of an application. For every application regardless of its stream, an entry clearance officer must carry out a range of decision-making functions before

arriving at a decision, most notably an assessment of whether an application meets the requirements of the relevant immigration rules.

The hon. Lady referred to the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration. In 2017 his report on the entry clearance processing operations in Croydon and Istanbul raised no concerns that applications would be refused because of streaming and contained figures that indicated that over 51% of applications streamed as requiring further scrutiny were issued.

The hon. Lady referred to her significant and important work with the all-party group on Africa, and as she said I was very pleased to meet the group earlier this year. She will know that over 47,000 more visas were issued to African nationals in 2018 than in 2016, an increase of 14%. The percentage of African nationals who saw their application granted is up by 4% on 10 years ago and is only slightly below the average rate of the past 10 years of all nationalities. Visa applications from African nationals are at their highest level since 2013. The average issue rate for non-settlement visa applications submitted in the Africa region is consistent with the average issue rate for the past three years, which has been 75%.

The UKVI Africa region is responsible for the delivery of visa services across sub-Saharan Africa. The region currently processes in excess of 350,000 visa applications per year. On average—and in line with other regions—97% of non-settlement visa applications submitted in the Africa region are processed within the 15-day service standard.

There are 31 modern visa application centres in the Africa region, 28 of which offer a range of added-value services and premium products to enhance the customer experience and/or speed of processing. I had the privilege of visiting one of our visa application centres in Africa last year when I visited Nigeria and met a wide range of students who were coming to the UK to study.

The hon. Lady mentioned visas for performers at festivals. I am delighted to see the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) in her place, because I recently had a meeting with her and the Edinburgh festivals organisers. We had what I thought was a very constructive dialogue about problems that international artists may have previously experienced and how to ensure that there are improvements going forward. We are also working closely with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to understand the requirements of the creative sector and, as part of the introduction of the future borders and immigration system, which will be phased in from January 2021, we are engaging widely across many sectors and all parts of the UK to work out how we can improve our system.

The hon. Lady asked a wide range of questions, some of which—such as those on the regulation of algorithms and the tech sector—are perhaps not best addressed by the Home Office. I was somewhat sad to have seen the Cabinet Office Minister my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) leave his place. I spent a happy six months at the Cabinet Office as Minister with responsibility for a wide range of matters, including the Government Digital Service. In that role I did not perhaps come to the Chamber to discuss things very much, but the hon. Lady has made an important point about the design of algorithms and the painfully high prevalence of young white men in the sector. We all understand, particularly in terms of artificial intelligence

[Caroline Nokes]

and machine-led learning, that bias can certainly exist—I was going to say creep in, but I fear that is in no way explicit enough. Bias can exist when a narrow demographic is designing algorithms and machine-led learning. We must all be vigilant on that.

I am not going to stand at the Dispatch Box and promise regulation from the Home Office, because that would be inappropriate, but the hon. Lady has made some important points which must be taken up by the Cabinet Office and DDCMS to make sure that we have regulation that is effective and in the right place.

Chi Onwurah: I thank the Minister for her remarks, and I appreciate the approach that she has taken. I did not expect the Home Office to make the decisions on how algorithms should function within the Department. I am happy to hear her recognise the concerns that I have raised, but I fear she is coming to the end of her remarks, so may I ask her two things? Will she commit to discussing with the Cabinet Office, or whoever is responsible, how algorithms may or may not be implemented in her Department? I do not know whether she is made aware of this, or whether there is perhaps a working party. Also, will she accept the invitation to help to launch the report of the Africa APPG, from which I have quoted some excerpts in this debate?

Caroline Nokes: Turning to the hon. Lady's second question first, I very much enjoyed coming and speaking to the Africa APPG, and I would be delighted to come to the launch, diary permitting. The hon. Lady will know that things are very fluid in the House at the moment, but I would certainly be pleased to come along to the launch of the report if at all possible. There is a significant amount of work to be done when it comes to the use of algorithms within and across Government. There is increasing use of greater technology not simply in the Home Office but in every Government Department, and the hon. Lady, as a tech evangelist, will welcome that. However, it is important that we get it right, and I am absolutely prepared to take away the 11 questions she has asked. I fear that they are somewhat above my pay grade, owing to their very technical nature, but we will undoubtedly provide her with answers; I absolutely commit to that. There is significant work to be done between the different Departments, including the Cabinet Office, to ensure that we get this matter right.

Question put and agreed to.

5.52 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 19 June 2019

[MS KAREN BUCK *in the Chair*]

Free Schools

9.30 am

Suella Braverman (Fareham) (Con): I beg to move,
That this House has considered the future of free schools.

It gives me great pleasure to open this debate. I want to start by quoting Kavit, a year 11 pupil at Michaela Community School in Wembley—a free school that I co-founded in 2011, opened in 2014 and chaired until 2017:

“I have been at Michaela, our unique and inspiring free school for five years. I was in the first cohort of pupils and remember when there were just 120 of us here. Now we have 600 pupils and in 2 years, we will have over 800.

I have been given so many opportunities to become a better person. Michaela is like nowhere else. Firstly, there is no bullying in the school. Our high standards of behaviour have led to a friendly environment where younger pupils can go to older pupils for help. We all feel safe and cared for by our teachers at school.

Our teachers are extremely hard working. They stay for hours after school helping pupils who may be unsure on a topic and create new booklets to use in lessons.

I transformed from primary to secondary school. My parents saw me reading bigger books, revising more, helping more at home and I was a much nicer person overall. Michaela inspired me to reach for the top. My aim is to graduate from Cambridge University with a Maths degree.

The advice my teachers have given me has shaped me into the person I am: someone who perseveres and who is stoical.

I am really excited about starting at Michaela’s sixth form next year and I am crossing my fingers that I get into Cambridge. It would be a dream come true.”

That illustrates the power of a great education and how dedicated teaching changes lives and empowers a new generation, regardless of their background.

What is special about Kavit and Michaela is that the inventive teaching methods pioneered at the school in terms of curriculum, behaviour and leadership, thanks to the autonomy inherent in these state-funded comprehensive schools, would simply not have been possible without the free schools policy introduced in 2010. Set up by teachers—in this case led by our formidable headmistress, Katharine Birbalsingh—with parents and other community leaders, free schools are from the community and for the community. I was inspired to get involved because I grew up in Wembley in the 1980s, and my parents found it difficult to find a good local state school for me. Had Michaela been around then, there is no doubt that my parents would have been first in line to sign me up.

Let me tell hon. Members about my home town of Wembley, in the London Borough of Brent. The general demographic of our secondary school intakes consists of approximately 50% on pupil premium, 10% eligible for special educational needs support and over 50% with English as a second language. Some of our intakes have consisted of a third of pupils who read below their chronological age and two thirds with maths below the national expectation. Many of our children have been under child protection, in care or excluded from previous schools.

Thanks to the robust knowledge-based curriculum pioneered by the teachers at Michaela, our pupils have been known to make two years of progress in reading in the space of one year or double the normal progress in maths. Some have even made up to five years of reading progress in a single academic year, and others have even come off their special education needs support. That is one reason why Michaela was rated outstanding by Ofsted in 2017. Michaela is one example of how free schools are changing the landscape of education in England for the better. The children of Wembley are lucky to have Michaela in their community, and I am pleased that we now have permission, announced last week, to open a second school in Stevenage.

I could wax lyrical for hours about Michaela, and I know the Minister is a fan and a doughty supporter of our school, but I want to talk more about how free schools overall are faring and about how I would like our next Prime Minister to commit to expanding their reach so that it is not just the lucky few in disparate parts of the country who have access to them. I want a country where every town has a free school, every parent has real school choice and every child has the chance to thrive. While the free schools policy has been an undeniable success since its inception in 2010, nine years later it is necessary to breathe new momentum into the programme, which is in danger of stalling. We need to take free schools from success to scale.

In 2010, the English education system was hampered by poor results and languishing in the international league tables. Twenty per cent. of our 16-year-olds were unable to functionally read or do basic maths. Under the Conservatives, thankfully, those stories are no longer the norm. Led by David Cameron, my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) and the Minister, free schools were a fundamental part of our charge to drive up standards, unlock innovation and improve discipline and leadership.

In the years following their introduction, free schools have been an unqualified success. The latest figures reveal that a free school is 50% more likely to be rated outstanding when compared with other types of state school. They are the most popular type of school among parents, attracting more first preferences than any other. Although free schools represent no more than 2% of all schools in England, four of the top 10 schools in the country are free schools, when measured by Progress 8 scores. Disadvantaged children do better at free schools than at other types of state school. Free schools are more likely to be located in deprived areas and can be vehicles to address behavioural problems that cause youth violence, thanks to the freedoms allowed to teaching staff. There is also emerging evidence of the competitive benefit that free schools generate, raising the quality of neighbouring schools through healthy challenge.

Despite those successes, the pace at which new free schools are entering the education system has slowed to a crawl. In a paper that I have authored, which is due to be published soon, I found that two thirds of parents do not live within reasonable commuting distance of a free school, because of a lack of geographic distribution. I also found that, at the current rate, it would be another 12 years before free schools made up just 10% of all English schools—two decades after the programme began. The first four years of the programme saw significantly higher numbers opening than in the most recent four years.

[Suella Braverman]

The 2017 Conservative manifesto aimed to increase the expansion of free schools through the building of at least 100 new free schools a year, but that has not been achieved. There used to be multiple application waves per year; now, there are longer gaps between the waves, and the number of approvals is falling. I was delighted to see the announcement of 22 new free schools last week, but that number is a reduction compared with waves 11 and 12. We risk losing the opportunities presented by free schools if that trend continues.

Today, I am making the case for scaling up free schools. There are several practical ways in which the slowdown could and should be reversed. First, we need to revisit the original purpose of free schools and broaden the approval criteria by which they are chosen. Free schools should be able to open wherever there is parental demand. Basing the criteria exclusively around a shortfall in school places severely restricts the opportunities for underperforming areas to have access to a free school. If we really value school choice, we need to genuinely provide it.

Secondly, a future Government should place innovation squarely at the centre of their school roll-out strategy, ensuring the approval of free schools that demonstrate an innovative and potentially useful approach, thereby reducing the cost of education and bringing about a net benefit to the overall education system.

Thirdly, to overcome some of the teething problems faced by newly established free schools and to disperse their location, we could develop a more proactive outreach programme, identifying teams of teachers, community leaders, business people and parents in areas that do not have a free school, and build their capacity to successfully apply for and open one. It is a bewildering process and requires much support. The New Schools Network has been excellent in that regard, providing support to promoter groups, but it should be tasked more explicitly and supported more widely with the talent-spotting resources needed to get a free school application team ready.

Fourthly, I need to mention the disappointing performance of studio schools and university technical colleges, two strands of the free school programme that offer more technical or vocational qualifications, which have suffered a disproportionate number of closures. We need to overhaul the fortunes of those institutions. Far from abandoning them, we need to make changes to ensure that the public do not lose faith in this essential kind of education. By changing the recruitment age to 16 so it is in line with the rest of the system, and allowing selection to be used in those schools, we can ensure that they operate on a level playing field.

Lastly and perhaps most importantly, we need compelling ideas about how to deliver more free schools affordably. The Conservatives have done remarkable work to deliver new free schools at a cost a third lower than under the Labour Government's Building Schools for the Future programme, but the issue of capital investment needs to be addressed, hopefully at the next spending review. If we are serious about ensuring that the free school programme remains dynamic, self-improving and growth-oriented, funding solutions have to be offered.

To that end, I am confident that we can drive down cost through neighbourhood plans, specifically by funding neighbourhood plans that propose free schools, allowing for cheaper land. Being more ambitious, we could oversee

the creation of a new kind of social impact bond to allow ordinary citizens to support the capital cost of a new school while offering them a small return.

Finally, we could incentivise free schools to use their funding more smartly. For example, they might receive more funding if they provided teacher training or developed more efficient teaching methods. We could also explore how to allow free schools more choice over how they use their allocated funding. We could, for example, allow a school to choose to take lower ongoing per capita funding—90% or 95% of the funding it would otherwise receive during its first two decades—and plough the savings back into its ongoing capital costs.

Those ideas will be fleshed out in my paper, which I am sure you are eagerly awaiting, Ms Buck. The next Prime Minister and Education Secretary have a golden opportunity to—[*Interruption.*] I have no doubt that Ms Buck will be waiting with bated breath for my report. I will send her a personalised copy. The next Prime Minister and Education Secretary have a golden opportunity to galvanise free schools and, in so doing, to galvanise the education of our young people. We are at a turning point, and I hope they seize the initiative to create the legacy of a school system that provides all our children with life-changing opportunities. For children like Kavit in Wembley with dreams and aspirations, we need to take free schools from success to scale.

9.42 am

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I congratulate the hon. Member for Fareham (Suella Braverman) on securing this important debate, and I look forward to reading her report.

It is fair to say that I wholeheartedly disagree with just about everything the hon. Lady said. Her comments about the concept of people getting a financial return from investing in local education establishments make me fearful. Education should not be considered as a business. The money-making, business and enterprise element of even the academies programme has served only to put additional pressure on schools and families. Parents have to finance so many of their children's additional activities in the education environment. That simply did not happen to the same degree prior to the academisation programme.

I am delighted that Kavit, whom the hon. Lady mentioned, has had such an enriching educational experience, but I deeply believe that Kavit's experience should be everyone's experience, and that the responsibility for education lies not with a few well-meaning local residents or capable parents but with the state. It is our responsibility. We in this place should take responsibility for ensuring the very highest standards in our state education system. For that and many other reasons, which I will come to, I cannot understand the enthusiasm for the free schools programme. Some £15,000 more per primary school pupil and nearly £20,000 more per secondary school pupil goes into free schools compared with those in the state system. That is a ridiculous amount of money.

The hon. Lady talked about “undeniable success”. Sir Peter Lampl, who founded the Sutton Trust, said:

“Free schools were supposed to bring new and innovative providers into the education sector, to drive up standards and improve school choice. But as our research shows, very few are fulfilling that original purpose.”

Carole Willis, chief executive of the National Foundation for Educational Research, said that the Sutton Trust report

“shows that the government’s free schools programme has not been very successful at bringing innovation to the education system and encouraging more parents and teachers to set up new schools. What it does highlight is that those new free schools that are opening are increasingly set up and led by multi-academy trusts and are used as a way to meet rising pupil numbers. So, if the government is still committed to the programme’s original purpose then it should review and clarify the mission of free schools.”

Can it really be an undeniable success that a trust set up by a Conservative peer and former so-called policy supremo of David Cameron’s was given £340,000 for two free school projects that never even got off the ground? Is that really the definition of success for the education of our children? I do not think it is. The Floreat Education Academies Trust, which was founded by the now Health Minister, Lord O’Shaughnessy—I do not know whether that is still accurate—received cash to set up new primary schools in London, but the plans were abandoned in March 2018. Those primaries were among 44 free school projects that were cancelled without teaching a single pupil between 2013 and 2017. What an utter disgrace of a waste of taxpayers’ money. That money should be going to our kids in the education system now, not on the fanciful ideas of people sitting in the other House who cannot even deliver.

There simply is not enough scrutiny in the application process for free schools. I had the same concern about the level of accountability and transparency in academies, but free schools, particularly under the umbrella of multi-academy trusts, are increasingly becoming completely unaccountable and untransparent fiefdoms at the heart of our communities. There is nothing that local people can do to challenge them when they are failing. And what happens when they do fail, having had all that money put into them? The state picks up the pieces.

Suella Braverman: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Melanie Onn: I will not, because the hon. Lady had a good 20 minutes to set out her case. I am sure she will cover these things extensively in her report or in summing up at the end of the debate.

Cancelled schemes were given £8.7 million of funding by the Department for Education. That money has now been written off. It could have been used to help struggling state schools, or even to reward schools in the state system that are succeeding and excelling and that deserve to expand, rather than being funnelled into these local community projects run by well-meaning individuals. The idea that improved financial self-management will in any way resolve those problems is for the birds.

In Great Grimsby, we have been fully academised at secondary school level for about five years. Even in that academised system, there are concerns about the level of exclusions, temporary and permanent. Some schools—if they are in the wrong area—feel they are a dumping ground for other schools that cannot cope with the diverse needs of their student body. We have also seen an increase in provision through pupil referral units.

I went recently to Phoenix House pupil referral unit in my constituency. I saw young people who would have struggled in mainstream education—whether a free school, an academy trust or the comprehensive system—but

who are now in an environment that works well for them. Where they might previously not have gone on to sit their GCSEs, they are now sitting them and engaging with their school community. They are forming friendships and respecting their local community. That school is going round begging for and borrowing facilities. It has a fantastic workshop where the kids can work on a car chassis, build it up from scratch and take it apart again. The school has to go to local scrapyards and car dealers to beg for things for that facility, yet we are wasting hundreds of thousands of pounds on free schools that often do not deliver for their pupils.

There are all kinds of statistics on the representation of young people in free schools who are eligible for free school meals, compared with those in academies, and that goes to the heart of the matter. If the Government really want to improve education, they should not turn the system even more into a marketplace. Education is not a marketplace; education is about the future of our young people and our country. We should give headteachers who are already in the system the flexibility offered to those in free schools to deliver well for their students, pupils and wider community, and we should properly fund them, rather than diverting cash to vanity projects that do not work for the local community. I therefore do not support the idea that we should introduce free schools all around the country.

9.51 am

John Howell (Henley) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I wish to speak about Europa School UK in Culham in my constituency, but this is not an attempt to get one over on the Minister—quite the opposite. The Minister has been incredibly helpful with that school, and his recent letter to it was a model of assistance that I am told helped to make a significant impact on the heads of other national delegations—it does have the word “Europe” in the title, so I thank him for that.

I disagree with what the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) has just said—I suspect this will go backwards and forwards across the Chamber. Europa School UK was founded as a free school because local people wanted it, not because the Government or any other institution wanted it. It could not be provided for by the local authority because of the way that it teaches the children who attend—I will say something about that in a moment. It also could not be provided for because it teaches the European baccalaureate, rather than any other baccalaureate or GCSEs and A-levels. It now has permission to continue teaching the European baccalaureate until 2021, subject to the European Commission, which effectively owns the copyright. That gives an enormous advantage to children who started when they were five with the expectation of taking the European baccalaureate, and who will now work through the school until 2021.

The school is also a good example of how petitions can work. I presented a petition that had been signed by parents and friends of the school to Parliament, and it had a big effect. Perhaps a message can go out from this debate that parliamentary petitions—as opposed to the e-petitions that we debate in Westminster Hall on Mondays—are not a waste of time, because that petition put the issues raised firmly on the table at the Department for Education, and helped to crystallise them.

[John Howell]

Under the terms of the free school, parents have agreed to the provision of a certain type of education, which I am about to describe. The importance of this school began in 2011, when I started getting people together to get permission for the free school to go ahead. At its core was a proposal to do something that has never been offered before in the UK or, incidentally, in the European Union school system. The proposal was to offer a complete, thoroughgoing commitment to full bilingual education from reception until finishing school. Pupils would not simply learn another language; they would learn through that language, which is an important distinction. They would learn the linguistic rhythm of a language and have truly deep language learning, not just acquire a second language overlaid on the first.

Europa School UK was set up as a free school because that is what parents wanted. I remember holding discussions with them at the time, and parents wanted that type of education. It is not only those parents of European origin who work at the Culham Science Centre or at Harwell who enjoy this school; it has become so attractive that it appeals to British-born parents who live in the area and are looking to provide the education that their children need. During Education questions I asked the Minister whether he accepted that Europa School UK was proving popular with all kinds of parents, and he kindly replied that he shared my admiration for the school.

How does it work? A pupil will go in and have a history lesson in German, or geography in French, and they will be taught through those languages throughout the day. It is not a question of picking up the language as one goes along; this is about fully immersing oneself in that language, and it works—I have seen it work, and I will soon go to the school to participate in the presentation of certificates and prizes.

The freedom offered by the free schools programme to allow schools to set their own curriculum has been essential. The founders of Europa School UK adopted the curriculum of the previous European school, which the Commission did not want to fund any more, and modified that with the mandatory elements of the English national curriculum. I mention that because it shows that free schools are what parents want, and they provide something different from what the local authority wants. The success of Europa School UK can be seen in the recent Ofsted report, which produced a very good result.

Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con): My hon. Friend's references to Europa School UK remind me of Northampton International Academy, which as a fairly new free school attempts to achieve that ethos. He referred to the ability to drive excellence through parental choice, and Northampton School for Boys has just been granted permission to go for free school status, which comes off the back of being a school that local parents recognise as a provider of excellence. Does my hon. Friend agree that this programme provides an opportunity for that parental view to be broadened and spread across local communities?

John Howell: I agree with my hon. Friend, who has hit on the key word that describes the whole programme—choice. It is about parental choice. What I have described has worked well for my school and I hope it works well for his.

There is not much more I can add. The Europa School UK is a model school that everyone is welcome to visit to see how the teaching is done. Of course, they will have to speak Italian, German and Spanish to understand the courses being delivered, but I am sure that will not cause any problems for hon. Members in this multilingual Chamber.

10 am

Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Ind): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I congratulate the hon. Member for Fareham (Suella Braverman) on securing the debate and on her excellent job application. When the future Prime Minister is appointed, I am sure she will be given serious consideration after such a loyal speech.

I will devote my contribution to the urgent need for a new secondary school in Radcliffe in my constituency. Radcliffe is an old industrial town that was on the frontline of the industrial revolution. When the paper mills shut down in the 1990s, not only did people lose their jobs, but the town lost its sense of identity. That was made worse by the loss of its secondary school and a sense that it was failing to get a fair deal from the council in Bury or the Government in Westminster. If we are to truly give Radcliffe families hope for a bright future, it is essential that they get the school they deserve and were promised.

First, I agree with much of what my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) said about the Government's ideological preference for free schools, which is predicated on a myth that keeps being repeated—that schools are subject to interference from local councils. That has not been the case for decades; in the real world, headteachers and governors run schools.

For a long time, the support provided by an excellent local education authority in Bury added value to school leadership and made a key contribution to raising standards. In recent years, the withering on the vine of the active LEA, especially the loss of expert advisers due to cuts, has contributed to previously excellent schools ending up in special measures or requiring improvement. I do not claim that all local education authorities were adding value to schools, but those that were should have been invested in, not effectively dismantled.

The fragmentation of the school system has led to a dearth of accountability, as my hon. Friend said, and has made no discernible difference to raising standards. Those who claim that new Labour is somehow to blame because it introduced academies are guilty of rewriting history. We created academies in communities where, despite extra funding and changes in leadership, long-term underperformance had blighted young people's life chances. Our passion was to break the shameful and enduring link between social class and educational attainment that continues to blight the country's success. I believe that breaking that link is the Government's objective too, but forcing academisation on all schools and insisting that all new schools are free schools will not necessarily achieve that.

Despite those misgivings, I make no apologies for working with the council and the Government to develop a proposal for a free school for Radcliffe. Government policy means that we have a stark choice: a free school or no school. In those circumstances, I will work night and day to secure a secondary school through the free school programme.

I often state that the worst thing that has happened in my political career is the betrayal of the promise that Radcliffe would have a new state-of-the-art secondary school. It is a shocking story, and many lies have been told about how it came to pass, so I want to put the record straight. In 2009, Bury Council had three sites at its disposal: the former Radcliffe High School site, the former Coney Green High School site and the former East Lancashire paper mill site. A developer had agreed to purchase all three sites and I had secured £5 million from what was then the Department for Education and Skills to enable the proposed school to go ahead on the East Lancs paper mill site. Work on the school was ready to go.

The Labour leadership of the council was concerned that the Conservatives would take control at that year's local elections and abandon plans for the new school, but senior officers assured them that a legal heads of agreement had been signed with the developer, which meant that nothing could prevent the school project going ahead. That turned out to be untrue and on taking office, the Tories suspended the school project. Without any consultation with affected parents, they proposed that Derby High School be relocated to Radcliffe; that proposal was ultimately rejected by parents.

The Conservatives then reduced the size of the proposed school and refused to proceed with the original funding package. In addition, they relocated Millwood School to one of the sites. They claimed that the school could go ahead only if the then Government's Building Schools for the Future programme provided the funding, but they were fully aware that Bury would not become eligible for that funding for many years. The developer lost patience and walked away, publicly expressing his anger at the council's conduct.

Meanwhile, the continued uncertainty and broken promises seriously affected student numbers at the existing Radcliffe Riverside School. Understandably, parents were voting with their feet and sending their children to schools outside Radcliffe. Having blighted the school, the then controlling group had the audacity to claim that there was no demand for a school in Radcliffe. In 2010, the incoming Tory-Lib Dem Government scrapped the Building Schools for the Future programme. In 2014, Radcliffe Riverside School closed due to dwindling numbers. The promise of a new secondary school had turned to dust, and worse still, Radcliffe now had no secondary school at all.

That history matters because some people promote the narrative that the council has neglected Radcliffe and does not care about its future. Some of the most vocal promoters of that view were members of the controlling group that blighted and then scrapped the school. They ought to hang their heads in shame for their hypocrisy and failure to stand up for Radcliffe when they had the political power.

I and the council leader, Councillor Rishi Shori, have made it clear that a new secondary school must be a top priority for the town and the entire borough of Bury. To that end, we had a highly constructive meeting with Education Minister Lord Agnew in April. I place on record my thanks, which I ask the Minister to pass on, for his guidance and understanding about why Radcliffe should be a priority. He made no guarantees about what would happen in the future, but he understood the importance of a new school as a driver of change in a disadvantaged community.

We are in the process of selecting a suitable partner, as required by the free schools programme, and will submit a funding bid to the Government in the autumn. We are confident that we meet all the relevant requirements specified by the Government and, crucially—the predominant issue in terms of being successful—that we can demonstrate future demand for student places.

My vision remains the same: a new secondary school at the heart of a revitalised Radcliffe community that offers the highest educational standards and is a key hub for intergenerational community activities. Radcliffe is the destination of choice for many people seeking affordable housing with good transport links in the vicinity of Manchester and Bury. The new food-based events at Radcliffe market and the council's investment plans for the town centre are positive steps forward. I would also like there to be a new focus on heritage and cultural regeneration in the town as a key driver for its future. As we host the cricket world cup, few are aware that the great West Indian cricketer Sir Garfield Sobers spent the early years of his career playing for Radcliffe cricket club, or that Radcliffe was the birthplace and family home of Danny Boyle.

The new school promised in 2009 is long overdue. I hope the Minister will assure me that the Government will continue to work with me and Bury Council to make the Radcliffe school happen and create a renewed sense of hope and optimism in the town. Radcliffe is an almost classic example of towns that are close to cities that have benefited from our country's growth in the last 30 years that feel left behind, and that they have not benefited from the economic growth. Delivering the school is absolutely essential to turning around the perception of many that the community has been forgotten and left behind. The school is not only important in raising educational standards; it is the key to the community's future sense of identity and regeneration.

10.10 am

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Suella Braverman) on the comprehensive way in which she introduced the debate. Although I do not necessarily agree with my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn), she presented the arguments against free schools skilfully. My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) made a good point about the Europa School. Free schools present an opportunity to vary the educational system and encourage different sorts of school. I sent all my children to the French Lycée, which is a state school, and I have never regretted that.

I want to talk about one community that wants to open free schools. The Minister will not be surprised by what I am about to go on about. In 2017, the Conservative party made a solemn manifesto commitment to lift the faith cap on free schools. Manifesto commitments are supposed to be very important. For instance, nobody has ever dared to break our commitment to spend 0.7% of GDP on international aid, and the same applies to pensioner benefits. However, there was one manifesto commitment that we broke: the commitment to end the 50% faith cap.

The Minister knows—I hope he will respond to this—that the cap uniquely disadvantages the Catholic community. There are 2,142 Catholic schools in England, covering

[Sir Edward Leigh]

every level of education. They make up 10% of the national total of state-funded schools. Everybody accepts that they are the most diverse schools, that they are the most willing to provide for all educational standards, and that they never impose academic selection. Despite all that, the 50% faith cap has, up to now, prevented the opening of a single new free school. Indeed, there cannot be any Catholic free schools because the 50% cap policy would come into effect only if the school was popular with pupils from other faiths and none. That means that the policy would only target popular Catholic schools that already had diverse school communities, while having no impact on schools that were either not over-subscribed or only attracted pupils from one, monocultural, community.

The 50% cap is espoused as encouraging diversity and inclusion. Catholic schools are already some of the most diverse schools in the country. That is in part due to the traditionally migrant nature of the Catholic community, which drives diversity and new demand for school places. Large catchment areas allow for increased social mixing. Catholic schools tend to be far more ethnically mixed than most other types of school. About one third have a proportion of ethnic minority pupils somewhere between 5% and 40%—higher than in any other type of school. Furthermore, all existing Catholic schools select pupils based on faith only when the school is over-subscribed, and currently, one third of all pupils in Catholic schools are not Catholics.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on making an excellent case and highlighting that this policy unnecessarily disadvantages Catholics. It is completely unnecessary for the Government not to have stuck to their manifesto pledge. I hope that the Minister will give some explanation for that in his speech.

Sir Edward Leigh: I hope he will, because this is an important point. Catholic schools have traditionally opened as voluntary-aided schools. VA schools are state schools where 10% of the capital costs are found by the faith group. In addition, Catholic schools' buildings and land are owned by the Catholic Church. The Church provides those premises at no charge to the state, and that arrangement saves the taxpayer tens of millions of pounds a year. Until recently, the onus for local authorities to prioritise new academies and free schools—this is where I agree with the hon. Member for Great Grimsby—meant that it was much harder to open new voluntary aided schools.

Now, that manifesto commitment was broken. Why was it broken? Of course, it has nothing to do with Catholic schools. The Government know perfectly well that we have the most diverse schools in the country. The Government are not at all worried about Catholic schools. In last night's televised leadership debate, there was a question about Islamophobia—something that we all oppose—but frankly, the Government are phobic towards the opening of new Muslim faith schools. That is what it is all about. It is never announced, never admitted. The Government are worried about 100% Muslim faith schools. Personally, I believe that if Muslims want to have faith schools, they should be allowed to have faith schools, and if that is the reason why the Government

are preventing the creation of new Catholic schools—which are the most diverse schools—they should openly admit it. Of course, they cannot admit it because it would be embarrassing.

Here we have a Government, breaking a solemn manifesto commitment and preventing the opening of new Catholic schools—the most diverse schools in the country. The ban is not only wrong but completely ineffective, because very few non-Muslims apply to Muslim schools, so most of those schools are in fact 100% Muslim—I am not complaining about that—so the faith cap does not even come into effect. The faith cap only prevents the opening of Catholic free schools. It is unsustainable, wrong and should be dropped.

The Government claim that they are working hard to open new Catholic voluntary-aided schools. No doubt the Minister will mention with great pride the forthcoming opening of Hampton Waters Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided School, which is to open in the diocese of East Anglia, which was announced on 14 June. That will be the first Catholic school to open in six years. Two years after the breaking of the manifesto commitment, not a single new Catholic school has opened. There are 50,000 Catholic children waiting for places, and no places for them. What are the Government doing about it? What they are doing is sending me letters, in the shape of one that I received from the Secretary of State, who tells me:

“On this occasion, I have been unable to approve any further bids. This is mainly due to the current lack of demographic need for additional school places in the areas chosen by the bidders.”

I presume that the letter was written by some civil servant. It appears to be profound gobbledegook.

This is a serious matter, and I hope the Minister will address it. No new Catholic schools have been opened for six years, and 50,000 Catholic children are unable to find a place. Only one school has been approved, and that was on 14 June—last week. I very much hope we might get some progress from this Minister, and if not from him, then from whoever becomes the new Secretary of State in a month's time.

Ms Karen Buck (in the Chair): I call Mike Kane.

10.18 am

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): I am recovering from that speech.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I congratulate the hon. Member for Fareham (Suella Braverman) on securing the debate. I cannot say that I agreed with much of her speech, but she has a passionate commitment to education, even though we may view it differently. I thank all hon. Members who have taken part in the debate. It is the birthday of my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn)—can we all wish her a happy birthday? She summed up how all our schools, not just free schools, are underfunded and are having to beg scrapyards for resources; that will live long in the memory.

In this Chamber yesterday we debated whether migration should be in the history curriculum. The hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) was sitting in exactly the same place when I left yesterday, so he must have been working there overnight. He speaks regularly in Westminster Hall about his passion for the Europa School. It is just nice to see a Conservative being nice to fellow Europeans, in particular, once in a while, and I say well done to him, flippantly.

The hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) speaks passionately about his constituency and the need for a school in Radcliffe. As my wife was born in Radcliffe, I am sure it will be the subject of pillow talk later.

The right hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) has shown passionate commitment to the treatment of Catholic schools. I declare an interest as the convenor of the Catholic Legislators Network in Parliament. A manifesto commitment was broken, and the Church is finding it extraordinarily difficult in bidding rounds to build the schools that it needs under the voluntary-aided system—a system that we happen to support. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will make progress with his campaign, because it is important.

We have learned today that the reality is that the current school system is broken. It has been fragmented. The current Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs threw it in the air in 2010 and let it break, and we are still trying to pick up the pieces. It has become unaccountable and is not being led by the needs of our communities. We need to fix what is broken. However, when 124 failing schools have been left stranded outside the system, and are waiting to be transferred to another chain or sponsor, something is wrong with the way we are running our school system. For far too long, parents and communities have been shut out of decisions affecting schools in their areas. The coalition Government document said that the free schools programme would

“give parents, teachers, charities and local communities the chance to set up new schools, as part of our plans to allow new providers to enter the state school system in response to parental demand”.

The reality has been very different. As my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby pointed out, research by the Sutton Trust and the National Foundation for Educational Research found that by 2018 only one in five free schools had parents involved in their inception, so the programme is not parent-led. The proportion of parent-led schools has decreased over time. What is the Minister doing to ensure that parents and communities are not being shut out of decisions about schools in their area?

Labour’s plan for a national education service will give power back to communities so that all our schools are run by the people who know them best—parents, teachers and communities. We would give local authorities the power to take on schools where no other sponsor could be found. That would ensure that no school would be left without the support of a sponsor to deliver school improvement services and provide it with a network of schools.

Despite huge expenditure on free schools, there is no evidence that they improve standards. Problems in 10 free schools, including low standards, concerns about financial oversight and governance and a failure to recruit sufficient pupils, have led to closure, planned closure or partial closure. I have previously cited the case of a school in Southwark. The council begged the Government not to go ahead but the Government funded the school, which attracted 60 pupils and closed after two years. There was no spatial planning from the authority about where it should go. It cost £2 million. We could have sent each of the 63 pupils to Eton for half the price. I do not, by the way, advocate sending pupils to Eton.

The system is failing, as that case shows, but that should come as no surprise when, like academies, free schools can employ unqualified teachers, which they do

at a much higher rate than other schools. While just 2.9% of teachers in all nursery and primary schools do not have qualified teacher status, the figure for primary free schools is more than three times higher at 10.2%. Similarly, while 5.4% of teachers in all state-funded secondary schools do not hold QTS, the figure in secondary free schools is 8.9%. That is a further undermining of the teaching profession by the Government.

Currently, 91% of schools face real-terms cuts. There is no need to ask me about that; just ask the Conservative party leadership candidates, who have all made promises to fund schools fairly. We cannot allow a system to go unchallenged when it permits the education of children to become a vehicle for private profits and allows the awarding of huge executive salaries, and when there have been mounting scandals, including evidence of financial mismanagement. The Minister should seek to ban related-party transactions—business arrangements between a free school, academy or multi-academy trust and other organisations with which there are personal connections.

The National Audit Office has highlighted wasteful spending on free schools. Its report in February 2017 found that free school places are more expensive than places provided by local authorities, with a place in a primary free school opening in 2013-14 or 2014-15 costing on average 33% more than places created in the same years by local authorities. A place in a secondary free school cost 51% more than a place in a local authority secondary. The National Audit Office has also exposed a reckless use of public funding on strategic land acquisitions for free schools, costing £850 million, with officials paying “premium” prices. On average, the Government paid 19% more than official land valuations for new sites.

It is not just the provision of free schools that has been riddled with mismanagement, however. The Government’s current chaotic system means that free schools can open in areas where there is no current need for new school places. That can result in reducing funding for existing schools that are already stretched to breaking point by the Government’s cuts to funding. Evidence was provided to the Education Committee by the Institute for Education in 2015, which found that

“35% of the first four waves of free schools were in districts with no forecast need and 52% were in districts with either no forecast need or only moderate need.”

In 2017 the National Audit Office also made the observation that many free schools had been built in areas with no need for school places, leaving them struggling to get enough pupils and balance the books. Admission systems need to be joined up. They should provide oversight across the whole local area and be accountable to the public, as they currently are not. What is the Minister doing to address the current fragmented system, which has led to over-supply of school places in one area while another is under-supplied?

Although Labour has committed to ending the inefficient free school programme, if parents and staff want to go further in launching and leading their own schools we will make it possible for parents and communities to come together and ask for a new school in their area. That is why we are working with the Co-operative party to develop the idea of co-op schools as a replacement for the free school model. Ultimately, we need a school system that responds to and reflects the needs of local

[Mike Kane]

communities and has a vested interest in the local community rather than in private profits. It is a shame that the Government do not feel the same.

10.27 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): It is a pleasure to have you chairing our sitting today, Ms Buck. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Suella Braverman) on securing the debate and on an excellent opening speech on the future of free schools. I commend her commitment to the free school programme. She has been heavily involved in setting up and running Michaela Community School in Brent.

The shadow Schools Minister, the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane), has reiterated Labour's policy to politicise the running of schools, to remove academies' autonomy, which is key to the raising of standards, and to abolish the free schools programme. That will be hugely damaging to academies and free schools and to academic standards, and it should alarm the teachers and headteachers of the 8,000 academies and nearly 500 free schools in this country. Similarly, Labour's policy of abolishing SATs, the key accountability measure for primary schools, would be a hugely retrograde step and would again undermine the drive for higher standards in schools.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham said, Michaela Community School in Brent was rated outstanding by Ofsted in 2017. Inspectors commented on the "exceedingly strong" progress that pupils make and on their

"powerful determination to achieve as well as they can".

We want every child in this country to have access to a world-class education, regardless of their background. Thanks to the free schools programme, extraordinary schools such as Michaela are changing what is thought to be possible and raising expectations across the country. I congratulate my hon. Friend on the Michaela Community School trust's success in the most recent free school application round, announced last week. As she said, the proposed new school will open in Stevenage, where there is a need for new, quality secondary school places. Michaela Community School in Stevenage will replicate the ethos of the existing Michaela school in Brent, with a focus on traditional academic subjects and on teaching the value of self-discipline, excellent behaviour and responsibility for one's own development. I wish the trust and my hon. Friend every success during the next exciting phase of establishing the school.

I hope my hon. Friend will allow me to begin by outlining how free schools such as Michaela are making a real impact on the lives of pupils across the country. All around the country, the Government have built the foundations of an education system through which teachers and headteachers control the levers of school improvement and parents exercise choice, taking power away from local education authorities and handing it back to local communities.

A key part of the Government's reforms has been the free schools programme. The programme was established in 2010, with the first free schools opening in 2011. The Government invited proposers to take up the challenge of setting up a new school, and groups who were passionate about ensuring that the next generation is

best placed to face the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead came forward with their ideas and plans to make that a reality. Indeed, my hon. Friend was one of the very early pioneers of the programme, and Michaela Community School Brent was successful in only the second round of free school applications.

We now have 446 open free schools, which will provide around 250,000 places when at full capacity; 122 of 152 local authorities now have at least one free school in their area, and we are working with groups to establish a further 285 free schools. The free schools programme has provided a route for opening innovative schools that do things differently, and successfully opened schools that local authorities would not have commissioned, as my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) rightly pointed out.

Of those open free schools inspected by Ofsted, 84% have been rated good or outstanding, with 30% rated outstanding. That is a significant achievement, and I congratulate the proposers and teachers for their dedication to ensuring the success of their free schools and their pupils. Furthermore, in 2018, four of the top 10 Progress 8 scores for state-funded schools in England were achieved by free schools: William Perkin Church of England High School in Ealing, Dixons Trinity Academy in Bradford, Eden Girls' School in Coventry and Tauheedul Islam Boys' High School in Blackburn.

The latter two schools were opened by Star Academies, which has grown through the free schools programme from running a single school in the north-west to running 24 schools across the country, made up of nine academies and 15 free schools, with approval to open five additional free schools. Of the 10 free schools that have had Ofsted inspections since opening or joining the trust, all have been rated outstanding.

All these successful schools teach a stretching, knowledge-rich curriculum. Each takes a strong approach to behaviour management, so that teachers can teach uninterrupted. I have seen at first hand Michaela school's commitment to high academic standards, showing what it is possible to achieve. I urge Opposition Members to visit some of those free schools, particularly Michaela or the Tauheedul Islam Boys' High School, to see for themselves before they cast judgment on a hugely successful programme.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Henley for his kind comments; Europa School UK is a classic example of how the free schools programme empowers innovation, such as by teaching through a European language other than English. As he says, standards at the Europa School UK in Culham are very high indeed.

The hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) said that the academies programme has led to more schools being put into special measures and requiring improvements, but the opposite is the case. In 2010, when there were just 200 academies, 68% of schools were good or outstanding; today, that figure is 86%.¹

Mr Ivan Lewis: Although the Minister and I have differences on some of these issues, I have massive respect for the work he does in his capacity as an Education Minister, and I think that view is shared across the House. If I may just correct the record, that is not what I said; I said that the removal, in the Bury context, of the local education authority's role in supporting improvement in school standards, especially through specialist, highly qualified advisers, has contributed in

1.[Official Report, 25 June 2019, Vol. 662, c. 7MC.]

that Bury context to schools that were formerly outstanding becoming in need of improvement or inadequate. That is what I said. I never said that the academies programme had led to the deterioration of those schools; I said that the removal of the local education authority, which in this case was excellent, adding value to schools, headteachers and teachers, has contributed to a deterioration in the performance of those schools.

Nick Gibb: I thought the hon. Gentleman had said that was the case at a systemic level, right across the country, and not just in Bury. I thought he had said that the reduction in the school improvement department's capacity in local authorities had led to an increase in the number of schools in special measures and requiring improvements. If he did not say that, I will withdraw the remarks, but the truth is that there are fewer schools either in "requires improvement" or in special measures than there were in 2010, despite—or, in my opinion, because of—the fact that we have such a large school improvement change.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his clarity and for his kind words about the Minister responsible for the schools system, Lord Agnew, and his understanding of the problems facing the town of Radcliffe in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. I can assure him that we will continue to work with him on that particular issue.

We have approved schools with links to other institutions, such as the LIPA Sixth Form College, inspired by the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, which focuses on acting, dance, music and sound technology and was recently judged outstanding in all areas by Ofsted. In addition, in September 2012, we opened the London Academy of Excellence, a selective free school sixth form in east London, which was set up in collaboration with seven independent schools.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Will my hon. Friend the Minister join me in celebrating the investment of more than £20 million in education in Cheltenham, in the form of a new secondary school to be run by Balcarras, which will open in 2021? Although issues such as traffic will have to be got right, does he agree that the principle of investing in excellent new schools close to the community they serve must remain a Government priority?

Nick Gibb: I do agree; there was an element of that in the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham. The free schools programme is important, and it is still extensive, but of course it is important that it continues in the long run. That is why I fear the Labour party's policy and the impact it will have on the future of the free schools programme.

I was talking about the London Academy of Excellence. In 2018, the school had an A-level progress score well above the national average, and the average grade achieved was A-minus. The school reported that 22 of its pupils received offers to study at Oxford or Cambridge last year.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) raised the matter of the 50% cap for faith-based free schools. The free schools cap on faith-based admissions has meant that some of the most experienced and largest providers, with a track record of delivering good outcomes for children and young people, have felt unable to open new schools through this route. The response to the "Schools that work for everyone"

consultation, published in May last year, announced a capital scheme to enable the creation of new voluntary-aided schools.

The capital scheme is open to both faith and non-faith groups; as with VA schools, those created through the scheme will be locally maintained, with the same freedoms as existing VA schools, including over their admissions. That means they will be able to give priority to admissions on the basis of faith for up to 100% of places. Last week, as my right hon. Friend pointed out, we announced the approval in principle of the bid for Hampton Waters Roman Catholic Primary School in Peterborough, which will address the need for places and meet demand from parents in the city. Consideration of two further bids has been placed on hold while we work with proposers to identify suitable sites for proposed VA schools.

The free schools programme has also helped to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. I have already mentioned Dixons Trinity Academy, a free school based in Bradford, and how its GCSE results place it among the top schools in England for the progress achieved by its pupils. However, the school is also one of the top-performing schools for disadvantaged pupil progress. Each of the other three free schools in the top 10 for progress also serves disadvantaged communities, demonstrating that high academic and behavioural standards are not, and must not be, the preserve of wealthy pupils alone.

Harris Westminster, a free school that opened in 2014 with close ties to Westminster School and that draws pupils from across London, with 40% of its pupils from a disadvantaged background, reports that 23 pupils were offered places to study at Oxbridge last year. That is another example showing that socioeconomic background need not be a barrier to academic excellence. I cannot, therefore, understand why the Labour party is so opposed to the prospect of more free schools.

Every child should be able to go to a good local school that suits their needs, whether that be a mainstream school with a specialism, alternative provision or a special school. To help achieve that ambition, we have opened 34 special and 45 alternative provision schools, and we have another 54 special and nine AP free schools due to open in the future. Furthermore, we are running competitions to find academy trusts to run an additional 37 special and two AP free schools across the country. That will bring the total number of special free schools to 125, boosting choice for parents and, crucially, providing specialist support and education for pupils with complex needs such as autism, severe learning difficulties or mental health conditions. We want these children, who are often already vulnerable and disadvantaged, to have a chance to reach their potential and live a fulfilled life.

We are not stopping there. Just last week we announced the approval of 22 mainstream free school applications in local authority areas identified as having the lowest educational attainment and in those that have not previously benefited from the free schools programme. That includes one from Northampton School for Boys, which will please my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer). Those schools will create over 19,000 new places, spread across 19 local authorities in every region. We are opening new schools in areas where there was a need to create more school places and largely in areas where there is low educational performance.

[Nick Gibb]

The announcement demonstrates that we continue to look for applications that have a new or innovative approach that would add value to the wider school system. That includes the Birmingham Ormiston Academy—an exciting new specialist college for 16 to 19-year-olds in central Birmingham that will offer a range of vocational and technical qualifications for students to enter television, film or theatre professions—and Shireland CBSO Music School in the Black Country, which will work with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra to help young people from diverse backgrounds test their musical ability at an elite level.

In addition, we are working to open four new specialist maths schools with the Universities of Lancaster, Liverpool, Cambridge and Surrey. That builds on the success of the two existing maths schools, King's College London Mathematics School and Exeter Maths School. In 2018, 99% of King's College London Mathematics School mathematics students achieved an A or A* in A-level mathematics, and the school's A-level maths progress score of 1.46 meant that pupils achieved on average a grade higher than similar students nationally. When I read out such results, it is difficult to maintain a calm voice and not to choke, given the intake of those schools. Again, I cannot understand why the Labour party, which is meant to be the champion of the least advantaged people in our community, cannot get behind the King's College London Mathematics School, the Exeter Maths School and the other maths schools we are opening up and down the country.

We have also published application criteria for wave 14 of the free schools programme, which will again target areas that have both low educational standards and a need for additional school places. We will, of course, continue to look carefully at the free schools programme, along with all our priorities for the education system, in preparation for the next spending review.

I am enormously grateful for the support my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham has shown for free schools. They are playing an integral role in our education system and bringing high standards of education that pupils might not have otherwise received. We will continue to ensure that we have an education system that works for everybody, regardless of their background, giving them knowledge and skills that will set them up for life. Many important points have been raised, and I always welcome the opportunity to discuss the free schools programme and the range of benefits that free schools bring to the wider educational landscape.

10.43 am

Suella Braverman: Thank you for your chairmanship of today's debate, Ms Buck. It has been rich, varied, useful and well-informed. The examples mentioned by the Minister in his closing remarks, from Cheltenham—my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) also mentioned that—to Liverpool, Northampton and Exeter, and the results from the

King's and Exeter maths schools, just show that the outcomes from free schools are simply brilliant. We need to celebrate those results, not try to undermine them for political gain. Those schools are contributing to our children's lives, and we should be encouraging them, not hindering them.

I disagree with some of the comments made by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) and other Opposition Members. Their ideological objection to more freedoms for teachers, which have brought about improvements in life chances for many children, is unsurprising but, overall, saddening. I would have hoped that politics would be put aside when it came to doing what works for our children, so that they can do better in life.

The challenge the hon. Lady and the Opposition have is that, nine years on from the inception of this policy, the emerging evidence shows that free schools—I would obviously like to see more free schools established, and faster—produce good results, as set out extensively by the Minister, and that is especially true for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The evidence also shows that they are good value for money and are an asset to our communities.

Sadly, as the Minister said, if the Opposition were in charge, free schools would be scrapped. Schools such as Michaela and Europa School UK, which was spoken about passionately by my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell), where lives are being turned around, would not be possible. That is simply an indefensible and incomprehensible position for the Opposition, who are putting politics above our children's lives.

Zoning in on the closures of free schools was misguided on the part of the hon. Member for Great Grimsby. She failed to put that in context. Rates of free school closures are similar to wider rates of closure in the broader state sector. It is always disappointing when a school fails, whether it is local authority maintained, free, an academy or otherwise. Crucially, however, school improvement and turnaround can be swifter in free schools, thanks to early inspection and a greater ability to adapt to recommendations.

I thank all hon. Members for their contributions today—I will not go into detail, because I want to wind up. Simply put, free schools change lives. They are from the community, and they are for the community—that is the beauty of these schools. They are demand-led, and they respond to local needs. If any Member were to visit many of them, they would see with their own eyes stories of transformation—children building their dreams and aspirations. We should be proud of that record, and it is why free schools should now move from success to scale.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House has considered the future of free schools.

10.47 am

Sitting suspended.

A38 Improvements

[SIR LINDSAY HOYLE *in the Chair*]

11.4 am

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered A38 road improvements.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Lindsay. I am delighted to see so many hon. Friends here today to talk about the A38, which runs through their constituencies and mine. The A38, between Bodmin, Plymouth and Exeter, is one of the two arterial roads connecting Cornwall with the rest of the United Kingdom—indeed, it is the only trunk road. It provides that link to my constituency of South East Cornwall, from the Tamar bridge in the east to Bodmin Parkway railway station in the west. It also provides essential access to the rest of the mid, west and north Cornwall road network. The A38 is the spine of my constituency, too, as it links the communities that I represent, either directly or via minor link roads.

First designated in 1922, the A38 is the longest two-digit A road in England, at 292 miles long, running from Mansfield in Nottinghamshire to Bodmin in Cornwall, in the respective constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) and for North Cornwall (Scott Mann). It has a rich history, closely following the Roman and Saxon roads, and it acted as the main holiday route into Cornwall, Devon and Somerset before the opening of the M5 in the 1960s and 1970s.

[MS KAREN BUCK *in the Chair*]

In my constituency, the A38 first ran on the former route of the A389, now the A374, over the Torpoint ferry, which is still an essential transport link for my constituents. When the Tamar bridge was opened in 1961, the A38 was rerouted through the village of Tideford, which remains on the route today and experiences several challenges, as I will outline later. It provides a vital link between the towns of Saltash and Liskeard, and on to Bodmin, past the town of Dobwalls, which has been served by a much needed bypass for over a decade. The Minister might be aware that the latter is framed by two bat bridges and one bat house, which were built because the new road went through existing bat flight lines. Environmental impacts and supporting our ecology remain serious concerns. The A38 also passes Trago Mills, the hugely popular retailer and local employer in Glynn Valley.

The A38 is vital for South East Cornwall's economy, our communities, businesses, emergency and other public services, and all those who want access to them, or who visit and stay in my constituency. However, it is simply not fit for purpose, given the huge increase in use in recent decades. The Cornwall chamber of commerce has said that the A38 is so unreliable in my constituency that it deters new business and investment locally, and hinders prosperity and growth. The chamber is at the sharp end and knows the importance of improving the route. That is why I am delighted to have secured this debate, to continue our campaign to obtain vital investment in the A38, throughout South East Cornwall and beyond, through current and future road investment strategy periods.

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for calling this debate. As she mentioned, the longest A road in the country starts in my constituency of Mansfield. What she has said about her constituency rings true for mine, too. It is our main link to the M1, but it has real challenges: it is not fit for purpose, it is congested and it is full of accidents. Does she agree that, because of the length of the road and its importance to so many constituencies, investment and improvement along the whole length of the A38 would give a big boost to our economy?

Mrs Murray: I completely agree. My hon. Friend might like to take note of what we did in the south-west with regard to this road by working together on a cross-party basis with local authorities. That might be a model that he could take forward.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to the hon. Lady, my constituency neighbour, for calling this debate, because this is a cross-party campaign, which is really important. She has been a doughty champion for it. Does she agree that this shows what can be done when our region works together, with MPs from all political parties and councils of different political hues, all putting aside their differences in support of this vital and much needed road investment?

Mrs Murray: Later, I will thank all of the people who have helped, but I must say that I am really grateful for the interaction that we have had with and the input from Plymouth City Council, both before the last election and since; both administrations were very supportive of our getting something done on this road.

I wish to put on the record our thanks to all of our partners, who are providing a powerful collective voice on the need for investment and improvement, including councils and councillors from across Cornwall and Devon, local enterprise partnerships, chambers of commerce, community road safety campaigners and my fellow parliamentarians from across Cornwall and Devon. Their work has enabled a compelling proposal—the A38 case for action—to be produced, which I and colleagues presented to the Secretary of State for Transport last July.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way; she has been a doughty champion of the A38 case for action. Does she agree that the changes that need to be made to Bodmin Parkway station will particularly benefit our constituents and will boost the local rural economy in the way we would like to see?

Mrs Murray: I completely agree. At the moment, the entrance to Bodmin Parkway railway station prevents many people from using that vital rail link, and I agree with Cornwall Council and my hon. Friend that it urgently needs significant improvement.

The A38 in South East Cornwall has several challenges, some of which are shared with the city of Plymouth and with the Plymouth to Exeter routes. I refer to the Devon section of the A38 case for action document, as many of my constituents commute to Plymouth and beyond, for work, travel, hospital visits, regular shopping trips and leisure. Investment is crucial right along the route from Bodmin to Exeter.

[Mrs Sheryll Murray]

The very poor accident record on the stretch of the A38 in my constituency is tragic and it must be addressed; the accident rate is nearly three times higher than the national average. In the last few years, there have been serious and even fatal accidents at Stoketon Cross, Landrake, Tideford, Trerulefoot, Menheniot and in the Glynn valley. My heart goes out to those affected, but I appreciate that what is needed is not words, but action to prevent future tragedies.

Volumes of traffic are high across the whole of the Bodmin to Exeter section of the A38. Between Bodmin and Saltash alone, there is a cumulative average daily traffic flow of more than 60,000 vehicles. Recently, I conducted a survey about traffic congestion and problems with access at peak times from side roads in Carkeel, and it had a huge response, which demonstrates how concerned my constituents are about the future viability of the A38. There are over a dozen access roads between Carkeel and Trerulefoot, with huge traffic flows that make it incredibly difficult—even dangerous—to join the A38. That is repeated along the whole of the road between Plymouth and Bodmin, and it is a constant danger in the Glynn valley, where roads wind and there is poor visibility.

It is also important that I highlight the lack of alternative roads or other transport modes, particularly given the resilience issues with the main railway line at Dawlish. There are only three significant alternatives: the Torpoint ferry; a single-lane 16th century bridge at Gunnislake; or a very long detour to the A30 in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann). However, all three are not practical alternatives, due to limited capacity and the travelling distance involved.

Across my constituency, the road is of variable standard, with changing speed limits. There is a mixture of single-carriage sections, multiple side-road junctions, direct access roads, dual carriageways with central reserve crossings, such as that for Looe, and the severance of local communities, including Landrake and Tideford. It makes for unreliable, congested and unsafe journeys, and a general feeling of frustration among my constituents.

In addition to the severance of local communities, there is also the significant impact of poor air quality. The A38 is subject to a high level of unplanned closures, which results in poor journey time reliability when compared with that of the A30 in north Cornwall. Over the last five years, the A38 has had 1,100 more unplanned closures than the A30. That figure is not acceptable, given how many people rely on the A38 to conduct their daily lives.

The A38 case for action document clearly states the desired outcomes for our communities between now and the end of road investment strategy 3, which is 2030. However, my ask on behalf of my constituents is for the earliest possible investment. We want the highest level of safety possible, by reducing accident rates and removing accident black spots; we want air quality to be improved; we want communities to be reconnected, by reducing the impact of severance; and we want to ensure that the A38 can support planned growth, including in tourist numbers and for major events, such as Mayflower 2020, by fully utilising technology to reduce journey times, increase reliability and strengthen resilience.

We also want to encourage increased use of rail for commuting, by improving access to park and ride schemes; Bodmin Parkway station has already been mentioned, but I will also mention Menheniot station. For South East Cornwall, that means we need specific speed and safety improvements as soon as possible, including overtaking lanes, side-road junctions, speed cameras and pedestrian crossing facilities. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will hear my plea and be able to respond positively.

In the medium term—so, within RIS2, which is 2020 to 2025—I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider making a substantial commitment to improve the Menheniot /Lean Quarry junction, and to link that with work to develop park and ride facilities at Menheniot station, in order to encourage more commuting by rail. This would be a significant investment, estimated to be over £14 million. However, it would also make use of the newly improved railway station in the constituency of the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard).

In the long term—so, within RIS3, which goes beyond 2025—a full upgrade of the A38 from Trerulefoot to Saltash is a priority, including dualling of the road. Of course, we would like this work to happen sooner, if possible.

The A38 case for action document shows that nearly £900 million of productivity growth and investment would be gained by improving the A38 between Bodmin and Exeter. Such an improvement would be a major opportunity for sustainable economic growth, with 52,000 additional jobs and 52,000 homes being planned by 2034, and it would also be an opportunity to strengthen the resilience of the wider transport network. However, the benefits to our respective communities would be so much greater—an improved environment, better air quality, more efficient road travel, less congestion, more jobs and, most importantly, a reduction in the number of road deaths and serious injuries. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider my points and the A38 case for action document carefully and positively. The proposals and outcomes set out in that document are compelling, and I look forward to hearing what he has to say.

Ms Karen Buck (in the Chair): Before I call the Minister to respond, I will just apologise, both to the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) and the Minister, for my late arrival.

11.18 am

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Michael Ellis): It is a pleasure to appear before you, Ms Buck.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) on securing this debate about improvements to the A38, which is a very important road. If I may say so, she is a passionate advocate for her constituency, and my hon. Friends the Members for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) and for North Cornwall (Scott Mann), as well as the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), are—by their very presence here today—speaking to their concerns and speaking in the interests of their constituents.

We all know that the A38 is a remarkable road, weaving, as it does, through the country from Bodmin in Cornwall, which I had the pleasure of visiting last year when I was the Minister with responsibility for

tourism, to Mansfield in Nottinghamshire. At nearly 300 miles—292 miles, to be precise—it is the longest A road that is entirely in England. Once upon a time, it was thought of as a country lane; it was called the longest country lane in England. However, it plays a really important role for communities up and down the country.

In the south-west of England, which is our focus today, the A38 and the A30 are the two principal routes, taking traffic through Devon and Cornwall, to and from the M5 and its connections to the midlands—my part of the world—and beyond. Through the two counties of Devon and Cornwall, both roads are part of the strategic road network that comprises England's motorways and main A roads, managed by Highways England. Those roads will be familiar to many Members of this House as routes to popular holiday destinations; my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall is not short of popular holiday destinations in her constituency, and I recommend that anyone who is listening visits them.

Although tourism is a vital industry for the region, the A38 also has a strategic day-to-day role for local people and businesses, especially those in and around Britain's ocean city, Plymouth. My hon. Friend has emphasised the importance of that road, and has rightly highlighted some of the problems that it faces, including safety and congestion. She has also drawn attention to the case for action on improving the A38, prepared by local authorities and local enterprise partnerships and backed by several local Members of Parliament. I know that my Secretary of State was pleased to receive that case for action when he visited the area last year to see it and its roads for himself, and I understand that he further discussed the contents of the case for action in October at a meeting with local stakeholders, organised by my hon. Friend. I congratulate her on having secured that meeting.

I will now explain how we are considering that case for action and other requests that we have received for improvements to the strategic road network. The Government take a long-term approach to investment in the SRN through the setting of periodic road investment strategies. Those strategies set out the Government's strategic vision for the SRN and specify what Highways England must deliver in terms of road enhancements and day-to-day performance.

The first road investment strategy was launched in 2015 under this Government, providing over £15 billion of investment in the strategic roads network between 2015 and 2021—a lot of investment, and rightly so. Highways England is making good progress on delivering that plan: some 29 schemes have already opened for traffic, including the dualling of the A30 between Temple and Higher Carblake in Cornwall, which cost £56 million alone. That improvement is expected to bring more than £134 million into the Cornish economy each year, encouraging economic growth, business expansion and the development of housing and tourism. The next stage, which is dualling the A30 between Carland Cross and Chiverton, is currently before the planning inspector. If it is approved, construction would start within the next 12 months.

For the A38, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall, £3.6 million has been spent to address safety and structural issues on the

section through Glynn valley between Dobwalls and Bodmin. That work has helped to deliver safer and more reliable journeys for road users. Safety is one of my Department's highest priorities and is certainly my highest priority, given my responsibilities as Roads Minister. Looking ahead, I understand that my hon. Friend will be meeting Highways England again in July to discuss potential improvements to the Carkeel roundabout, and I wish her well in that meeting. Further along the A38 in Devon, a safety improvements scheme will soon be implemented at A38 Harcombe Bends between Chudleigh and Exeter, which will involve installing reflective road markings and improved warning signs. It follows work at Wrangaton, completed a couple of months ago in March this year, which addressed a flooding hotspot that risked the safety of road users.

I have talked about the first road investment strategy and the money that has gone into my hon. Friend's area, but that is just the start of our roads reform. She will be pleased to hear that we are now working to develop the second strategy, which we call RIS2—our Department's fondness for acronyms is legendary. Part 2 of the road investment strategy will govern investment in the strategic road network between 2020 and 2025, so there is more investment to come with RIS2. That investment will be funded through the national roads fund, which will match all the money spent by taxpayers on vehicle excise duty in England for investment in our most strategically important roads.

In the 2018 Budget, the Government announced their intention that, of the £28.8 billion expected for the national roads fund between 2020 and 2025, no less than £25.3 billion would be made available for RIS2. The remaining £3.5 billion will be used to help fund enhancement schemes on the most important roads managed by local highway authorities. That funding must first meet the costs of Highway England's operation of the SRN—the essential task of maintenance and renewals work—and complete the RIS1 commitments. Once those are covered, it can then deliver the new enhancement schemes, for which £3.5 billion will be available.

To inform decision making about how to use that funding, my Department and Highways England have gathered a substantial amount of evidence through three years of research and public consultation. The A38 case for action has been a helpful contribution to that evidence base; local knowledge, local insight, and the views of local Members of Parliament such as my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall are invaluable as we at the Department for Transport seek to develop an investment plan that is affordable and deliverable. We have received a large number of proposals for RIS2 through that process.

Competition for the available funding is, of course, very strong, and we are considering all the proposals carefully, with some key aims for RIS2 firmly in mind. Better meeting the needs of road users and the neighbours of the network is a key aim, including addressing safety and congestion issues. Supporting housing is another key aim, as is supporting balanced economic growth and productivity in an area and enabling seamless integrated journeys across transport modes—where they link with rail, ports and so on. We expect to publish RIS2 towards the end of this year—a few months hence. That will not be the end of the story; we will continue to work

[Michael Ellis]

through the coming years to deliver a better road network that meets the needs of road users and the country at large.

Luke Pollard: The case that the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) has made will save lives if we get the investment in her constituency that is needed. If we get the investment we need at the Manadon roundabout in Plymouth, it will open up huge amounts of our city for the job creation that I know the Minister is keen on. I would be grateful if, during that funding period, he looked favourably on both the schemes in Cornwall and those in Plymouth.

Michael Ellis: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. As he knows—we have worked together in other areas—I will give the matter the very careful consideration that I know it deserves. I share the appreciation that my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall and all colleagues have for the strategic importance of the A38, both for the south-west generally and for those people in my hon. Friend's constituency and neighbouring constituencies who depend on it day to day. Safety is the paramount priority, but the economy is also very important in all of these considerations.

I thank my hon. Friend for the sterling efforts that she has made on behalf of her constituents to promote the case for further improvements to the A38 during the development of RIS2. I wish her well in making progress.

Question put and agreed to.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended.

Modern Slavery Act: Independent Review

[MRS ANNE MAIN *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the independent review of the Modern Slavery Act.

It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I thank the secretariat of our inquiry, who were superb. I want to make a brief comment about the importance of this topic to me—it is terrific that so many Members want to intervene or make a speech, because that shows a growing interest in the issue in the House of Commons, which is good.

Two things over my parliamentary lifetime have knocked me sideways: one has been the extent of hunger and destitution in my constituency; the other was the beginning of the work on modern slavery. I find it impossible to describe the horrors that people try to convey to us about the experience of being enslaved in this country, in this year and at this time. That is partly because one does not want to break down speaking in this debate. I know everyone will bear in mind the background of those individuals.

My Pauline conversion came when I was sent off and told to do a press conference for the Centre for Social Justice report on modern slavery, "It Happens Here". I was horrified and amazed by the information—the data and case studies—that the CSJ brought together. There was a huge gathering of organisations for the launch of the report. We agreed at that meeting that we should lobby hard for a modern slavery Act. It was after a summer's work of lobbying that the then Home Secretary, now Prime Minister, decided we would have a Bill. She thought we should have a scoping exercise about what that Bill should contain. She then used her influence to allow us to have a Joint Committee of both Houses to consider the draft Bill. We then had a Bill.

For all that we now want to move on from the legislation, that initiative was a real success for the Prime Minister. This was the first modern slavery Act in the world. It included supply chains, although the measures to act on them were pretty feeble. However, once something is in legislation, the requirements can always be pushed up. There was also some help for victims, and I am sure many Members will talk about the adequacies.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. Does he welcome the work of Northern College in Barnsley, which has set up the "Free Thinking" programme, the first of its kind to provide education opportunities specifically for survivors of modern slavery? Does he agree that the Government should look at ways in which we can roll that out across the country?

Frank Field: I do indeed. I had the real pleasure of meeting, with my hon. Friend, a delegation that came down from the college, and I saw the work it is doing. Clearly, if we are to get a breakthrough on the lack of knowledge about what is happening in this country, courses like that will and should play a crucial part. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 signified a breakthrough.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing this debate. We can never have such debates too often, and we certainly welcome any initiatives that deal with modern-day slavery. I am sure he will remember the gangmaster issue in Morecambe, probably 10 or 15 years ago, when Chinese people were being used in a form of modern-day slavery. We are getting more and more instances where individuals are being locked in property—

Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair): Order. I know this is a hugely interesting debate in which lots of people will want to take part, but I ask for interventions to be brief, because Mr Field has a lot of colleagues to bring in.

Frank Field: I do agree with my hon. Friend. The scope and work of the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority are clearly important, as he said, in countering modern slavery.

The 2015 Act was a breakthrough, and there have been successes from it. The number of police investigations moved from 188 in 2016 to 1,370 in April 2019. There has been a doubling in the number of people thought to be victims—up to now, it is 7,000. The composition of that total has also changed; the proportion of children and UK nationals has increased.

We can talk, quite properly, about those things being successes, but, despite that, the Prime Minister was not satisfied we had got the 2015 Act right. She therefore asked the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), Lady Elizabeth Butler-Sloss and me to undertake a review. As always, when the Government act, they want a review by Christmas, although we were not much in session before the summer break. We picked up four themes that we would look at: the anti-slavery commissioner; giving greater importance to supply chains; the role of advocates for children involved in trafficking; and the legal working of the Act.

We made an innovation in how we would undertake our work. It would have been impossible to do a detailed inquiry without the work of the separate commissions that we established, which reported to the right hon. Lady, Elizabeth Butler-Sloss and me. I put on record our thanks to them. My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) co-ordinated the parliamentary front and looked at what Parliament thought about the Act. Bishop Redfern looked at what the faith groups saw their role as. Baroness Young and John Studzinski looked at business. Anthony Steen led the discussions on civil society with the very large number of voluntary organisations that are concerned with slavery. Christian Guy looked at the Commonwealth and the international scene. Professor Ravi Kohli looked at child trafficking. Peter Carter QC and Caroline Haughey QC looked at the criminal justice system. They all went away and did that work, and then came back to the three of us who were in charge of the inquiry. Without their work, we could not have achieved what we did in submitting the report to the Home Secretary on time.

There were 80 recommendations, and the Chamber will understand that I will not dwell on those, although I want to emphasise a couple. One is on the lack of data. It is appalling that we collect no data whatever on what happens to those who enter the national referral mechanism for safety—they are mainly women, but some are men—once that period of safety ends. Most

of our forebears would have been scandalised if they had allowed an Act to continue with that lack of data collection.

We had views about the independent slavery commissioner, which the Government, for their own reasons, disregarded. However, we thought it was important to realise that, all the time, there is this great conflict in the Department between its wish to bear down as effectively as possible on those merchants of evil—the slave owners—and its responsibility for immigration. We therefore thought that the Home Office's modern slavery unit—happily, a unit was established—should actually go to the Cabinet Office. We also have views about the supply chains, and we are anxious that some of the money that we should get off these undesirable individuals under the proposals in the Act actually goes to the victims. That is therefore part of the agenda for today's debate.

We have parliamentary groups, and the right hon. Member for Basingstoke will talk about other ways in which our report will be followed up. I hope that the Home Office, Parliament, the slave owners and those we wish to rescue from slavery will be convinced that today is another example of our wish to be more effective in countering this wickedness that we see in this country and abroad.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair): Order. Given the number of Members who wish to speak, there will be a six-minute time limit from the very start. I call John Howell.

2.41 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Thank you, Mrs Main; it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I will raise the situation of modern slavery in Nigeria, which the team should look at as an example of how the Modern Slavery Act is working. The attack on modern slavery is an international phenomenon, and we lead the world in setting the standards.

I mention Nigeria because I am the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Nigeria, so I happen to know the country and what is going on there very well. As a bit of background, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. By the middle of the decade, it will have in the region of 400 million people. It also has the largest number of people in modern slavery in Africa. Examples include women who are tricked into migrating for non-existent jobs and then left to work in brothels or forced to work for no wages and with no legal immigration status whatever.

It is not just women who are affected; the number of children affected is enormous. Some are forced to work as street vendors or beggars. Boys are forced to work in mines, stone quarries and domestic service. Nigeria has just under 1 million people who are trapped in modern slavery. It is an enormous number, which accounts for around 17% of the people trapped in modern slavery in Africa, where the total figure comes to around 7 million or 8 million people. That is an enormous number; we are not even the tip of the iceberg in this country.

The Nigerian Government like what they see in what we do. We are helping to tackle the problem of modern slavery by using the Department for International

[John Howell]

Development budget in a number of ways. For example, the work with non-governmental organisations uses victims who have been rescued from modern slavery as good examples. Those victims talk to people about how evil it is and about how they can avoid getting trapped in it. That is such a powerful way of getting the message across, because those victims have actually suffered as a result of modern slavery, and such outreach goes down extremely well.

The British Government have taken a stance, putting about £16 million into Nigeria to help with this issue. That provides a number of bits of background. It is particularly concentrated in a place called Edo State, which sits at the crossroads of the people traffickers. I could go on and on about the people traffickers, but I will not.

On my last visit to Nigeria, I took a brief to tackle modern slavery with the Nigerian Government, and one of the companies I went to see was Unilever. Unilever acts in a number of sectors where one would expect modern slavery to exist—broadly, in the agricultural sector. I had a long chat with its representatives and saw the NGOs they were working with. It was a fantastic experience, because Unilever in Nigeria has eliminated modern slavery from not just its own activities but its entire supply chain. That has taken a big effort, so it is worth looking at that as an example of how to go about things.

One of the great joys for me was talking to the NGOs that work in this area and that have helped to eradicate modern slavery. They, too, used people who had suffered to get the message across, which is a brilliant thing to have done. When I go back, I hope I will be able to capitalise on that. I hope Unilever's example has spread, because the company found not only that eradicating modern slavery was a great thing to do, but that being able to tell people that it no longer carried on in that way gave it an enormous competitive advantage in the marketplace.

2.47 pm

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I declare my interest in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) on securing the debate, and on his report with the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) and Baroness Butler-Sloss in the Lords.

I know that the Minister is committed to doing all that she can on this issue, so my remarks are really a challenge to us as an institution, and as a Parliament, rather than a criticism. We all want to end slavery and trafficking; that goes without saying. However, we have an opportunity to ask how we can wake the system up a bit, and make it go a bit faster. I was in Government, and it is a great source of frustration for me that some of the sensible amendments that the Government have started to accept were tabled in 2015. They should have been adopted then, and the Government are now adopting them four years later.

We all understand why people outside sometimes get frustrated. In a sense, that fuels populism, because people ask, "Why doesn't the system get a move on?" Everybody knows that it is a problem. I say to the

Minister that this is a real opportunity to get hold of this issue, and say that not only will we be outraged, frustrated and angered by it, but we will drive the system much more quickly than at present to work in a way that makes a real difference.

A difference has been made, of course, but let us look at what the report says. In the limited time that I have, I will make a couple of points in each area. Businesses are still not really conforming to the transparency arrangements, which I know the Prime Minister has made a statement about. I say to the businesses of this country that surely every managing director or board of directors deplores slavery, and I challenge them to put their own houses in order—to use their massive purchasing power to invest in companies, businesses and supply chains that conform to the requirements of the Modern Slavery Act.

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making a passionate and well-informed speech. Will he join me in paying tribute to the brilliant businesses around the country who understand the agenda and are trying to do their best about it, such as the Co-operative Group, which has brought in a project called Bright Future that guarantees a job placement for anyone who is a victim of modern slavery?

Vernon Coaker: Yet again, the co-op movement shows the rest of us what can be done. I use this debate to challenge businesses to get their act together—to stop just talking and to show the rest of the country in their investment decisions that they mean what they say. One of the suggestions in the report is more transparency. I know the Minister will address that, and the Prime Minister has already started to address that, which is good.

We come to independent child trafficking advocates. That has to be rolled out much more quickly and has to include not only trafficked children, but unaccompanied children, which is a demand of many of the non-governmental bodies. People would be shocked—I know the Minister is—that we save children, and then we lose them. How can that be right? How can it be right that we take children from the traffickers and put them into the care of the state, and then we lose them, and not just for a short period of time? According to the 2017 report from Every Child Protected Against Trafficking and Missing People, 190 of them have gone and we have no idea where they are. That simply is not acceptable. We have to do better.

The report laid out that the role of the commissioner is a challenge for the Government. The commissioner has to be independent. Governments hate that—I know that from my time in Government. They say they love it, but they hate it, because as soon as the commissioner brings out a report that says the Government need to be doing better, the Government usually row back—although I know the Minister will not do this—and say, "If only the commissioner understood the parameters in which we operate." That is why the suggestion in the report that the commissioner should be moved into the Cabinet Office rather than the host Department might be a way forward.

It is really important that some of the legal applications are clarified, particularly in terms of what we mean by trafficking and modern slavery, and the relevance to the Palermo protocols and so on. There is a job of work to be done there.

I want to labour one point with the Minister, which completely and utterly bedevils the system, and it bedevils me—I find it intolerable. The Government must reconcile the needs of victims with the immigration system. Somebody can be found to have conclusive grounds for claiming to be a victim of modern slavery or trafficking, and yet they end up with no immigration status at all. The Home Office even looks to send home some of the people in that situation. I know the Home Office will say that it will look at this, and that the processes will all be done very carefully, and so on and so forth. I say again to the Minister, all power to her elbow when she points out to the immigration department of the Home Office that these people are victims of the most heinous crimes and should be guaranteed some security of residence in this country, over and above what they are given at present. It simply is not good enough.

I finish where I started. This is a real opportunity. It is a positive report that reflects the good work that the Government and the whole of the House of Commons have done, and it says to the British people that we know more needs to be done, and we are going to do it.

2.54 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. It is also a great pleasure to speak in this debate, after having the privilege of working with the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) and Baroness Elizabeth Butler-Sloss from the other place. I am a newcomer to the issue of modern-day slavery and I have learned so much from the right hon. Gentleman. The report will add much to the work that needs to be done, which the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) has talked about.

Modern-day slavery is a human tragedy that is still happening in our communities today—we have to acknowledge that if we are going to move forward. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has done more than anybody in raising this issue in the last decade, in this place and outside, but there is still so much more to be done. She made a very powerful speech at the International Labour Organisation just a few days ago, reminding us of the progress that has been made. The UK has led on this issue over the last decade, and that work has led to 90 Governments endorsing the call to action on modern slavery, which the Prime Minister launched in 2017.

Although we have done more than almost any other country in the world, and have some of the best legislation, it is important that we recognise that more needs to be done. In her speech, the Prime Minister recognised that, and in my remarks, I want to pick up that theme of raising awareness. The Prime Minister said—this is very important—that “ordinary shoppers” can

“vote with their wallets, to shun those companies that do not make the ethical grade.”

I was delighted to see in her speech that the Prime Minister is committing to one of the things that our report called for—a new registry of modern-day slavery transparency statements, to make it easier for the people we represent to be aware of what companies are doing and how they are taking the need to stamp out this appalling abuse seriously.

We need to go further than that, and awareness is of paramount importance. The hon. Member for Gedling says that everyone knows this is a problem, and we do

here, but I am not sure whether it is quite as salient out in the communities as he and I would want it to be. I urge the Minister to consider the work of individuals such as Dr Rosie Riley, who has set up VITA—Victim Identification and Trafficking Awareness—which works in the NHS to ensure that victims and survivors get the help they need at the frontline from people working in emergency departments. The Minister needs to go even further and make sure that we are doing everything we can to make our constituents aware of modern-day slavery. I pay tribute to the work of the Church, which has developed an amazing app on car washes.

We need to go further, and that has to be an important focus of the new commissioner. I will come to that in a moment. It is important that businesses will be under more pressure to publish statements of compliance, but we need to make sure that those statements are properly scrutinised. Our report recommends that that role is taken on by the commissioner, so that the statements do not just become lip service.

I believe that the commissioner’s role needs to have at its core raising awareness of the issue of modern-day slavery in our communities, up and down the country. We must also make sure that the role is independent from the Government. The Minister will be aware of the comments of the Joint Committee on the Draft Domestic Abuse Bill, which I chaired, about the slightly haphazard way in which commissioners are being set up. I hope the Minister will listen to the comments in this report and from that Committee, and make sure that we have some proper consistency in the way commissioner roles are dealt with in the future.

I want to raise one thing that is not in the report—I hope that is allowable, Mrs Main. One of the things we wanted to look at, but were not able to because of the terms of reference, was the issue of prostitution. There is strong evidence—much of which was brought forward by the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion)—of the very close relationship between modern-day slavery and prostitution. We in the UK need to look carefully at our laws, which are potentially acting as a magnet for those who want an easier place to operate as traffickers of people who they want to sexually exploit. I hope the Minister will be able to comment on that.

In the foreword to our report, we talked about setting up an implementation group to hold the Government to account. The Minister knows me and the right hon. Member for Birkenhead well enough to know that we will do exactly that, and that her feet will be firmly held to the fire—not only on implementing the things to which I know the Government are committed, but on ensuring they look very carefully at all the recommendations in the report. Modern-day slavery is a human tragedy, and we cannot allow it to continue or get worse on our watch.

3 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to be called in this debate. First of all, it would be remiss of me not to thank the right hon. Members for Birkenhead (Frank Field) and for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) and Baroness Butler-Sloss for the incredibly hard work that they individually and collectively put in to ensure that the report came together. Looking at the hours, days and weeks that were spent on the report, I am in awe of those three and others. The report is clear, concise and yet still shocking, and the facts cannot be ignored.

[Jim Shannon]

I was an advocate for the Modern Slavery Act 2015, having seen my noble Friend and colleague Lord Morrow. I am sure the Minister is aware of this, but I want to remind the House very gently. He broke ground in the other place with the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015. It is my belief that it paved the way for the Modern Slavery Act 2015. I stand by my decision to speak up for people in situations that prevented them from helping themselves. I believe this is the very core of what we do in the life that we have chosen and been given the opportunity to serve in.

The right hon. Member for Basingstoke referred to sexual exploitation, an issue that was addressed emphatically in the Act that Lord Morrow brought forward for Northern Ireland. I was the sponsor of its presentation to the House. The event was well attended by Members of different parties and of the House of Lords—I think that encapsulated the interest. However, it is time to revisit the legislation, as all good legislators must—that is what the debate is about—and see its impact on the problem. The report reminds us gently, but firmly and concisely, that although the Act was certainly groundbreaking, new ways of trafficking and slavery circumvent the Act. We must therefore change the Act and the legislation to ensure that we can help people who need protection and assistance, and that those who are guilty of modern slavery are made accountable.

I loved the report's use of the phrase, "give teeth to legislation." We often use it in the House on different occasions. We should give teeth to the legislation to stop people exposing loopholes and continuing to exploit people. I support that wholeheartedly, and commend the right hon. Members again. I was horrified to read that:

"The number of potential victims identified in the UK each year has more than doubled"—

these figures are horrific—

"from 3266 in 2015 to 6993 in 2018."

Right hon. Members have referred to the fact that:

"The proportion of children identified has increased during the same period from 30% to nearly 45%"—

that should shock us to our very core, and it underlines the need to act on the report as soon as possible—

"in large part due to the rise in cases of county lines and other forms of criminal exploitation."

Perhaps the most shocking thing in the report is that:

"UK nationals now represent by far the highest proportion of potential victims identified at almost a quarter of all those recorded, while in 2015 they were only the fifth most represented nationality behind Albania, Vietnam, Nigeria and Romania"—

the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) mentioned Nigeria—

"This is again due to the rising number of children identified as being involved in county lines, most of whom are UK nationals."

Sex slaves and migrant workers are promised jobs and come to the UK, but that all changes when they get here. I believe we need a victim support scheme. I know the Minister has referred to that in previous answers to questions, and perhaps she could mention the scheme in her response.

I wholeheartedly agree with the authors of the report that too few convictions have been handed down for the new offences prosecuted under the Modern Slavery Act 2015, and that too few slavery and trafficking prevention and risk orders are in place to restrict offender activity. We need to tighten up and do better. So how do we add teeth to the legislation? The report is incredibly clear, so I will not simply rehash the recommendations. I seek merely to highlight a couple.

There is the issue of a more appropriately allocated budget for the commissioner, and the message that this is not a board set up on a whim, but an intrinsic part of what we do in this place—protect people and look after them. It is the first step to take. We need sentences to fit the crimes of forced labour and sexual and physical abuse. That must be followed by ensuring that businesses with an annual turnover of over £36 million do not simply have an obligation to state that they did not take any steps, and they must begin to demonstrate exactly what their approach is to ensuring that no member of the workforce is coerced or made a victim. It cannot be acceptable that we do not do that—the six-step guidance in the report should be mandatory for big business in the same way as basic health and safety steps. Another absolutely essential obligation is the complete fulfilment of section 48 and the need for independent child trafficking advocates. This must be done urgently—the funding must be found and the training put in place for the other two thirds of council authority areas.

Time is not on anyone's side in such debates, because there is so much to say and comment on. I give my sincere thanks to everyone involved. I also pledge to do what I can to make the recommendations become reality, so that the shocking numbers highlighted in the report become a part of our history. As we move forward, we can give hope to people who need it. Our job is to support them.

3.6 pm

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I, too, congratulate the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) on securing the debate, and on the work that he has done, alongside my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), in getting such a fantastic report published. I thank everybody else who was involved, and I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for her dedication to starting to rid our nation of the evil practice of modern slavery when she was Home Secretary. She led the way, not just nationally but globally, through the legislation that she introduced.

I first took an interest in modern slavery when I was first elected, because I heard the Bishop of Derby, Alastair Redfearn, speak about it. As a Derbyshire MP, it had a huge impact on me, so I have been following it ever since. Baroness Young, who was also involved in the report, introduced a private Member's Bill, the Modern Slavery (Transparency in Supply Chains) Bill, in the other place in 2016 and asked me to take it through this place in 2017. It was designed to strengthen the transparency in supply chains and introduce the legislation to cover the public sector. Sadly, I did not get the Bill very far at that stage. At the time, the Minister reassured me that the Modern Slavery Act 2015 was just the start. We see today that those words were true, but it is still going far too slowly.

A lot of my constituents will think that modern slavery is about the sex trade and prostitution, but we all know it is more than just that. It is the nail bars and car washes—my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke mentioned that we now have an app where that can be reported, which is really good. I do not like washing my car, so I take it to a car wash, but I look so carefully at the people who work there, to reassure myself that I am not adding to the modern-slavery supply chain.

Modern slavery also applies to manufacturing. Once again, this issue has been quite close to home, because an agency supplier to Sports Direct was employing slaves. Some fantastic work was carried out by the Nottinghamshire police, resulting in convictions. So we need to tighten up transparency in the supply chain because we never know where we will find modern slavery.

My interest has never gone away. In fact, to promote this debate and to get it on the radar, I asked the Prime Minister a question earlier today. I was reassured because she said that the Government would

“shortly be publishing a consultation to look at ways to strengthen transparency in the supply chains, and...expanding transparency laws to cover the public sector and its purchasing power.”

As we know, the purchasing power of the public sector is huge. The word that concerned me was “consultation”, and we need action. We could see the report as a consultation and we need to speed things up. We cannot keep having consultation after consultation. We need action to make things happen.

Before I came into this debate today, I was at an event called “Send My Friend to School”, which is about making sure that the sustainable development goals include funding for education. If we get education right, we can give kids a future. Giving kids a future as they grow up is another way of eliminating modern slavery. We need to work across Government to make sure that whatever public money is available is spent on making sure that our supply chains are transparent and free from modern slavery, and we also need to spend public money in the right place overseas to make sure that modern slavery does not happen in the first place.

I look forward to the Minister’s response. I feel that step by step we are getting there, and that my private Member’s Bill, which I tried to introduce in 2017, played a small part in getting us to where we are today. I know there are people in this room who have played a much bigger part, and I thank them for that.

3.11 pm

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) on securing this debate, on his long commitment to this topic and on the difference that he has made. I also congratulate the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), Baroness Butler-Sloss and the review team on the work that they have done on the report. They are tirelessly trying to make the changes that we so desperately need to see in this country.

I speak as chair of the all-party group on prostitution and the global sex trade. Currently, the Modern Slavery Act does not recognise the gendered nature of slavery and does not do enough to effectively tackle trafficking and modern slavery for sexual exploitation. The APPG

was concerned that the terms of reference for the independent review were too narrow in scope as they did not allow the review team to explore the links between the laws regarding prostitution and trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. That is why I welcome the commitment made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead in the foreword of the report to undertake

“a scoping review into laws surrounding prostitution in England and Wales and the extent to which they help or hinder police action against trafficking for sexual exploitation.”

I am grateful that the right hon. Member for Basingstoke has reiterated that commitment here today. I know the modern slavery review team are passionate about getting that aspect out into the public domain.

Trafficking and coercion of individuals into the prostitution trade is one of the two most prevalent forms of modern slavery in the UK, and it disproportionately impacts on women. In 2018, 1,192 adult women were referred to the national referral mechanism for sexual exploitation. Only 269 were referred for being potential victims of labour exploitation. Police figures submitted to the all-party group on prostitution and the global sex trade in 2018 indicate the scale of sexual exploitation in this country. Between January 2016 and January 2018, Leicestershire police visited 156 brothels, encountering 421 women, 86% of whom were from Romania. Northumbria police visited 81 brothels between March 2016 and April 2018. Of the 259 women they encountered, 75% were from Romania. More than half of those brothels were recorded by police as being connected to other brothels, agencies or non-UK organised crime groups. Modern slavery for sexual exploitation is happening right here in the UK on an industrial scale. The impact on victims is devastating.

Research by the European Commission shows that victims experience sexual brutality that causes serious damage to health and wellbeing; vaginal injuries that lead to sexually transmitted infections and HIV; and high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression. Victims live in fear of reprisals if they try to escape. The rates of re-trafficking of those who manage to exit are high. Evidence from the POPPY project revealed that victims were exploited for an average of eight to 20 months before they could get out. Most women were exploited every single day of the week, seeing on average 13 sex buyers a day. We can therefore extrapolate that the average victim can be raped anywhere from 2,798 to 6,828 times. It is slavery through prostitution in the UK, and it is happening on our watch.

The basic principles of supply and demand underpin the phenomenon of trafficking and modern slavery for sexual exploitation. Without demand from sex buyers, there would be no supply of women and girls through sexual exploitation. Demand for paid sex is context-dependent, and one factor that influences the higher level of demand is the legality of prostitution. Legality has been found to contribute to normalisation, which in turn contributes to demand. In short, trafficking and modern slavery is larger in countries where prostitution is legal.

Demand reduction legislation was first introduced in Sweden in 1999. Research there has revealed that demand for prostitution has significantly decreased since Sweden criminalised paying for sex. At present the Modern Slavery Act does not seek or function to suppress the

[Sarah Champion]

demand from a minority of men who pay for sex—the very demand that drives and funds trafficking and modern slavery for sexual exploitation. Since our Modern Slavery Act came into force, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and France have all criminalised paying for sex in order to combat demand for sexual exploitation, while removing the criminal sanctions that penalise victims. Demand reduction legislation is also in place in Norway, Iceland and Ireland, which means that England, Wales and Scotland now have substantially more sex-buyer-friendly laws than many of our surrounding countries, making us an attractive destination for sex traffickers.

Prostitution laws should be urgently updated to reduce demand for sexual exploitation by criminalising the purchase of sex, while removing all criminal sanctions applied to victims of sexual exploitation and supporting them to exit. That is the key way to tackle modern slavery of women in the UK. Once again, I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead for securing this debate, and I look forward to working with the independent review team as they explore the links between prostitution laws and preventing modern slavery.

3.17 pm

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Main. I commend the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) on securing this debate, on his tireless work in this area, on his efforts to expedite a review—I remember that it was not necessarily going to happen—and on the excellent review that flowed from that. Of course, I should not miss out of my compliments Baroness Butler-Sloss and the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), as reviewers, and two of my very good pals in this place, my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) and Baroness Young, who provided expert advice. Looking down the list of contributors, I feel we should give those guys more difficult problems, because it was a very strong team—I cannot imagine there is much that their collective wits and experience could not tackle. The report really is a terrific bit of work.

The slavery of another human being is a cruel and unthinkable crime. We talk in terms of modern slavery, but, in reality, this is a thread that has run through humanity for centuries, and we are custodians of an abolitionist movement that takes a stand and fights it. Today we stand in the shoes of Wilberforce, Hamilton and Elizabeth Heyrick. It is an awesome opportunity and challenge, and our ambition must match theirs.

Having world-leading legislation is a critical first step. I have no doubt that, as the Prime Minister finishes her final few days in office, the work here will be among her proudest. The 2015 Act stands as a testament to her personal commitment to this agenda. Slavery is a scourge that we have fought for centuries. Slavers innovate, and we too must develop our approaches to make sure that they are fit for a modern context. That is why the review is so important. Even in four years, things move on.

I want to touch on two issues in the report that I have spent my past two-plus years in this place raising. First, the role of the independent commissioner is important;

it is one way in which a self-confident, reflective Government are held to account. As the report has shown, however, it has not delivered as planned. Frankly, if a role is hosted, managed and appraised by the very Department it is set up to ensure scrutiny of, it is not independent. It is not possible for someone to be independent of the place where their pay and rations come from. If the Government are serious about independent oversight, it needs to be done properly. The suggestions in the report would be a good approach and would ensure greater independence and effectiveness.

The Minister does not need me to draw her attention to what the right hon. Member for Basingstoke said in the report about the draft Domestic Abuse Bill, on which she and I have spent the past three months. There are some good suggestions there about how we can have a truly independent commissioner. If we carry on along current lines, I can say with certainty that a Member will be standing where I am, facing a Minister, and they will be having the exact same conversation about the independent domestic abuse commissioner that we have been having about the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner. We shall make the same mistakes, because nothing will have changed. No one wants that to happen, but no one at the moment is stopping what seems to be a runaway train. I implore the Minister to stop it and to say there is a better way. I think that there is, and the report suggests one.

While I was a member, the Home Affairs Committee took evidence from the outgoing Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner, Kevin Hyland. We heard about the practical difficulties that he had in running the office and the debilitating nature of the Home Office recruitment process. There are good reasons for that, and I fully understand, but I wonder what craft and creativity could be brought to bear so that the post could be made agile and flexible in relation to need.

As to transparency in supply chains, section 54 of the Act is a critical part of disrupting the supply chains on which the global organised crime network is built. However, the record on that is not good enough. It is unthinkable that, four years on, more than a quarter of companies do not comply with the provisions on reporting, as TISCreport states. That does not even account for token compliance. What other laws that we pass in this place are thought of as, “Do them if you fancy doing them”? I certainly do not talk to constituents about many laws of that kind. These laws are not optional extras, and a competitive disadvantage is created, so I offer no apologies for repeating what my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) said about the Co-op and the Bright Future programme: the company has put itself at a competitive disadvantage to do what it has done, which is wrong.

I have, through my written questions over the past couple of years, noticed an evolution within the Home Office. To begin with, it would reply that it did not know “who should” do things or “how many have”. Then it recognised that it had such knowledge. Now there is an idea that something must happen. The shoe needs to drop. I am interested in hearing more about the Government’s plans.

I echo the call in the review for the requirement to be extended to the public sector. Councils and central Government are massive purchasers and could have a real impact on disrupting supply chains. Of course they

would have no interest in dealing with disreputable suppliers. However, the latest Sancroft-Tussell report says that more than 40% of the top 100 suppliers to central Government have failed to meet the basic legal requirements of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. That is extraordinary. What is wrong with us, whether we are in the Government, or we are the people who hold them to account? How have we let it come about that 40% of the top 100 suppliers, who get billions of pounds of taxpayers' money, think, for a start, that they do not need to comply with the law, and do not think it worth their time to cross the road to comply with modern slavery legislation? It is ridiculous, and none of us should stand for it. I would be interested to know when there will be action on that.

The report is excellent. I alluded earlier to the fact that there was a bit of a battle to make the case for it, and I applaud the Members who did so. It is good to come back and ask whether something that was world-leading is now fit for our time. Were amendments rejected previously that now fit the modern context? There are 80 suggestions, and I am pretty much on board with all of them. If we add those things and develop them, we will get what we all want: a strong, forthright and complete attack on slavery in this country.

Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair): I am sure colleagues have not missed the fact that they have shown such discipline that the Minister and shadow Minister will have a generous amount of time—it may well be that interventions are required to tease out further questions. I was strict about the six-minute speeches, and colleagues dutifully did not intervene on each other.

3.24 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mrs Main, and I am grateful to you for not encouraging interventions in my speech at least.

On behalf of the Scottish National party, I thank the right hon. Members for Birkenhead (Frank Field) and for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), and Baroness Butler-Sloss, for their hard work on the review. I welcome, in particular, the fact that they do not see their work as complete and that, through their implementation group, they will continue to hold the Government to account and the Minister's feet to the fire. I echo what the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) said about the need to work on a scoping exercise, at least, in relation to sexual exploitation.

It is good to see that the evidence gathered by the Home Affairs Committee was of assistance to the review panel. I hope that, in due course, we can make a useful contribution to policy development in this important area. I thank all the members of the all-party parliamentary group on human trafficking and modern slavery, particularly the chair, the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), who, as we heard, served on the team of expert advisers. He spoke eloquently about the fact that we must seize the opportunity for reform, and about the urgency of action.

Some provisions of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, and, therefore, some of the recommendations of the review, are directly relevant to all parts of the United Kingdom. Even in devolved areas, in Scotland and

Northern Ireland, where there is of course distinct human trafficking legislation, I am sure all the recommendations will help to inform the debate and policy development, just as they will in England and Wales. We can all learn from what works and from good practice in each of the jurisdictions.

I commend everyone who spoke in the debate for their knowledgeable and insightful comments. I want briefly to add my support for recommendations on two of the key themes of the report that relate to the whole UK, and to make a couple of comments on some of the other provisions. As has been said, we could do with a full day in the Chamber to discuss the various aspects of the topic.

I particularly welcome many of the recommendations made about the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner's role and powers. The hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) was particularly eloquent on that. Recommendations that I fully back include those on appointment procedures, although I would always want to make it clear that the Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive should still be consulted in the process. The proposals on how the role is funded, who sponsors it, and where it is situated seem to be sensible and practical ways to build the independence of the commissioner. As hon. Members have said, that is pivotal to the role's credibility.

Secondly, I am similarly supportive of the ideas on transparency in the supply chain, which could mean that a measure with the potential to be transformational really has teeth, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said, paraphrasing the report. Implementing the suggestions could help to bring an end to what is too often useless and pointless tick-box reporting by certain companies, and could ensure far more widespread compliance.

On a related subject, but going beyond that, there is a compelling case to reconsider whether we should restrict ourselves to a simple reporting model. Perhaps, as other countries are pushing towards doing, we should put companies under duties to identify, prevent and mitigate impacts on human rights more broadly. I echo the eloquent comments of the hon. Members for Erewash (Maggie Throup) and for Nottingham North about the need for action in relation to the public sector.

Thirdly, I welcome the discussion on the different models for supporting children in the different jurisdictions of the UK. We are certainly proud of the work that the independent guardians are doing in Scotland, but nothing is beyond improvement, and analysis such as that provided in the report allows us to see what we can learn from the other schemes. For what it is worth, I am full square behind what has been said about the need for roll-out of the independent child trafficking advocates—or independent guardians. Again, the hon. Member for Gedling is right about the urgency and significance of that.

I have two final topics I want briefly to cover. First, to paraphrase the review, and as the right hon. Member for Birkenhead said, there are severe deficiencies in the way data about modern slavery is collected. There is still a need for far greater awareness of modern slavery and for consistent, high-quality training among those most likely to encounter its victims. Addressing those issues will be paramount if we are to maximise the impact of the legislation and strategies. It is against that background that the Scottish Government this week commenced

[Stuart C. McDonald]

consultation on a broader duty to notify and provide information about victims. The proposal is to specify a wider range of public authorities required to notify Police Scotland about persons who are or appear to be victims of offences under the legislation. The explicit and main aim is to provide a more accurate picture of the scale and extent of trafficking than can be gleaned from national referral mechanism data, and to provide more effective targeting of enforcement activity and support services. I take on board the point made by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead on the need for data on those who are on the other side of the NRM process, and I shall definitely feed that back in.

I believe there is still a real need to look again at how the immigration system fits into this, and I echo what other hon. Members said about that. Similarly, as we debated recently in Westminster Hall, the Government need to look again at support for victims. However, that is for another day. I thank the review authors again for their thoughtful and insightful work, and echo the calls that have been made to seize the opportunity to make a difference for the victims of modern slavery.

3.29 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main, and I congratulate the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) on securing this important debate. I thank all those who have spoken so eloquently today. I welcome the independent review of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, and its robust and detailed recommendations, and I congratulate all those involved in producing the report. Modern slavery is an abhorrent, vile, devastating practice, and we must do everything in our power to ensure it is stopped. Those who fall victim to it must be fully supported on their journey out of modern slavery, and given the dignified care they need.

During my time as an MP and a shadow Minister, I have spent many hours meeting victims of modern slavery, and hearing the tragic stories of how they were stripped of their rights, violated, and subjected to abuse and inhumane work and living conditions. The review highlighted the significant scale of modern slavery in the UK. In 2017, 5,143 potential victims were referred through the national referral mechanism, 41% of whom were children. The number of victims who sadly go unreported will obviously be much higher.

Along with CORE, the UK civil society coalition on corporate accountability, the review highlighted weaknesses in the introduction of section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act, “Transparency in supply chains etc”. An estimated 40% of eligible companies are not complying with the legislation at all, and there are currently no penalties for non-compliance. When statements are shared, they are often generalised and do not provide the detail required to be sure that modern slavery is not taking place. Consequently, if companies have victims of modern slavery in their supply chains, little has been done by organisations to eliminate it.

Much more needs to be done to strengthen the legislation, first by mandating companies to report on the six areas that the Act requests, and secondly by ensuring consequences if they do not report. That commitment

from companies could also provide an opportunity for a co-ordinated approach to issues that arise in multiple supply chains. If the UK wishes to lead the way on this issue, it must ensure that such structures are in place, and enforced, so that companies report on their supply chain. A further problem that I have raised a number of times, which was also identified in the review, is the lack of information about victims once they leave the NRM. The fact that such information is not properly recorded leaves hugely vulnerable individuals at risk of being re-trafficked. No knowledge is kept of their whereabouts, which is simply not good enough.

I also wish to mention the gendered nature of modern slavery. I understand that the law on prostitution could not be addressed in the review as it fell outside its remit, but I am pleased that that work will now be carried out, together with colleagues in the all-party group on prostitution and the global sex trade, for which my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) has done such brilliant work. Although the issue was not addressed in the review, many who gave evidence stated that because—unlike other countries in Europe—England, Wales and Scotland do not having a sex buyer law, they could be more of a target for traffickers. The sex buyer law on prostitution decriminalises all those who are prostituted. During my time as an MP I have met countless women involved in prostitution, and I have heard their harrowing stories of exploitative relationships and the dangerous situations they have been put in. We must ensure that England, Wales and Scotland are not easy targets for traffickers because they do not have a sex buyer law.

The UK Government can say warm words, and repeat the same lines about what they are doing to help victims and protect them from modern slavery or being re-trafficked. However, unless our police force and support services are properly resourced to undertake that mammoth task, those desperately needed changes will not come about.

Mrs Miller: The hon. Lady set out the issues around the law on prostitution in the UK, and she made a clear case for why a sex buyers law has helped to reduce sexual exploitation in other nearby countries, leaving the UK with quite different laws. Will those on the Labour Front Bench support a change to the law in that area?

Carolyn Harris: I will answer by saying simply that it is a work in progress.

In 2015 there were 17,000 fewer police officers in England and Wales than there were in 2010, and regardless of the way that is spun, it will have an impact on helping victims of modern slavery. We can get closer to eradicating this heinous crime if there is a properly resourced, co-ordinated approach by companies, politicians and other supporting bodies, who commit to meeting the expectations of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. There is a huge opportunity to be world leaders in removing this horror from our society, but there must be more enforcement and it must be properly resourced. The consensus we have heard today should, and I hope will, motivate the Government to implement the recommendations as soon as possible. Again, I thank everyone who was involved with this remarkable and insightful piece of work.

3.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main, and I am grateful for your invitation to colleagues to intervene on the Minister as much as possible.

I thank the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) for securing this important debate, and for all his work not just in the review—I will thank him and others lavishly for that in a moment—but over the years. We were struck by his recollection of how he was first alerted to the heinous crime of modern slavery, and by the recollections of other hon. Friends and Members around the Chamber. My hon. Friends the Members for Erewash (Maggie Throup) and for Henley (John Howell), and the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) highlighted the various ways that we have all become aware of, alerted to, and are working on efforts to tackle the range of horrendous crimes against humanity that modern slavery involves. Yet again it is a great privilege to take part in a debate in which the tone, I hope, shows the best of this place, with both constructive criticism and the will to work together. I thank all hon. Members and friends for their participation this afternoon.

The Government are committed to the eradication of modern slavery in the United Kingdom and overseas. Our modern slavery legislation is among the best in the world, but we always seek to improve our response. The hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) expressed impatience with this place but also with outside, and the hon. Members for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon) noted the evolving methodology of slave owners, and the ways they change their criminal behaviour to avoid detection and exploit more vulnerable people, or find opportunities for selling people in a range of ways. That is what modern slavery is about.

Vernon Coaker: On the evolving nature of the legislation, will the Minister do all she can to ensure that some of the negative reporting about the way traffickers are starting to use the statutory defence included in the Modern Slavery Act 2015 does not deter us from using it? That important provision protects vulnerable victims.

Victoria Atkins: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question because we have recently seen negative publicity about that issue. We are clear that that defence exists to protect the most vulnerable people in society, particularly children, and we believe that rolling out independent child trafficking advocates—particularly the new forms that we are trying for UK nationals—will help the police and others to understand where that defence applies properly and lawfully.

Jim Shannon: The Minister will be aware of the legislative change in Northern Ireland—there was a meeting in the House to make Members aware of it. Has she had a chance to look in detail at the legislation in Northern Ireland? May I say gently—and quickly, Mrs Main—that by looking at it she might find a way of introducing effective legislation here?

Victoria Atkins: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that. Later in my speech, I will deal with hon. Members' observations about prostitution. I am always happy to look at the example set in other parts of the United Kingdom and elsewhere.

The methodology is evolving, and we have an open-handed, open-hearted response to tackle this very serious crime. I was pleased that the right hon. Member for Birkenhead, my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) and Baroness Butler-Sloss accepted the Prime Minister's invitation to review the Act because we do not want to rest on our laurels. We recognise that as the crimes develop, so too must the law. I want to put on the record my sincere thanks to those three colleagues for all the work they have done on this. It is quite something to see the work they have drawn together, with the help of the commissioner experts—I have written to them all to thank them. They have done extraordinary work, and we are truly grateful to them.

We are considering all the recommendations of the final report very carefully, and we hope to respond to them formally before the summer recess. Colleagues who are impatient will have to understand that the wheels of Government turn slowly, and that is a swift response. We are working very hard indeed to achieve that. We recognise that this is an opportunity, as the hon. Member for Gedling said.

I will touch on the review's four themes, and I hope hon. Members will understand that I cannot commit to particular recommendations today. I am delighted that Dame Sara Thornton took up the role of Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner on 1 May. Anyone who has met Dame Sara or had the privilege of working with her knows how independently minded she is. I know from my meetings with her how much she is relishing the opportunity to work in this arena, bringing her policing experience with her. I have no doubt that she will bring some huge improvements to the way in which we deal with modern slavery in this country. It is a vital role that offers independent insight and challenges public authorities to ensure the UK's response remains among the best in the world. We very much welcome the review's recommendations on how to ensure the role's independence, and we are working closely with Dame Sara to take them on board.

Last week, the Prime Minister announced the creation of a new Government modern slavery and migration envoy to help advance the Government's international modern slavery objectives. That is something that colleagues were keen to recommend. My hon. Friend the Member for Henley gave examples from Nigeria, with which we must work closely because we are sadly a destination for a great number of the traffickers from that country. My hon. Friend will know that the Home Office is using the modern slavery fund to tackle modern slavery in key source countries, including Nigeria, where we have committed £5 million to deal with the issue. Through events such as the Santa Marta Group conference, I have met some of the amazing people who work with people—predominantly women—in Nigeria who are at risk of being trafficked or have been trafficked. I am absolutely convinced about the invaluable role that their work plays.

Vernon Coaker: This is a difficult question, but I will ask it because the Minister is more sympathetic to this than others in the Home Office. She talks about women from Nigeria who may have been trafficked to this country. If they are confirmed to be victims of trafficking through the national referral mechanism and receive a conclusive grounds decision, what immigration status should they have at the end of that?

Victoria Atkins: I will come on to that when I talk about victim support. The hon. Gentleman understands only too well how complicated this is, so I will try to keep to my themes, and I want to give the right hon. Member for Birkenhead a couple of minutes at the end to sum up.

Sarah Champion: The Minister was right to identify this country's pull factor. She rightly talked about the point that the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) made about women coming over here and being sexually exploited. Does she acknowledge that the Government must do more to address sexual exploitation in this country, and that a buyers law is the way to do that?

Victoria Atkins: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady and my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke for setting out the reviewers' intention to look at prostitution in addition to the report that they have delivered. I welcome that review. I very much understand the points that hon. Members have made today and in previous debates. We have commissioned detailed research into what prostitution looks like in the 20th century, because we all acknowledge that it is different from how it was 20 years ago, particularly given the rise of online sex trafficking and prostitution. We want to wait for that independent research conducted by academics in south Wales, and we hope that they will be able to report this summer. We very much look forward to that, and we will of course review the evidence once it comes in.

The review rightly focused on transparency in supply chains. We are the first country in the world to require large organisations to report on the steps taken to prevent modern slavery in their supply chains. More and more businesses are reporting on their actions to protect vulnerable workers. My hon. Friend the Member for Henley mentioned Unilever, and other colleagues rightly mentioned the Co-op. In my role, I have the privilege of helping the Home Secretary with the business forum, which draws together some of the biggest business leaders not just in this country but in the world, so we can examine what they are doing to ensure their compliance with the Act. As hon. Members said, compliance can give companies a competitive advantage, but only as long as other companies are doing what they should be doing too.

The Home Office wrote to the CEOs of 17,000 businesses in October 2018 and March 2019 to notify them of our intention to undertake an audit of compliance. We are pleased that nearly 4,000 businesses have signed up to our newsletter for further information. This is an area that requires real action. I am therefore very pleased that, last week, the Prime Minister announced that we will develop a central registry for modern slavery statements published under the Act to empower consumers, investors and non-governmental organisations to scrutinise statements and hold businesses to account. I think that is a very significant development, and I was delighted when we managed to get it over the line, not least given our experience of the huge public pressure that the gender pay gap has put on businesses to ensure they treat female staff members properly and correct unfairnesses where they exist.

I am conscious of the work being done by various businesses and organisations, including, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke said, the NHS

and churches. The Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority is also doing a huge amount to educate and hold people to account.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister mentioned the excellent progress that has been made on this front, but it remains the case that 5,000 businesses are not in compliance with section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act. In October 2018, she said that they can expect to face tougher consequences if they continue to flout their obligations. Will she elaborate on what those tougher consequences might be?

Victoria Atkins: We will consult on further new measures, including proposals to improve reporting quality, ensure compliance and extend the requirements to the public sector. My hon. Friend the Member for Erewash expressed some dismay at yet another consultation. I regret that when we make big changes, which I hope this consultation will lead to, we have to consult to see what organisations and so on think of them. I believe this consultation will be a real step forward, and I encourage hon. Members to respond to it.

Some 100 local authorities already report, but I am pleased to announce that individual Departments will publish their own modern slavery statements from 2020-21, building on the Prime Minister's earlier commitment that central Government will report voluntarily this year. We very much accept the observation that we must lead by example, and we will do so.

I turn to independent child trafficking advocates. As was set out, some of the most heartbreaking examples of modern slavery in what is, it has to be said, a pretty competitive field are those of children who are exploited by slave masters. We are committed to providing specialist support for child victims. We have now rolled out ICTAs to one third of local authorities in England and Wales, in line with the commitment I made in July last year. We welcome the findings of the independent review, and we are considering the recommendations on the improvements we can make to the ICTA service. We remain committed to rolling out ICTAs nationally as soon as possible.

On legal application, the Act provided the necessary tools and powers for the police to tackle the offenders responsible for this crime and bring them to justice. I am grateful that the reviewers examined the definition of the offences, the uptake of slavery and trafficking reparation orders, and the use of the statutory defence. We are considering the review's recommendations with our operational partners and will use the impetus the review has created to build on the recent improvements we have seen in the operational response. We have made good progress, but the review rightly highlights where we need to go further to ensure more offenders are convicted, more gangs are disrupted and more illicit profits are seized and returned to victims.

The hon. Member for Strangford touched on victim support. That technically was not part of the review, but I want to answer his question because it comes up in the context of immigration, which a number of colleagues understandably raised. We absolutely reiterate our commitment to identifying victims of modern slavery and supporting them to recover from their exploitation and begin rebuilding their lives. In 2017 we announced a package of reforms to the national referral mechanism centred on improved identification and support for

victims at all stages, and quicker, more certain decision making that victims and wider society can have confidence in.

To improve decision making, we have launched a single expert unit to make all decisions on whether someone is a victim of modern slavery. That single competent authority is responsible for all NRM decisions regardless of an individual's nationality or immigration status. That is significant because we are absolutely clear that consideration of whether an individual is a victim and any decision about their immigration status must remain separate. We are convinced that that expert unit, and all the safeguards we have put alongside it, will help to improve the quality of decisions.

Importantly, we are also developing a new digital system to make it easier for those on the frontline to identify and refer victims. That system will go live at the end of the summer. That is also significant, because it goes to the point the right hon. Member for Birkenhead rightly made about data collection. We have high hopes that, once that is digitised, the collection of such data will be very much improved.

Modern slavery is an appalling crime that robs people of their freedom and their dignity. It cannot be allowed to continue. We can be proud that the UK is a world leader in tackling modern slavery, and that the Prime Minister set out her expectations not just for the United Kingdom but for the rest of the world in her call to the United Nations for action. We of course acknowledge that we must lead by example, and we will continue to do so. Once again, I thank the right hon. Member for Birkenhead, my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke and Baroness Butler-Sloss, and all their expert commissioners, for their commitment to the review. I look forward to their implementation group and to their holding my feet to the fire.

3.55 pm

Frank Field: Thank you, Mrs Main, for chairing the debate; you got us through on time and enabled us all to make our contributions. I thank my colleagues who made the review possible. We had serious intent, but with the kind of fellowship across party lines that Members of Parliament can have, to make a contribution. We have given notice that there will be an implementation group so that we do not just do a report and forget it, and we will also look at the areas we were forbidden from looking at by our terms of reference. With the help of the House—we saw the extraordinary strength of support in this debate—this will be just the beginning of another stage of our campaign.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the independent review of the Modern Slavery Act.

3.56 pm

Sitting suspended.

Railway Connectivity: East to West Midlands

4 pm

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered East to West Midlands railway connectivity.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I am pleased to debate this important issue. Like many hon. Members, I have spoken frequently about the pressing need to invest properly in our rail network. I am glad that several hon. Members from the midlands are present, which underlines the strength of interest in the subject, even though it is a short debate. I am happy to take interventions.

This is not my first debate in the Chamber on rail investment in my community, but I make no apology for prioritising the topic, which is essential for our economic development and our standing as an excellent place to live and work. The Minister will be happy to hear that I will not discuss rail privatisation or future models of ownership; suffice it to say that our network is in need of significant improvement. Commuters and other rail users across my constituency do not always feel well served by the services that they pay a high price to use. They are crying out for a service that works as it should, and the network is crying out for the major investment that it desperately needs.

If the Government are serious about the midlands engine, they need to power it up with a significant commitment to our rail infrastructure. The midlands are a focal point of our country's strategic transport network. Whether people are heading north, south, east or west, the chances are that they will travel through the midlands at some point, which loads additional pressure on our network that does not affect other regions to the same extent.

Over the last decade, rail journeys in the east midlands, or that touch the east midlands at some point, have increased by a staggering 37%, but in the west midlands, they have increased by an extraordinary 121%. It is good news, of course, that the networks are well used and that many people travel to, across and through our region, but we must recognise that those journeys put pressure on the network and cannot be at the expense of decent, reliable local and regional services for my constituents.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): On the point of local services and east-west links, does my hon. Friend recognise that it is not only the big stations but the so-called little stations, such as Burton Joyce, Netherfield and Carlton, that are important commuter stations for people who live in those areas?

Alex Norris: I absolutely agree. When I was preparing for the debate I was thinking about Netherfield, as I often do because I have canvassed there an awful lot in my life. Those stations are important to people and provide the ability to get to and from Nottingham or other places.

The figures do not lie, although I know that anything can be proved with figures. The latest statistics show that £70 per head is spent on rail infrastructure in the

[Alex Norris]

east midlands and more than 10 times that is spent in London. We can play with those numbers, but fundamentally, there is an extraordinary imbalance that is unsustainable economically—and, frankly, practically—and it will not do. I am a realist, however, and practical, so I am not out with a begging bowl asking for investment levels to be equalised overnight in a vacuum for no purpose. I am here to make a positive case for my constituents and our region to get a good shake of the dice.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): I am fortunate that there was investment in a new railway station in Ilkeston not long ago, but even from there, or from Long Eaton station, which is also in my constituency, it is hard to go from east to west, so I welcome the debate. The hon. Gentleman is correct that we need more investment in our railways, so that more trains can stop more frequently at our smaller stations.

Alex Norris: I appreciate that intervention. We talk about north and south and going to and from London a lot, but for our constituents and the communities in our part of the world, that east-west link and the link to Birmingham is just as important.

It is the perfect time, after an intervention from the hon. Lady, to mention that HS2 is coming down the line. We still have some significant work to do to make sure that the east midlands is not erased from that map. We have a real opportunity to gear up our region's infrastructure and economy.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. HS2 is often seen as a north-south rail project, but does he agree that reducing the journey time from Birmingham to the east midlands hub at Toton to just 19 minutes is a game changer for east-west connectivity in our region? It is unsurprising that the eastern leg of HS2, which will transform links from Birmingham to not just the east midlands but Yorkshire, the north-east and Scotland—an area of 15 million people—delivers more than 60% of the wider economic benefits of phase 2.

Alex Norris: The Chair of the Transport Committee, my constituency neighbour, makes an excellent point. One of the most frustrating things about the arguments around HS2 is that they get drawn into journey times to and from London. They are not unimportant, but they are not the fundamental thing.

Many hon. Members will have heard me say that we have a real opportunity in the east midlands—the west midlands will benefit too—in the Toton station for HS2; in dualling the roads that get us to the brilliant East Midlands airport, which is the biggest pure freight airport in the country; and in developing the power station site. There is the potential for more than 100,000 new jobs. HS2 is fundamental to that, so pulling that project out risks pulling the whole thing down; that is how critical it is.

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. On HS2 and the economic benefits to the region—the debate is about

east-west rail links—for my constituents, the east-west connection to the Chesterfield hub is vital if we are to make the most of the local economic growth around those stations. Does he agree that to make HS2 work for areas across the east midlands, not just immediately around those hub stations, we need those east-west rail links so that people can travel to those new jobs and to the economic growth that HS2 will create?

Alex Norris: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. Without those east-west links, people will not get the benefit of HS2 and we will not get all that growth. Individuals will lose out if they are not close to it, which none of us wants. It is no secret that we are going to see a lot of political change in this place in the next six months, but I hope that we can come together as midlanders and make a positive case, with one voice, about why that model and that development will make such a difference.

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): In terms of coming together, does the hon. Gentleman agree that extending services on the Crewe-Derby line through Stoke-on-Trent to Nottingham is essential? I welcome the decision of the new operator of east midlands services to extend most of those services to Nottingham.

Alex Norris: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman. Greater frequency and a better service will be good for constituents at both ends of the line and in between. Hon. Members will have seen that last week, northern newspapers and public figures got together to talk about powering the north. We need to match that level of energy, enthusiasm and creativity; I will come on to something shortly that we can all get behind. The Minister will reiterate the Government's commitment to investing in our midlands rail network, but it is our duty to make sure that that rhetoric stacks up with the reality on platforms across our region.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech on an important topic. Does he agree that rail freight capacity is important to relieve communities and roads of heavy lorries and to meet our zero-carbon targets? Projects such as Peak Rail in my constituency would drive hundreds of lorries off our roads and would bring heritage steam to Buxton, which would attract tourists. With significant private sector investment, it could also free up capacity on our main lines at little cost to the Department and would have benefits for the proposed HS2 route.

Alex Norris: I share my hon. Friend's view; I was going to make that point. We all want freight off the road, because we declared a climate emergency three weeks ago and that is a good way to support that declaration. We can create, in the midlands, through Toton at the fulcrum of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, and the airport and the power station site, a centre of the country where freight will come in by air, rail and road. We will be the fulcrum for that and the jobs and opportunities are extraordinary. My hon. Friend knows that I often drive through her constituency on the way to the football, and I hoped that she was going to mention better rail links through there, because I certainly would have shared her view on that too.

Midlands Connect has produced a practical, backable and concrete proposal on the midlands rail hub. I hope that the Minister will take some time to reflect on what he has heard about it so far and on where he thinks we might go with it in future. The project will create economic, social and environmental rewards across the whole of the midlands and far beyond. It is the most ambitious upgrade of our region's rail network since the east coast main line was electrified in the 1980s.

The line to Birmingham was electrified more than 50 years ago, and we are still campaigning hard, Minister. I will never miss an opportunity to say that we want the same for the midlands mainline. It is extraordinary that we are still waiting for 20th-century levels of support in Nottingham.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech that is as important to the west midlands as it is to the east midlands. Does he agree that the midlands rail hub project has absolutely massive potential? It has been estimated that it could free up another 6 million passenger journeys and around 36 extra freight paths by linking up the east and west midlands in the way that is needed. If that is to happen, the project will need backing. Will he join me in saying to the Minister that if the Government agree with the ambition and the end, they must will the means? That involves investment in the midlands rail hub.

Alex Norris: I absolutely agree. That was precisely why I applied for this debate—to have the opportunity to encourage the Minister to back the scheme, which is coming any day now. I made my application on the day of the draw and was granted the debate first time; that has never happened to me before. I confess that I was planning to have a little bit of lead-in time, but I am nevertheless delighted even to be slightly ahead of some of the review's proposals. As my hon. Friend says, it requires decisive Government action and support.

The project, as planned, would include new direct services between Nottingham and Coventry via Leicester, and would connect Hereford, Worcester, the south-west and Wales to the HS2 network. That could be done in phases, starting in 2024, and finished in time for the arrival of HS2—

4.11 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.38 pm

On resuming—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): I apologise to the Rail Minister, but I suppose it is appropriate in a debate about railways for there to be a significant delay in proceedings. For those who are waiting for the next debate, this debate is due to finish at 4.58, when the next one will begin. I call Alex Norris.

Alex Norris: Thank you, Mr Hollobone; I am grateful for the chance to resume my remarks.

Before we were interrupted, I was talking about the facets of an east midlands rail hub, and I know the massed crowds in the debate will be excited to hear some more about it in the next 18 minutes. That could

be completed in phases, starting in 2024 and finishing in time for the arrival of HS2 in the east midlands in 2033. That staggered approach would minimise disruption to passengers and would prevent a worsening of the issues that we are suffering.

As I said before, this debate came more quickly than I expected, so the full details of the proposal for the hub from Midlands Connect will not be published until next week. I will test the principle that the best place to tell a secret is on the Floor of the House of Commons by letting Members in on some of the highlights, ahead of time.

Broadly, the proposal would give capacity for 24 new east-west and west-east passenger services every hour on the midlands rail network, with 36 additional freight paths per day, shifting 4,320 lorries from road to railway each day. Some 1.6 million more people would be brought within an hour's journey by public transport of the midlands' biggest towns and cities, and the extra capacity would add £650 million to the economy of the midlands every year.

The hub would be a win-win for our region on so many fronts. It would bring huge economic dividends every year to our industries and local businesses. A more joined-up public transport system would be a good idea as it would reduce traffic on our overcrowded roads and help to tackle the climate emergency we are all too aware that we are facing. The additional tourism it would bring to the region would also be a benefit, as my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Ruth George) mentioned.

It is clear as day that this a project whose time has come; it needs to happen. The case for the midlands rail hub is persuasive, the details Ministers see will be good and it is time that midlands communities were backed in this way. I hope Ministers will put the full weight of the Department for Transport behind this project; if they want the midlands engine, they will have to have the rail hub as a constituent part of it.

I know Transport Ministers have a tough job and there are competing priorities, but I believe there is a strong business case. This is not the politics of the begging bowl or saying, "London gets so much per head and we get so much less per head." It is easy to say that stuff, but there have to be backable propositions; this is one of them. We think it will lead to good infrastructure in the region and economic benefits.

I ask the Minister to read the report from Midlands Connect when it is released next week and put it at the top of his in-tray for approval. We know there will be significant political change in the next few months and there may be ministerial changes too. If the Minister is not in his role in the future, I ask him to pass it on to his successors, so that they understand that this is a good project. We would make sure that they got a copy of the report, but I hope the Minister would pass a copy on too.

Far too many people in my constituency think that progress in our economy is stalling. There are significant gaps in our development that have not been exploited. I mentioned briefly when the hon. Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) intervened that the reality for my community since the mid-1980s has been significant deindustrialisation. We could have a day's debate on the reasons for that, its inevitability and what came in its place, but to a certain

[Alex Norris]

extent that is now for the birds. What comes now is what matters, with the midlands rail hub being a critical component part of our economic development around that triangle.

Lilian Greenwood: My hon. Friend is making an important point about the economic regeneration that the midlands rail hub could enable. He has already acknowledged the importance of tackling the climate emergency. Is it not equally important to tackle congestion and poor air quality in our cities, and improve safety? We know it is far safer to travel by rail than by road. Does he agree?

Alex Norris: I share my hon. Friend and neighbour's view. The climate emergency is a real thing, not just for leaflets. We should see every action that we now take as a country through the prism of sustainability. This is one of those projects, because it is sustainable: it will take cars and lorries off the road, and the jobs we are talking about—around the airport, the HS2 facility at Toton and the power station site—will be new economy jobs. There are extraordinary opportunities around the power station site for clean energy jobs; we are talking about more than 100,000 potential jobs across those sites. This is the future for the midlands. The only way to get there is to have it properly wired up with the infrastructure.

I hope the Minister will give good consideration to the rail hub, so that we can get it moving, on the books and ready for delivery.

4.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) on securing this debate on this highly important issue. He articulated the importance of rail in his own area, and across the east and west midlands, highlighting its impact on reducing congestion, improving air quality and other environmental improvements, plus its role in underpinning our economy. Those are critical reasons why we should be—and are—investing heavily in rail.

I agree with points made by a number of Members about the importance of rail freight in the economy as a whole, and in the midlands in particular. It is already part of a strong logistics sector in both economies; rail underpins that comprehensively.

I receive many representations from colleagues about the rail services in their areas, typically focused on capacity and overcrowding. I will talk about cross-country, the midlands hub, HS2 and rolling stock, what we are doing now and what we are working to deliver for passengers over the next few years.

This is an exciting time for the rail industry and for passengers. We have new fleets being introduced that will help to deliver a step change in customer service. The performance of trains is one factor affecting the overall network performance. Both the Department and operators consider that to be an important part of the franchise competition process.

We are seeing a change in the operator for the east midlands franchise, which has been won by Abellio. There will be a mobilisation phase and Abellio will take

over in August. It will oversee the introduction of a brand new fleet of trains on the upgraded midland main line from 2022. The new trains will deliver faster journey times over longer distances in peak periods, and new, frequent express services will be introduced, including from Corby through Luton into London. The roll-out of the new fleet will be completed by December 2023. That intercity fleet will be significantly more reliable and comfortable. The key point about capacity is that passengers will benefit from an 80% increase in the number of morning peak seats into Nottingham, Lincoln and St Pancras.

Midlands Connect is critical in planning the transport for the future of the area. It is working with HS2, Transport for the East Midlands, the Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire local enterprise partnership—D2N2—and Network Rail to make the case for enhanced connectivity to the new hub station at Toton. HS2 will indeed transform things, which was a point made by the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), who is Chair of the Select Committee on Transport. It will not just improve connectivity to and from London, although that is obviously a part of it, but it will certainly transform connectivity between the east and west midlands in a positive way. That point does not always get exposed, but needs to be said. The Toton hub will be well connected to Nottingham, Derby and other mainline stations, and provide significant journey time improvements to the north and west. It is key to maximise the opportunities that will be presented when HS2 arrives in the area.

Midlands Connect is also investigating options to run services from Leicester to Leeds via HS2, transforming connectivity between the two cities, and developing a business case for additional services on the Derby-Stoke-Crewe corridor, so the east midlands can link to HS2 services at Crewe in 2027.

Jack Brereton: The Minister mentioned the Crewe-Derby line, through Stoke-on-Trent. Does he agree that there is real untapped potential on that line to vastly improve services, particularly to stations such as Longton, in my constituency?

Andrew Jones: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend; he has made a strong case for that in meetings that we have already had on the subject, and that case has been shared with other colleagues, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths). I will mention it later, but I agree entirely with the point.

Today, eight out of 10 journeys between Birmingham and Nottingham are made by road. That is not desirable. One of the key points made about the midlands rail hub was that it will help to improve east-west connectivity by doubling the number of direct services between those two great cities, cutting the journey time by more than 25% to just 50 minutes and bringing about 450,000 more people in the two cities within one hour of each other. It will enable faster and more frequent services through Derby and will include funding to examine the case for major investment to reduce conflicts between the east coast main line and Nottingham-Lincoln traffic at Newark.

I recognise how important this case is. We have received the strategic outline business case in the Department and it is going through its evaluation. The hon. Member

for Nottingham North asked whether I would back the case; I cannot say that until we have concluded our evaluation, but I can say that I am extremely keen to see inter-city connectivity as a driver of economic growth, that the points he has made are spot on and that I am keen to work with Midlands Connect to take this forward. Indeed, I am meeting Midlands Connect next week. I hope that is of some interest to him.

I must mention the midlands main line, because we are seeing the biggest upgrade of the line since its completion in around 1870. The investments being made will improve long-distance passenger services between Sheffield, Nottingham and London, and services between Corby, Kettering and London. The journey time improvement and additional seats will make cities in the east midlands better places to do business in.

Market Harborough station has recently seen considerable improvements to make it more accessible and ease the curves in the track, which will increase line speed, deliver improved journey times and help to reduce fuel use. That project has been going well and saw a landmark completion earlier this month. The next east midlands franchise will deliver new bi-mode trains on routes between London, the east midlands and south Yorkshire, delivering benefits to both passengers and the environment.

However, the east midlands railway will provide additional capacity and more frequent services on routes across the east midlands, not just on the lines to and around London. Those include the route between Leicester and Nottingham, the Robin Hood line and routes in Lincolnshire. As an example, the Derby to Crewe line will see the introduction of additional capacity. The key thing here is that it has been a single-carriage service, which has not met the needs of the travelling public in the area. We will see additional capacity using modern trains, which will have air-conditioning, at-seat power points and free wi-fi.

Many trains from Crewe will be extended through to Nottingham and there will be additional morning and evening services introduced, as well as an hourly service on Sundays. That upgrade has attracted significant attention—I have had more comments on this part of the east midlands franchise than on any other—so I hope that that will be of interest to colleagues. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South has been a key champion for it.

One project that I have visited recently in the east midlands is the upgrade to signalling and modernisation of the railway around Derby to improve train service reliability. That has been an important project to unlock capacity, and I must say that when I visited it I thought it was a significant piece of work that had been achieved well by Network Rail.

A further project that is coming on stream later this year, which I have not had a chance to visit, is the brand-new station of Worcestershire Parkway, delivered by Worcestershire County Council. When it opens, the station will be served by CrossCountry services on the Nottingham-Cardiff route, providing improved journey opportunities between the east midlands and destinations in Worcestershire and the Cotswolds.

I mentioned earlier the services provided by CrossCountry; I have had significant representations from colleagues about the capacity problems on that

line, because it has been so popular that it has seen huge growth in passenger numbers. CrossCountry provides local train services between the east and west midlands, with its long-distance services covering the most extensive franchise in Britain, from Scotland to Cornwall and Manchester to Bournemouth. CrossCountry offers regular direct trains from Derby to the north-east and Scotland, as well as to Bristol, Plymouth and the Thames valley. All routes serve Birmingham New Street.

Because of this extensive network, and to avoid the possibility of fettering the outcome of the Williams rail review, which is looking at the future structure of the rail industry, the CrossCountry franchise competition was cancelled last year. We are now working with the incumbent, Arriva, to develop a direct award franchise agreement. This work will consider the results of the extensive public consultation held in 2017 to deliver appropriate passenger benefits.

The key question that is consistently raised, and therefore our No. 1 priority for the next CrossCountry franchise, is providing additional capacity for passengers. We are working on a number of options to deliver additional trains for the CrossCountry fleet as they become available in the rolling stock market. The rolling stock market is going through one of its greatest changes in our country's history. We are seeing a fleet update equivalent to when we went from steam to diesel in the UK. That is the scale of change we are experiencing, and it will free up rolling stock to add additional capacity into our network. We must remember that we are now enjoying more services on our rail network than at any point in British history.

I once again thank the hon. Member for Nottingham North for securing this debate on this important issue. We have covered a lot of ground, but I hope I have made clear that we are seeing new trains, new services, new lines and new stations. Rail in our country is being transformed, and he has made a great case for east-west connectivity in the midlands. I am happy to keep colleagues informed and I look forward to working with Midlands Connect and other bodies in the area, because I strongly believe that rail is a key driver of economic growth, environmental improvement and social mobility. Before closing, I will just highlight that the Government fully understand that, and it is why we have secured a record investment of £48 billion for our rail network over the next five years and are investing £1.5 billion in the midlands main line upgrade—the biggest since its completion 150 years ago.

There was one question about infrastructure spend by the different parts of our country and I have some updated information that the House might like to know: the infrastructure pipeline data from the Infrastructure and Projects Authority shows a per capita spend of £236 for the midlands for the period from 2018-19 to 2020-21, which is the same as the south and just a little bit behind the north. We are seeing a radical change in the infrastructure spend across the country, as we believe strongly that the economy of our country needs to be rebalanced. Underpinning that is a rebalancing of our transport investment, and at the heart of that is work in the midlands.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered East to West Midlands railway connectivity.

Jewish Refugees from the Middle East and North Africa

4.58 pm

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Jewish refugees from the Middle East and North Africa.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone, as we consider this important matter. In 1945, 856,000 Jewish people lived in the middle east, north Africa and the Gulf region. Only about 4,500 remain, almost all of them in Morocco and Tunisia. Jewish people have lived continuously in the middle east and north Africa for over 2,600 years, yet in just a few decades they almost totally disappeared. Thousands were expelled or fled their home countries in fear. Around 850,000 were forced out or felt they had to leave following the United Nations decision to partition Palestine in 1947. Age-old communities, with roots dating back millennia, were gone. It was the largest exodus of non-Muslims from the middle east until the movement of Christians from Iraq after 2003.

Between 1948 and 1972, pogroms and violent attacks were perpetrated in every Arab country against its Jewish residents. The ethnic cleansing of thousands of Jewish people from the Arab world in the mid-20th century was described by journalist Tom Gross as “systematic, absolute and unprovoked.” For example, there were 38,000 Jews living in western Libya before 1945. Now there are none. Few of the 74 synagogues in Libya are recognisable, and a highway runs through Tripoli’s Jewish cemetery. In Algeria, 50 years ago, there were 140,000 Jewish people. Now there are none. In Iraq, there were 135,000, and in Egypt, 75,000. Almost all are gone from those countries too. Some 259,000 left Morocco, 55,000 left Yemen, 20,000 left Lebanon, 180,000 left Syria and 25,000 left Iran. What happened amounted to the near total extinction of an ancient civilisation.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing this important debate. Is she concerned by the assumption that the near total absence of Jews from so many countries across north Africa and the middle east is because there were never Jewish communities in those countries? Helping to break that misperception and spreading the stories of the great histories of those Jewish communities, which go back thousands of years, as she says, is key to helping us to understand and find solutions for some of the problems of today in the region.

Theresa Villiers: My right hon. Friend makes a good point. That is one reason why this debate is so important. It is shocking that, so far as I am aware, there has never been a debate specifically on this subject in the House.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing the debate. Somebody who asked a question in last night’s Tory leadership debate—Abdullah from Bristol—had retweeted a tweet suggesting that Israel should be relocated to the United States. This debate demonstrates why that is so offensive. It feeds into a false narrative that Israel is a creation of

Europe or America, and totally whitewashes the history of the Jews in the middle east and the recent living history of Jews in Arab states in the middle east. That is why it is so offensive and so disgusting.

Theresa Villiers: I agree. Both those points reinforce the importance of raising awareness of this issue, because if our colleagues in the House or the general public do not understand what happened to the Jewish communities of the middle east, they do not understand the middle east conflict. Understanding what we are discussing is crucial if one is to have a fair and balanced outlook on that long-standing dispute.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing this historic debate. She will know that my family, on my father’s side, comes from Libya but had to leave because their home and business were appropriated by Gaddafi, and there were pogroms before that. Why does she think the United Nations has passed 172 resolutions specifically on Palestinian refugees over the past 60 years yet not one on Jewish refugees?

Theresa Villiers: That United Nations record is a matter of grave concern. As I will go on to acknowledge, it is of course important to recognise the suffering experienced by the Palestinians displaced by the 1948 war, but that should not blind us to the suffering experienced by the Jewish communities about whom we are reflecting today.

Jewish people lived in what is now the Arab world for a millennium before Islam was founded, and centuries before the Arab conquest of many of those territories. Until the 17th century, there were more Jewish people in the Arab and wider Muslim world than in Europe. In 1939, 33% of the population of Baghdad was Jewish, making it proportionately more Jewish than Warsaw. Until their 20th-century expulsion, Jewish people had lived in the area covered by present-day Iraq since the Babylonians exiled them from Judea to Mesopotamia in 586BC. The Bible tells us that, taken into captivity in Babylon, they wept on the banks of the Tigris and the Euphrates. A sizeable minority chose to stay after the Persian king Cyrus defeated the Babylonians and declared that the Jews were free to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple. Jewish people living under Muslim rule shaped Judaism as we know it today. The Talmud—or the Babylonian Talmud, as it is often called—was written in the pre-Islamic academies of present-day Iraq. For centuries, Babylon was the spiritual and religious hub of Judaism.

According to the powerful book “Uprooted” by Lyn Julius—I warmly recommend it to everyone here and welcome that Lyn is with us in the Gallery—Jewish people in the Arab world faced two types of oppression. Countries such as Yemen, Syria and post-Suez Egypt drove out their Jewish populations mainly in a single mass expulsion. In other places, such as Lebanon and Morocco, Jews were pushed out gradually over a more protracted period, steadily being made to feel less and less welcome in their home countries. Several countries criminalised Zionism, exposing their Jewish minorities to the allegation that they were somehow enemies of the state.

In Iraq, the situation deteriorated over time. Having served their country proudly over centuries, the vast majority of the Jewish community in Iraq had their nationality taken from them in 1951. A crisis point was reached in 1969 with the execution of nine Jewish Iraqis on trumped-up charges of spying. Their bodies were left hanging for days on public display. Following that brutal episode, many of Iraq's remaining Jewish population escaped through Kurdish areas, including the vice-president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, my constituent Edwin Shuker.

Last year, Edwin visited Parliament to talk to MPs about the injustice we are reflecting on today and to share with us the story of his escape from Baghdad over the Kurdistan mountains. He told me:

"For years, we were pleading to be allowed to leave... We were happy to leave behind everything, but were denied this request. Instead, we were practically kept as hostages from 1963 until we finally managed to escape with our lives in 1971... and were mercifully granted asylum upon arrival to the UK."

I pay tribute to the tireless work Edwin and others have done on this issue, and I am pleased he is here with us today. I welcome all those here today who have been personally affected by the events that we are considering or whose families were driven out of those ancient communities in the middle east.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Theresa Villiers: In a moment. I thank those people for their courage in speaking out on this important issue. We owe them all a great debt of gratitude.

Zac Goldsmith: I apologise for intervening on my right hon. Friend while she was mid flow. I congratulate her on securing this historic and hugely important debate. The US and Canadian Governments have both passed resolutions formally recognising the plight of Jewish refugees. Would she support a similar measure here in the UK, so that the British Government, the British people and Britain as a whole finally recognise, officially and formally, the plight of those Jewish refugees, which she is describing?

Theresa Villiers: I agree that we need much clearer recognition. One good way to do that would be a resolution in Parliament. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will consider that as a next step from this debate.

I pay tribute to Harif, which provides a powerful voice for Jewish people originally from the middle east and north Africa, ventilating many of the concerns about which we will no doubt hear in this debate. I also thank the Board of Deputies, Conservative Friends of Israel and Dr Stan Urman for the information they provided me with in advance of the debate.

Many people were given just days to leave, and most lost everything they owned. A Jewish Egyptian refugee, Joseph Abdul Wahed, wrote:

"We left. And we lost everything. We lost the business, the manufacturing shop, a very beautiful villa with a garden full of orange blossoms and lemon blossoms that I can still remember. But I did take with me a Star of David. It was made by my grandfather. Luckily I was able to get it out."

The ethnic cleansing of Jewish people from the Arab world has far too often been overlooked, as we have already heard in interventions. This is largely an untold story, and it is an unresolved injustice.

Huge amounts of airtime, debate and resources are focused on the Palestinians who were displaced by the 1948 conflict, and it is right to acknowledge their suffering and the importance of safeguarding their interests in a future peace settlement. But the plight of the 850,000 Jewish refugees and the scale of their suffering have never had the recognition they deserve. Indeed, I was shocked to learn that some countries' embassies in Cairo are apparently located in homes stolen from Jewish Egyptian refugees. Concentrating only on the Palestinian refugees gives the international community a distorted view of the middle east dispute. A fair settlement needs to take into account the injustice suffered by Jewish refugees as well as the plight of displaced Palestinians.

The historic UN resolution 242 states that a comprehensive peace agreement should include "a just settlement of the refugee problem"—

language that is inclusive of both Palestinian and Jewish refugees. The status of Jewish refugees has been recognised by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and by world leaders such as President Bill Clinton.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the right hon. Lady for raising this issue. Although I am a European Jew—my family are European Jews—my mother's best friend at school was an Egyptian Jew who had to flee Egypt in the 1950s to move to Israel. I grew up with stories of Egyptian Jews, Iranian Jews and Iraqi Jews who had to flee and who lost many things when they were fleeing, so I am really grateful for the right hon. Lady's intervention, and I call for reparations for Jewish refugees from those countries as well as for Palestinian refugees.

Theresa Villiers: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. It is so important for us to be able to tell some of these stories. It is astonishing that they are so little known. I therefore welcome his intervention.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister raised this matter in her speech to mark the 100th anniversary of the Balfour declaration; she referred to the suffering of both Jewish and Palestinian refugees. I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Government's help on some key questions. I appeal to them to back the efforts by UNESCO and other bodies that are pressing for the conservation of historic sites in the middle east that have cultural significance for the Jewish community and, indeed, other minorities. I also appeal for Ministers, when they discuss middle east matters, explicitly to acknowledge that two refugee populations, Palestinians and Jews, emerged from the same conflict, during the same period, and that the rights of both need to be addressed in a fair settlement. I also ask right hon. and hon. Members to acknowledge that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) did, and as has been the case in resolutions passed in the US Congress and the Canadian Parliament.

After fleeing their home countries, a number of the 850,000 displaced Jewish people went to the UK and Europe or to Australia, the USA and Canada. About 650,000 found refuge in Israel. Many faced hardship

[Theresa Villiers]

and adversity, but I want to highlight the optimism, because theirs is a huge success story, as they have become a much-valued part of the social fabric of the countries that welcomed them and took them in. In their former homelands in the middle east and north Africa, Jewish people over centuries had attained leading roles in many walks of life, and that success has been replicated in their new home countries, including here in the United Kingdom and in my own constituency. I count it a great honour that those I represent in the House include people whose courage and determination got them through a traumatic expulsion from their former homes in the middle east and north Africa.

I want to close on a cautionary note. I am deeply worried that history is repeating itself in the middle east. Just as the indigenous Jewish population was forced out 70 years ago, so the Christians are now under ever-increasing pressure. A grave injustice was perpetrated on the Jewish communities in the middle east and north Africa. Let us hope that that is not repeated in relation to the Christians in the region, whose roots also go back many centuries and whose position now also looks increasingly precarious.

I am afraid that this is an occasion to recall the solemn statement by the former Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks:

“The hate that begins with Jews never ends with Jews.”

That is a danger that none of us should ever forget.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. This hour-long debate will finish at 5.58 pm. Seven Members are seeking to contribute. I am obliged to start calling the Front Benchers no later than 5.36 pm, and the guideline time limits are five minutes for the SNP and for Her Majesty's Opposition and 10 minutes for the Minister, with Theresa Villiers having two or three minutes at the end to sum up the debate. That means we have 21 minutes of Back-Bench time, which means that there will have to be a three-minute limit to ensure that everyone can contribute.

5.14 pm

Dame Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) on securing this important debate. The 850,000 Jewish people displaced from Arab countries from 1948 are the forgotten refugees. They rarely feature as part of the discourse about the plight of middle eastern refugees associated with the establishment of the state of Israel, yet they are an integral part of the history of that region.

It is truly shocking that since 1947, antisemitism—hostility towards Jewish people—has virtually extinguished Jewish life in the middle east. Jewish people have lived in the middle east and north Africa since antiquity. Cities such as Baghdad in Iraq and Aleppo in Syria were renowned hubs of Jewish life. In 1947, one quarter of the population of Baghdad was Jewish, putting Baghdad on a par, in terms of the Jewish population, with pre-war Warsaw and New York. In 1947, there were 90,000 Egyptian Jews, living mainly in Cairo and

Alexandria. The fate of the Jews of that region was persecution and expulsion, and their assets were confiscated. There is no right of return. The persecution and expulsion continued into the 1950s and beyond. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) is one of the Jewish Egyptian refugees.

The Jewish refugees were forced to make new lives elsewhere. Many found refuge in the state of Israel. Today, half of Israel's population traces its origins to other middle eastern or north African countries. It is time that the story of the Jewish refugees from Arab countries was told as a fundamental part of the history of that important region. The Jewish people have always been part of the middle east. It is a sad reflection on the history of the region that there are now virtually no Jews in the middle east outside of Israel, the world's only Jewish state. I hope that a peaceful solution to current conflicts in the region will once again welcome Jewish people right across the region to the place of their origins.

5.17 pm

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. Many in the House will know that I have a deep personal connection to this issue. I very much wish that my grandfather, Renato Halfon, had been alive now to see the demise of Muammar Gaddafi. In 1968, my grandfather was forced to leave Libya because of pogroms targeting Jews and, as an Italian Jew, he fled to Rome. He had owned a clothing business, and planned to return to Tripoli once the pogroms had subsided, but when Colonel Gaddafi took power in 1969, all Jewish businesses were seized under the new regime. In the beginning, Gaddafi was seen as a saviour, yet, as we know, he became a murderous dictator.

My grandfather, like thousands of other Jews from Libya, had nothing to return to—no home or business. On top of oil money, Gaddafi had bought the loyalty of his supporters by giving them all the property seized from the Jews and Italians. Gaddafi's rule was driven by the conviction that foreigners were still exploiting Libya, and the eviction of Jews and Italians was made a hallmark of his regime.

Fortunately, my grandfather had seen Gaddafi coming. He sent my father, aged 15, to England in the late 1950s. After a short stint in Rome, my grandfather joined him in north London, where he spent the rest of his life. It is a great sadness that, by the end of 1970, nearly all Jews and Italians had left Libya. Jews had lived in Libya for more than 2,300 years and had a thriving culture. The population numbered more than 38,000 by 1948.

Today, Jewish communities all over the middle east and north Africa have been almost entirely erased. The flight of historic Jewish communities has altered the shape and face of the region forever, but that is rarely recognised or spoken about on the international stage. As I mentioned to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers), the UN has passed 172 resolutions specifically on Palestinian refugees, but nothing on Jewish refugees. It must be noted that Israel, despite being in its infancy as a country and under attack from six Arab states in 1948, did its best to integrate Jewish refugees. In comparison, many Arab countries, with the exception of Jordan and a few others, turned their backs on the displaced Palestinians.

I am proudly British. I feel a deep attachment to my heritage. I do not want a right of return. I only wish to go to Tripoli to retrace my dear grandfather's footsteps. I urge the Minister to give the immense suffering of Jewish refugees international recognition and equal prominence to the plight of the Palestinian refugees. All their stories deserve to be told.

5.20 pm

Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Ind): It is always a pleasure to participate in debates under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) on securing this important debate.

As the right hon. Lady has made clear, it is important to acknowledge the historical facts relating to Jews forced to flee their homes in the middle east and north Africa. Too often, the debate about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is dominated by a narrative that demonises Israel and delegitimises the rights of Jews to self-determination in their own state.

In the aftermath of the creation of the state of Israel, as the right hon. Lady said, a minimum of 850,000 Jews were forced from their homes. From Iraq to Egypt, Syria, Libya and Yemen, state-sanctioned pogroms descended on Jewish neighbourhoods, killing innocents and destroying ancient synagogues and Jewish cemeteries. New draconian laws prevented Jews from public worship, forced them to carry Jewish identity cards, and seized billions of dollars of their property and assets. Any future peace plan must tackle that issue. It should be part of any full and final settlement between Israelis and Palestinians. Naturally, there must also be justice for Palestinian refugees, based on credible proposals. As Palestinian leaders have privately accepted for decades, it is not feasible to demand both a Palestinian state and the right of return to Israel for Palestinian refugees. Other solutions have to be found, which are just and recognise the losses that refugees have suffered.

It is also time to question the need for Palestinians to live in United Nations-run refugee camps. Surely, they should be encouraged and supported to live in better conditions in Arab countries in the region. That need not in any way compromise or prejudice their rights in any future peace agreement. Refugees, especially children, should not be used as political pawns in the frontline of a public relations campaign.

Regarding these issues, in the past I have accused the Leader of the Opposition of supporting a one-state solution. Today, I reiterate that charge. It is the logical conclusion of the positions he has adopted for decades and his support for the view that the creation of the state of Israel was a catastrophe. His personal attempt to persuade the Labour national executive committee to amend the definition of antisemitism, to allow people to say that the creation and existence of Israel is a racist endeavour, tells us all we need to know about his view of Jewish people's right to self-determination.

The Leader of the Opposition and many of his supporters support the campaigns of every minority around the world who demand the right to self-determination. Why are Jews the only exception? It is to be hoped that the Equality and Human Rights Commission inquiry will shine a light on the Leader of the Opposition's

and his inner circle's failure to act against their allies who are found to promote antisemitic rhetoric and imagery.

In conclusion, it is a source of regret that there is no meaningful political dialogue taking place at the present time between Israelis and Palestinians. Let us hope that this changes, in the interests of peace and stability for both peoples.

5.23 pm

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) on securing this important debate. It is an opportunity to give this issue the prominence that it deserves. As the hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) said, it is remarkable that this issue is rarely remarked upon. Some 850,000 people were forced from their homes, yet no pressure group or organisation ever talks about it. However, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) said, the UN has passed 172 resolutions on Palestinian refugees and not a single one on Jewish refugees. I ask the Minister to advise us on what can be done to correct that imbalance, and what the Government can do with regard to the United Nations.

The right hon. Lady said that Jewish roots in north Africa go back 3,000 years. Indeed, many Jewish people travelled with the Phoenicians, who were wonderful traders and seaman, capable of navigating the oceans. Today there is not a single Jewish person left in Algeria; previously there were 140,000. The same is true in Libya. There are said to be just 20 Jewish people living in Egypt, despite there once being a thriving community of 75,000.

The Jews of Yemen, a community going back 2,000 years, also faced some of the worst persecution, with protests against the UN partition plan resulting in the murders of over 80 innocent Jewish people, and the burning of their homes, school and synagogue. However, Israel managed to save 47,000 of the Yemeni Jews in the extraordinary Operation Magic Carpet, from 1949 to 1950, with help, I must say, from the United Kingdom, so that they could start their new lives in the nascent Jewish state.

Some 60,000 square miles of land was taken from Jewish refugees, which would be four times the size of Israel. These people are not seeking any kind of restitution; they are seeking recognition of their plight. My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) also suggested that the Government should follow the lead of the Canadian, American and Israeli Governments, and officially recognise the experience of so many Jewish refugees after the second world war. I hope that the Government take that opportunity.

Many of those Jewish exiles have gone on to make a huge advance in their personal lives, as well as contributing to the community of Israel itself. They have reached important positions in national Government, and thrived in the public and private sectors. They have made an invaluable contribution to the state of Israel. When we hear about Palestinian refugees, we must all bear in mind the fact that this was a tragedy for not just one group of people, but two groups.

5.26 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I thank the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) for bringing this debate here and setting the scene so well, and giving us all a chance to participate. I add my voice to her call for the Minister for the Middle East to make representations to his US counterparts, ensuring that the long-awaited middle east peace process includes reference to the Jewish refugees from Arab countries.

I am pleased to see the Minister in his place. I believe this is his first debate in Westminster Hall.

The Minister for the Middle East (Dr Andrew Murrison)
indicated assent.

Jim Shannon: Well, he is very welcome. I am sure it will not be his last. It probably will not be my last either, but that is by the way.

Since the partition of Ireland and the creation of Northern Ireland, the Protestants in the border regions that made up the new Northern Ireland have faced attempts on their lives, to ethnically cleanse them out of the regions. The United Nations has defined ethnic cleansing as

“a purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic, or religious, group from certain geographic areas.”

That is what has happened along the border of Northern Ireland, and that is what has happened to the Jews. We know that only 4,000 Jews remain in the Arab world, while some 200,000 Arabs were absorbed into Israeli society, making up the Arab minority of 1.7 million people, which forms 21% of Israel's population.

What can we do? First, the media bias against Israel and her people is exactly that: bias. For example, when the BBC attempts to set a narrative that does not equate to what is actually taking place on the ground—such as reporting retaliatory missiles launched by Israel in such a way that it seems like an offensive attack—we must investigate and seek the truth, but not from those who seek to write the narrative that suits them.

Secondly, we must fulfil our obligations to do what the Balfour declaration began—allowing Israel back to her home and having equality and safety for all in the middle east. Thirdly, there is significant linkage between those two refugee populations, which underscores the need to deal with both simultaneously. We must impress upon the American Administration the importance of not negating any refugee's rights to justice, nor the responsibility of Arab states to provide a humanitarian solution to their plight. Ensuring rights for both Arab and Jewish refugees is an essential key, on a very practical level, to resolving the issue of the refugees.

If Israelis—over 50% of whom are descendants of Jews displaced from Arab countries—are asked to approve a peace plan that provides rights and redress for Palestinian refugees only, it will be less likely to be adopted than an agreement that would provide rights and redress to Jewish refugees as well. That makes sense to me, and I believe it makes sense to everyone taking part in this debate.

A question was put to me over the weekend, and I shall ask the Minister the same question. What steps will the British Government take to recognise the injustice

that was suffered by some 800,000 Jewish refugees from Arab countries and to ensure that, in the Government's stance on the middle east peace process, they recognise their tragedy alongside that of the Palestinian refugees? Both sets of lives matter and both narratives matter. We must strongly advocate for those whose plight often goes unnoticed—in this case, the plight of Jewish refugees from the middle east and north Africa.

5.29 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I wish to dedicate much of what I am going to say to the Jewish refugees of Iraq. I have taken a personal interest in them over the past year, having become friends with several Jews of Iraqi heritage who fled to the UK from Iraq.

A few months ago, I had the pleasure of watching a powerful documentary entitled “Remember Baghdad”, which tells the story of Edwin Shuker and others, and of a once prosperous Jewish community in the Iraqi capital. Their stories are similar to those of so many other Iraqi Jews—135,000, to be precise.

Baghdad was seen as one of the centres of the Jewish world, with an abundance of synagogues, Jewish schools and kosher butchers. At one point, the Jewish community constituted as much as a third of the total population of Baghdad. It was a Jewish community much like those in many other parts of the world.

The situation began to change in the 1940s, with violent riots. Then, upon Israel's foundation in 1948, the situation for Iraq's Jews became absolutely untenable. Laws were passed making Zionism a criminal offence and allowing the police to raid and search thousands of Jewish homes for any evidence of Zionism. Jews were also prevented from going to schools, hospitals and other public places and organisations. Also, Jews were removed from thousands of Government positions and their homes were valued at 80% less than those of their Arab neighbours. Faced with such heartbreaking persecution, over 120,000 Iraqi Jews fled the country between 1948 and 1951; sadly, today the Jewish population of Iraq numbers no more than five. Many refugees went to Israel to forge a new life, but hundreds came to the UK, and in doing so they forfeited their Iraqi citizenship and their property.

The powerful documentary that I have mentioned tells a story of great loss, but I was also struck by the enormous optimism that it showed about re-establishing a Jewish presence in Iraq. In closing, I encourage the Minister to take the time to watch this short film; I ask him to recognise the injustice that was suffered by more than 850,000 Jewish refugees from across the middle east and north Africa; and I also ask him to ensure that the Government recognise this tragedy alongside that of the Palestinian refugees in their stance on the middle east peace process.

5.32 pm

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): Thank you, Mr Hollobone, for calling me to speak; I nearly said, “Sir Philip”, as I am sure it is just a matter of time before you are called that. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship.

I of course congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) on securing this debate and on everything she said. I associate

myself entirely with her comments and with other comments, particularly those by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) about the declaration that we would like to see this Government make, which would bring us into line—as I believe a number of speakers have said—with both the United States and Canada.

I was not planning to speak in this debate, as the time for it is short, but now I have been given the opportunity I will, of course, take it. I will say something about the importance of education regarding this particular issue. That is because, as I said in my intervention earlier and as we saw in the awful tweet from Abdullah in Bristol last night—speaking as I am now, he will probably think, as he also tweeted, that I too am a political figure on the “Zionist payroll”—there is a false narrative that has been created that Israel is a European and western creation, and that it is anathema in the middle east. However, we absolutely know—not only because of the thousands of years of history and heritage of the Jewish people in the middle east and north Africa, but because of recent history, as has been outlined during this debate—that the Jewish presence in the middle east is a living history that goes back to before the creation of the state of Israel, and there are many in the Jewish community who doubtless would have liked to continue to live their lives in north Africa and other parts of the middle east but are prevented from doing so today.

The lack of understanding of the history of Jewish refugees from elsewhere in the middle east and north Africa is perhaps part of the reason why so many people who pronounce on the issue of Israel are so ignorant in making the offensive comments and statements they make, and it is also why this debate is so important.

Of course, Yemen has been referred to; I will just make a very brief comment on it for the Minister to respond to when he speaks. There is a very small Yemeni Jewish community left, of—possibly—only about 70 people. Previously I have written and said on the Floor of the House of Commons that those Jews who are left in Yemen have been subjected to the most awful abuses and threats. One family in particular, whose representatives came to see me, live in fear. Only the father goes out to shop; his daughters have been threatened with rape by their Arab neighbours. This is a really dire situation; as I say, there are fewer than 100 Jews left in Yemen.

A former immigration Minister—the Minister without Portfolio, my right hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Brandon Lewis)—tried to be as helpful as possible on this issue, but I hope that the Minister who is here today, the Minister for the Middle East, will also look at it.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): We now come to the speeches from the Front Benches.

5.35 pm

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I am pleased to be able to contribute to this debate. I commend the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) for securing it. I also commend her not only for the content of her speech, but for the tone in which she delivered it.

In 2010, I had the great privilege of being present when Kate Adie was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of St Andrews. In her doctoral

address, she surprised a lot of the media studies students in the hall by telling them that if they wanted to follow her career path—possibly with fewer attempts on their life than she had experienced—they should not do a degree in media studies but a degree in history. Her logic was very simple. She said, “How can you possibly hope to explain to people back home what is happening in a faraway country today if you don’t understand what happened in that country, and to it, in the past?” This debate, and particularly the opening speech by the right hon. Lady, has brought that comment home again, because it seems to me that too many people who speak very forcefully about what should happen to solve the problems in the middle east are either unaware of its history or—perhaps even worse—only aware of part of that history.

When we look at the recent history of Israel and of the Jewish people, it is very easy to be overwhelmed by the scale and the horror of what happened in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, and to lose sight of the fact that at any other time what was happening to Jews in other parts of the world would have been seen as a catastrophe on a global scale. That is because 850,000 people were forced out of the only homes they had ever known—homes that they could demonstrate their families had lived in for hundreds, and possibly even thousands, of years. An unknown number of people were killed—certainly hundreds, but probably thousands. By today’s standards, that was ethnic cleansing. Indeed, I would argue that by today’s standards that was a genocide and it deserves to be recognised as such. And those people who fled for their lives to try to escape from that genocide should be recognised as refugees, just as those people who are currently fleeing from Yemen, Syria and other conflict areas should be recognised, and looked after, as refugees.

One of the sad things in any conflict is that civilians always lose; they are always the ones who become refugees. And it is unusual for there to be an armed conflict where there is only one group of refugees; we almost always find that there are refugees from both sides. As the right hon. Lady forcefully reminded us, and as others have commented on, two entire populations of refugees were created as a result of the conflict in the middle east in the 1940s and 1950s. Both those populations deserve equal recognition; the members of those populations all had equal rights and they all suffered appalling losses and appalling treatment. All of their stories deserve to be heard and remembered.

As well as looking at what we need to do now to try, as far as possible, to restore the rights of all those who were persecuted in the past, we also need to look at what we should be doing differently now to stop such persecution from happening again. I liked the comment earlier that hatred against the Jews does not stop with the Jews, and eventually becomes hatred of somebody else. I think that is a lesson that we take too long to learn. When we allow hatred and persecution of any minority in a society to become normalised, that hatred and persecution very quickly spreads to a different minority, whether that minority is based on religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation or any other characteristic.

If we tolerate and allow people to demean, dehumanise and vilify anyone else because of their religion, colour or nationality, we are allowing the start of another process of persecution against a minority at some point. In welcoming today’s debate, and associating myself

[Peter Grant]

with a huge amount of what the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet said in her opening comments, I desperately hope that in 50 years' time, there will not be some Parliament somewhere talking about a massive persecution against a population of refugees that happened because we did not do enough to stop it from happening in our world today.

5.39 pm

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr Hollobone, and I congratulate the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) on having secured a very timely debate. It is extremely important, at this stage of all stages, to be reminded of the true history of the middle east and the part that the Jewish community played in it. I will say a little bit more about that in a minute.

I thank the right hon. Lady for her tour d'horizon of the middle east and north Africa, as well as her remarks about the near-total extinction of an ancient civilisation and the fact that this is the first debate we have had in this House on this subject. She also pointed out that Jews lived in that region for more than 1,000 years before the religion of Islam was founded. It was a thoughtful, well-researched opening speech, and I am grateful to her for it. The right hon. Lady also quoted the former Chief Rabbi and my relative through marriage, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks—a wise and incredible man, who did such a lot to represent the Jewish community of this country.

We then heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Dame Louise Ellman), who always makes an excellent contribution in every debate that I hear her speak in. She mentioned that Jewish people have always been a part of the middle east, which is absolutely right. We heard from the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon); we then heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis), who made the point that any future peace plans must include the history of Jewish refugees and the loss faced by those refugees. We also heard contributions from the hon. Members for Hendon (Dr Offord), for Strangford (Jim Shannon), for Henley (John Howell), and for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy). I am very grateful for the points that they made.

I have a personal interest in this topic. My earliest memories of my own family's history centre on photographs of my late father, taken outside a mosque in Tangier. When my grandfather was a refugee from the Nazis during the occupation of Paris in 1940, my grandmother remained in Paris; he was in Spain. He crossed the water to Morocco, where he found refuge in Tangier. His own brother was the mayor of that city at the time, which shows the part that Jews played in north Africa and, indeed, the middle east. My father's origins were Ottoman, from Salonica and Istanbul, so the cuisine that we enjoyed as children was always middle eastern and Turkish cooking—something that I found strange when I went to the homes of my English friends at school. Having mentioned my great-uncle, I will add that on the street where I lived in north-west London, my best friend's family had fled from Cairo. The Sharma family had found refuge in London, and the parents and grandparents still spoke very good Arabic; their main

language was French, which meant my family could communicate with them. Their stories about having to flee from Nasser's Egypt always remained in my mind.

A few years ago, I went to Kurdistan in northern Iraq; I went to Erbil. The right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet mentioned the part that the Kurdish people have played in helping Jews escape from the hostile environments they found themselves in after 1947. It was a pleasure to hear from so many Kurdish contacts and interlocutors about their respect for the Jewish people, and the fact that if Israel were able to establish an embassy in Baghdad today, there would be one in Erbil tomorrow. They are great supporters of the Jewish people, and they feel a great sympathy because of the plight and persecution that they have unfortunately had to experience.

Over successive waves of persecution in the 20th century since 1948, up to 850,000 Jews—some estimates are close to 1 million—were expelled from mainly Arab countries. Most of those Mizrahi, as they are called in Israel, took their refuge in that country; their descendants comprise approximately half of all Israeli Jews. To many Israelis, the issue of refugees remains one of the outstanding obstacles to peace that must be resolved in any final status negotiations. The plight of Palestinian refugees, as we have heard, is well known, but Israelis rightly believe that less attention is given to former Jewish refugees.

As it happens, just before I came to this debate, I had a meeting with Dr Saeb Erekat from the Palestine Liberation Organisation. I told him about this debate and that we would be discussing Jewish refugees in the middle east, and asked him what he would do about that. He asked me to say quite openly that the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the Palestinian Authority believe that just as Palestinians should have their rights to return with full compensation, so should all Jewish refugees. I thought that was very interesting.

5.45 pm

The Minister for the Middle East (Dr Andrew Murrison):

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone, for my first time in this capacity. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) on having convened this debate; it is indeed a timely debate to be having, and she has laid out the case extremely well.

In the very short period of time we have had to debate this matter this afternoon—I hope this will be the first of several such debates, as one hour is insufficient to give this issue the coverage that it so richly demands—we have had a tour de force of the historical background to the conundrum currently faced by Jewish refugees. I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton), the Opposition spokesman on these matters. He has referred to a meeting with Dr Saeb Erekat; I also met with Dr Erekat today, and we shared a number of reflections on the current situation. He is a very wise man with a great deal of experience in these matters, and the remarks that he made to the hon. Gentleman do not surprise me in the least.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet mentioned Jewish refugees in the round, and spoke about the historical background to this issue. She mentioned Morocco and Tunisia; I am pleased she did so, because although the general history in respect of

the Jewish people across north Africa and the middle east has been appalling, there are examples of countries that have done relatively well in a dismal scene. I cite Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan, which I think has also been mentioned, as countries where there has been a more benign attitude towards Jewish refugees. My right hon. Friend knows that I have an interest in Morocco; I was told anecdotally that Jewish residents in Israel who are from Morocco—the Opposition spokesman is nodding; I think he knows what I am going to say—often have a picture of the King of Morocco on their wall, because Morocco has done good things in the past in respect of its Jewish population.

However, that does not obscure the general awfulness of the way these things have been. We have heard from a lot of right hon. and hon. Members about the failure of the international community to properly understand the extent of Jewish refugee status. We talk a great deal about Palestinians—they are always in the news, and they are extremely important—but we also need to consider refugees in the round. Of course, UN Security Council resolution 242 mentions “refugees”; it does not disaggregate refugees. There is a reason for that, which we are exploring today.

It is particularly timely for me to be talking about this today, because three weeks ago I paid my first visit to the middle east in my new capacity, and I visited Yad Vashem. My belief is that a person will not fully understand the state of Israel unless they visit Yad Vashem. It had a profound impact on me. Yad Vashem gives us the story; it tells us why it is that a people who have been bashed, bullied and messed around over generations and centuries have said, “Enough! This is our home. This is ours, and we are going to defend it.” I am very pleased that the Government are four-square behind their right to self-determination and safety in the state of Israel.

The hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) spoke about the two-state solution. As we approach the Manama conference next week, I make it clear that we have to have a two-state solution based on the ’67 borders, with agreed land swaps and Jerusalem as a shared capital. There has been lots of talk in recent times about that being finessed, and he referred to the Leader of the Opposition. We are clear that we will not have peace in the middle east unless we have a shared future between the Jewish and Palestinian people, and that means a two-state solution. At this time, we just need to make that abundantly clear.

I spent a lot of time in the west bank, Gaza and Israel. I saw the desperate conditions in which the people of Gaza are living, and I visited Khan al-Ahmar, whose inhabitants are apparently safe for now, but who still expect to be made homeless by Israeli demolitions. The UN has said that could constitute a forcible transfer. The experience of all these people—the victims and survivors of the holocaust, the Israelis who live in fear of Palestinian rockets, and the Palestinians who live a precarious existence in Gaza or the west bank—illustrates the complexity of the issues still to be resolved by the middle east peace process.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet is absolutely right to cite UN Security Council resolution 242. It speaks of refugees; it does not break them down. The Scottish National party spokesman, the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant), touched on similar ground in his remarks.

The history of Jewish migration and displacement in the region is highly complex. We have touched on a great deal of that today. Some have estimated that the figures could be as high as 1 million displaced people over that period. For those whose homes and property were seized or who were forcibly expelled, the experience was hugely traumatic and hugely distressing. Some continue to live with all that distress today and rightly seek some sort of recognition of the trauma they have suffered. We deeply sympathise with that suffering, just as we sympathise with the many Palestinians who have been forced from their homes over the same period and, indeed, the more than 15 million people of many faiths and nationalities who are currently displaced in the region.

We understand that there were a range of motivations for Jews who decided to leave Arab countries. Many of them were certainly forced out, one way or another—either directly or by the general bullying behaviour that they experienced over years. Many left because they were driven by the desire to forge a new homeland for the Jewish people in the new state of Israel. We continue to support that legitimate aspiration for a secure and safe homeland in the form of the modern state of Israel, just as we support the objectives of a viable and sovereign Palestinian state. The hon. Member for Bury South was absolutely right to underscore the importance of that. It is with those two states very much in mind that we approach the Manama conference next week, at which this country will of course be represented.

The Government continue to believe that the way forward is through substantive peace talks between the parties leading to a two-state solution with Jerusalem as the shared capital. We would also like to use every opportunity to call out any instances of antisemitism, wherever it occurs. Scapegoating and demonising minorities fuels division, hatred and violence, and it cannot go unchallenged, wherever we find it. Freedom of religion or belief is a universal human right that dovetails with many other human rights. Where religious freedoms are under attack, other basic rights are also under threat.

In the time available to me, I will run briefly through the contributions that have been made this afternoon. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet mentioned UNESCO world heritage sites. We work, as she will probably know, with regional Governments and UN agencies so that cultural sites, religious and secular, are protected in a troubled region. She is right to raise that.

I commend the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Dame Louise Ellman) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) on their contributions, particularly in relation to the history of this piece. They have a deep and long-standing interest in the matter.

My good friend the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) pointed out that peace in the middle east needs consideration of Palestinian and Jewish refugees. I hope in my remarks and my emphasis on UN Security Council resolution 242 that I have made clear that the Government very much see it in that light, too.

My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) talked about the injustice perpetrated on Jewish refugees and hoped that they, as well as Palestinian refugees, would feature in the middle east peace process. The fact

[Dr Andrew Murrison]

we are having this debate in this place should reinforce the message that there can be no lasting peace without consideration of both of the peoples principally in the frame in this matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) quoted a very insensitive remark by Abdullah from Bristol. I am grateful to Abdullah from Bristol for making his crass remark, because it gave us an opportunity to explode it today in the House of Commons. My hon. Friend also mentioned Yemen. Between 1948 and 1949, 50,000 Jews were airlifted from Yemen, and he is right to point out that there are probably only around 100 left.

I once again congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet on rightly raising this important matter. It is timely that she has done so, since next week in Manama these grave matters concerning the middle east peace process and the way forward will be considered. I very much hope that someone involved with those talks has been listening today.

5.56 pm

Theresa Villiers: I thank the Minister and everyone who has taken part in the debate. The main point I take away from it is that one hour is just not long enough. This story has stayed untold for far too long. We need

this debate to be the start of a process by which we ensure that more people know about this unresolved injustice.

I echo the request from all parts of the House that the Government explicitly refer to the matter of Jewish refugees in statements, discussions and debates about the middle east because, as we have heard, it is not possible properly to understand the middle east conflict or to formulate a fair solution without an understanding of the issue with which we have been grappling this afternoon.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) made a powerful point when he said that ignorance about the long history of the Jewish communities across the Arab world and the middle east is used as an excuse to fuel the entirely false narrative that Israel is somehow an artificial European construct and a colonial outpost. That is a false narrative, and I hope that the Minister and all right hon. and hon. Members present today will help me in taking forward the process and in ensuring that more people know what really happened 70 years ago, so that we can see some genuine justice in the middle east for the dispossessed Jewish communities of the Arab world.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Jewish refugees from the Middle East and North Africa.

5.58 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statement

Wednesday 19 June 2019

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Response to Opposition Day Debate: Local Authority Social Care Funding

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): Today I would like to update the House on local authority social care funding following the Opposition day debate of 24 April 2019.

Our local authorities and the people who work for them are delivering essential services and changing lives and it is right we support them to succeed. This is why this Government have given our local authorities in England access to £46.4 billion in 2019-20. This represents a real-terms increase and a cash increase of 2.8%.

The four-year settlement, accepted by 97% of local authorities, gives our most deprived areas access to substantially more funding than the least. The average core spending power per dwelling for the 10% most deprived authorities is around 22% more than for the least deprived 10% in 2019-20.

The settlement this year includes extra funding for local services with a strong focus on supporting some of our most vulnerable groups.

The Government are committed to person-centred integrated care, with health, social care, housing and other public services working together seamlessly to provide better care. The better care fund, introduced in 2015, is our national policy driving forward the integration of health and social care in England.

In every year of the fund, local areas have voluntarily pooled more than the minimum required taking the total to £7.7 billion in 2018-19. We know that this is having a positive impact locally with 90% of local health and care system leaders saying that the better care fund had a positive impact on integration locally (2018-19), and levels of delayed transfers of care which have reduced since February 2017, with more than 2,000 beds per day being freed up.

We announced at last year's autumn Budget more than £1 billion of extra funding for councils, with £650 million going towards adult and children's social care in 2019-20. Of that, £410 million can be spent on adult or children's social care and, where necessary, take the pressure off the NHS, meeting requests from local authorities for greater flexibility.

The remaining £240 million has been allocated to ease pressures on the NHS. This is on top of the £240 million announced in October which allowed councils to provide additional care to over 35,000 people, delivering four million hours of homecare in 2018-19.

Taken together with the adult social care precept and the improved better care fund, the Government have given councils access to around £10 billion in dedicated funding which can be used for adult social care in the three-year period from 2017-18 to 2019-20.

A further £145 million capital funding has been given to hospitals to provide winter improvements such as upgrading wards and redeveloping A&Es and an additional £36.3 million has been invested into the ambulance services for new vehicles and "make-ready hubs". This is on top of the additional £1.6 billion for the NHS in 2018-19 to support A&E and elective care performance.

This Government have been able to make these significant investments in social care because of the balanced approach we have taken to our public finances, investing in public services while keeping debt falling.

In 2017-18, local government spent £17.1 billion on adult social care, up by £390 million from £16.75 billion in 2016-17.

We are also investing £84 million in protecting our children over the next five years to expand three of our most successful children's social care innovation programme projects. The projects will keep more children at home safely in up to 20 local authorities.

Helping the most vulnerable in our society also means supporting troubled families and local government is at the heart of this agenda.

Our troubled families programmes helps local authorities support families with complex needs and improve outcomes for individuals.

It has been a catalyst for local services, transforming how they work together, making them more integrated and cost-efficient, reducing dependency and demand for expensive services.

The results speak for themselves. The latest national programme evaluation shows that—when compared to a similar comparison group—targeted intervention saw: the number of children going into care down by a third;

the number of adults going to prison down by a quarter and juveniles in custody down by a third; and

10% fewer people claiming jobseeker allowance.

Although I recognise there is more to do, these outcomes are a real tribute to the efforts of family workers, local authorities and their many partners in our public services and the voluntary sector.

Our work supporting vulnerable families is much more than the financial boost you get from a regular wage, it is about the pride and dignity that comes from being able to take control of your own life.

This Government have given local authorities the tools and resources they need to do this vital work.

The end of the current multi-year deal is in sight, and it is clear we need to take a longer view on how we fund councils, as we move to a stronger, sustainable and smarter system of local government.

Preparations for increased business rates retention, a new approach to distributing funding between local authorities and the upcoming spending review will be pivotal to this. Important work is under way with authorities and the wider sector to better understand service costs and pressures.

For years, councils have asked for more control over the money raised. We have listened and responded through our plans to increase business rates retention to 75% by devolving additional grants, and in the process providing local authorities with powerful incentives to grow their economies.

Local authorities estimate they will retain around £2.5 billion in business rates growth in 2019-20 under the current system. This is a significant revenue stream on top of the core settlement funding.

In addition to giving more control, councils want and need to see a clearer link between the allocation of resources and local circumstances.

Our new funding formula will ensure a more transparent link between local needs and resources and the funding councils receive. We will ensure that measures of deprivation

are, rightly, central to this, when we look at services like adult social care, children's services, fire services and public health, because we want a system that ensures no one is left behind.

The Government are determined to give all local authorities the freedoms and flexibilities they need, so that they can continue to flourish and deliver vital services to meet the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

[HCWS1636]

Ministerial Correction

Wednesday 19 June 2019

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Hong Kong

The following is an extract from the Urgent Question on Hong Kong on 18 June 2019.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): The words “rule of law”, are much used on both sides of the argument, both in Hong Kong and in the People’s Republic of China. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the rule of law is only there if one looks at the rules themselves, at how they are made, and at punishments? In addition, they should be underpinned by the universal declaration of human rights. That is what the rule of law means.

Mark Field: I would agree with what my hon. Friend says. He takes these matters seriously, and has dealings with leading figures from Taiwan who are based in

London. He will be aware of the constraints that we are under in the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence in standing up for One China. Equally, there is a terrific amount of work that goes on in relation to trade and in educational exchanges with Taiwan. **Taiwan is succeeding very rapidly as a country**, not least because it stands up for the rule of law in the way in which my hon. Friend describes.

[Official Report, 18 June 2019, Vol. 662, c. 150.]

Letter of correction from the Minister for Asia and the Pacific:

An error has been identified in the response I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy).

The correct response should have been:

Mark Field: I would agree with what my hon. Friend says. He takes these matters seriously, and has dealings with leading figures from Taiwan who are based in London. He will be aware of the constraints that we are under in the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence in standing up for One China. Equally, there is a terrific amount of work that goes on in relation to trade and in educational exchanges with Taiwan. Taiwan is succeeding very rapidly, not least because it stands up for the rule of law in the way in which my hon. Friend describes.

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