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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Monday 1 July 2019

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WORK AND PENSIONS

Universal Credit: Roll-out

1. **Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): What progress her Department has made on rolling out universal credit. [911639]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Amber Rudd): The national roll-out of universal credit was completed in December 2018. As of May 2019, there are now more than 2 million people claiming universal credit, and of those, 34% are in work. We now plan to begin “the move to UC” pilot later this month.

Drew Hendry: The right hon. Lady’s Government promised that

“universal credit should not leave councils out of pocket.”

Yet Highland Council has nearly £3 million of additional costs, including £640,000 of indisputable administration costs, directly as a result of universal credit. Despite letters, questions and meetings with officials and Ministers, where details and data have all been provided, there is still no settlement. When will this debt to highland households finally be repaid?

Amber Rudd: I am aware that the hon. Gentleman has raised this matter before and has had a number of meetings with the Minister for Employment. As a result of some of those meetings, we have already increased the additional funds available to councils such as the one to which he refers. There has been an increase in the total amount of new burdens money that has been paid out, but we have also said that we will investigate further. I want to reassure him that this is not finished yet, and that I will continue to look at it myself to ensure that there is satisfaction.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): May I thank my right hon. Friend for her very successful visit to Stirling last Thursday and Friday? When we met the work coaches and the other staff of the Department of Work and Pensions team at Randolphfield, was she struck, as I was once again, by their degree of dedication and their genuine concern for the claimants with whom they work? They are a credit to themselves and to the DWP team. Does she agree that, rather than spread fear and scaremongering, Scottish National party Members should

be encouraging the people who live in their constituencies to go to the DWP to get the help that they need, confident that they will be respected and treated with genuine dignity?

Amber Rudd: I thank my hon. Friend for his important question and for setting up the visit, which was so useful and purposeful. I do note that when I went to the jobcentre and met the work coaches, they were passionate about delivering the right outcomes for their constituents. When we asked them what they would change about universal credit, they said the publicity, because they are so committed to getting the right outcomes for the right people. These are people who are doing good work for good people.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State confirm for the record that any EU national who has been granted settled status in the United Kingdom is regarded as being habitually resident for the purposes of applying for and receiving universal credit?

Amber Rudd: That is largely correct. The only issue here is about the evidence that people now have to supply which they did not have to supply before. I know that there are a number of places where people were able to claim benefits and they now no longer qualify for universal credit. We are looking at those individually to see whether it is an issue with their application for settled status or something else.

21. [911662] **Gerald Jones** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): Universal credit was rolled out in my area last year. Staff at my local citizens advice bureau found that, last year, 1,882 people contacted them in relation to debt linked to universal credit. Surely that is an indication of how many people are finding difficulty in managing during that initial five-week wait. Will the Secretary of State tell me when the Government will act to end the misery of the five-week wait?

Amber Rudd: In answer to the first part of the hon. Gentleman’s question, which is about assistance in getting the applications through, we announced in April this year the help-to-claim arrangements so that applicants who are struggling to apply for universal credit can have the additional support they need from citizens advice bureaux. I hope that he will find that that is working well in his local bureau. On the second part about getting money to people earlier, as he will be aware, we have made advances available and we are extending the amount of time over which people have to repay it and the amount that is deducted from their core amounts so that they do not feel it as badly as they would have previously.

Mr Speaker: With commendable brevity, I feel sure. Neil Gray.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Research released last week from the Child Poverty Action Group and the Church of England shows that women are being forced to choose between poverty and an abortion because of this Government’s two-child cap—that is the reality facing families with three or more children. It appears unlikely that the Secretary of State will face another

Work and Pensions Question Time, so will she make it her legacy to scrap the two-child cap and avoid impoverishing half of all children in those families?

Amber Rudd: I will try not to be distracted by the hon. Gentleman's slightly personal remarks. He might know that I visited Scotland last week, and the Scottish Government have taken their own steps on what they feel is the way to address child poverty. Those of us on the Government side of the House feel that the best way to address child poverty is to help more people into work. I am proud of the fact that there are now 1 million more people in work and that over 600,000 children are no longer in houses where no people work.

Neil Gray: I note that the Secretary of State did not answer my question. I would like to compare and contrast, because CPAG has said of the two-child cap, "you could not design a policy better to increase child poverty", but last week it described the new Scottish child benefit, to which the Secretary of State referred, as "an absolute game changer in the fight to end child poverty".

Therefore, on the 20th anniversary of the reconvened Scottish Parliament, is this not yet another example of where Holyrood empowers, Westminster impoverishes?

Amber Rudd: Again, I point to the fact that there are different ways of addressing poverty, both child poverty and family poverty: one is to hand out money, which is what the Scottish Government have chosen to do; and another is to focus, with laser-like attention, on ensuring that we build the economy and create employment and that there are good jobs so that people can support their family.

Departmental Organisation

2. **Stephen Lloyd** (Eastbourne) (Ind): Whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of splitting her Department into two separate Departments. [911640]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Amber Rudd): There has been no such assessment. As one Department, we have rolled out universal credit, providing a holistic benefits system to ensure that everyone is given the support they need. As one Department, we have seen record levels of employment and the lowest unemployment rate since the 1970s.

Stephen Lloyd: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. However, she will be aware that there is a significant difference between the benefits of universal credit, disability benefits and pensions. She will also be aware that certain newspapers are prone, when talking about the allegedly outrageous amounts of money that people on unemployment or disability benefits get, to look only at the Department's overall spend. Of course, as she will be aware, 90% of that spend is on pensions. Would it not be simpler, easier and more straightforward simply to split DWP into two Departments, so that both can focus on what they should be focusing on?

Amber Rudd: Although I recognise the good work that the hon. Gentleman has done in many of these areas, I respectfully disagree. I think that it is right that

those elements are held together in one Department. If we look at the results, we are seeing record levels of pensioner poverty—[*Interruption.*]

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): Yes, we are.

Amber Rudd: I say quickly to the hon. Lady on the Opposition Front Bench that we are seeing the lowest levels of pensioner poverty, as well as the highest levels of employment.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): I very much welcome the recent decision to move the Office for Disability Issues into the Cabinet Office, creating a super-hub of all equalities work right across Government. Will the new hub be leading the reform to statutory sick pay so that it is better enforced, more flexible and covers the lowest-paid workers, and when will the consultation on this vital reform take place?

Amber Rudd: I thank my hon. Friend for that question, and may I take this opportunity to pay homage to the extraordinary work that she did to ensure that took place? The point of having an equalities hub in the Cabinet Office is to ensure that we have strong enforcement to deliver on the disabilities changes across Government. With her help, following the work she put in, we are able to do that.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Ah yes, the man in the summer suit—splendid. Mr Barry Sheerman.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): And my tie has whales on it, Mr Speaker—Japan comes to mind. The fact of the matter is that the Secretary of State knows that she has some really good people working in her Department—certainly the people working in my patch are very good—but the trouble is that they are not well managed or well led. Splitting is not the answer; the answer is to get in some managers who can tackle things such as the awful situation for people on universal credit who do not have a bank account, because she has still not tackled that.

Amber Rudd: I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that we are working with Lloyds, for instance, to ensure that basic bank accounts are more available. May I also take this opportunity to join him in praising the work of the staff at the jobcentre in Huddersfield to help people in his constituency?

Child Poverty

3. **Emma Dent Coad** (Kensington) (Lab): What recent assessment her Department has made of trends in the level of child poverty. [911641]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince): Tackling poverty will always be a priority for this Government, and I take these numbers extremely seriously. In the latest low income statistics, child poverty increased in three of the four measures. The evidence shows that work is the best route out of poverty, and there are 667,000 fewer children in workless households compared with 2010.

Emma Dent Coad: Summer holidays are fast approaching, and far too many families will be struggling to feed their children. The Childhood Trust states that two thirds of London children living in poverty—that will be 2,000 in Kensington—could go hungry without access to charitable donations. While the Mayor's Fund for London supports hungry children across the capital, what is the Minister doing, long term, to tackle the causes of child poverty, including in-work poverty?

Will Quince: As I have said, the latest statistics show that full-time work substantially reduces the chance of poverty. The absolute poverty rate of a child where both parents work full-time is only 4% compared with 44% where one or more parents are in part-time work. We are supporting people into full-time work where possible—for example, by offering 30 hours of free childcare to parents of three and four-year-olds. Over three quarters of the growth in employment since 2010 has been in full-time work.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): In our country in 2019, what proportion of children live in poverty?

Will Quince: Without knowing the exact figure, it is too many. My role within the Department, and the role of the Department itself, is to address that. My hon. Friend will know too well that the best route out of poverty is work. That is why our focus is on universal credit. Universal credit is working in terms of getting more people into work, and more people are staying in work.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The best way out of poverty is probably properly paid work. The real problem for many of my constituents and their children is the fact that they have very low levels of savings, so when somebody loses their job, perhaps because a company closes, the real danger is that when they go on to universal credit they have to wait for five weeks for a payment and have nothing to fall back on. I really do beg the Government to reconsider the issue of the five weeks. The worst possible thing of all is saying, "You can borrow some money", because suddenly a family ends up in debt, and that is when the children end up not having food unless it comes from a food bank.

Will Quince: I recognise the passion with which the hon. Gentleman raises his point, but, in terms of the five-week wait, nobody has to wait for their first payment of universal credit, as 100% of their indicative advance is available on day one. It is interest-free, repayable over 12 months—and, as the Secretary of State has said, that will in future be moving to 16 months. That is available and about 60% of people are currently taking it up.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Given that the majority of families affected by the two-child limit are working, why did the Department for Work and Pensions make the following statement in response to the recent report by the Child Poverty Action Group and the Church of England:

"This policy helps to ensure fairness by asking parents receiving benefits to face the same financial choices as those in work?"

Could the Minister clear up this confusion for the House?

Will Quince: The policy to provide support for a maximum of two children helps to ensure fairness by asking parents receiving benefits to face the same financial choices as those in work. Safeguards are in place and we have made changes this year to make the policy fairer. Tackling poverty remains a priority. We are spending over £95 billion a year on welfare and providing free school meals to more than 1 million children.

People with Disabilities: Employment

4. **Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con):** What steps her Department is taking to help people with disabilities into work. [911642]

17. **Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con):** What steps her Department is taking to help people with disabilities into work. [911657]

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson): We support disabled people into work through initiatives like the Work and Health programme, the Personal Support Package, and the new Intensive Personalised Employment Support programme launching at the end of 2019. Access to Work approved support for nearly 34,000 disabled workers last year, and we engage with employers through the Disability Confident campaign.

Mary Robinson: The 19% disability employment gap in Cheadle highlights our untapped talent and the challenge facing the Government in getting a further 1 million disabled people into work over the next eight years. Greater flexibility in working hours, managing time and accommodating medical appointments are just some of the ways to close the gap, but there is clearly more to be done. Does my hon. Friend agree that employers should be encouraged to think creatively about how to make work more accommodating to disabled people?

Justin Tomlinson: My hon. Friend is spot on. I was at Employability Day on Friday, celebrating meeting disabled people who had got into work and, crucially, meeting employers who had often made very small changes. The key message was that it is a win-win. The 950,000 more disabled people who we have got into work are making a real difference to businesses that have taken those steps.

Gillian Keegan: I recently met the charity Root Experience at Chichester library, where it was launching a book called "Hidden Stories". The book puts a spotlight on hidden disabilities such as epilepsy or autism and how they impact people on a day-to-day basis. Would my hon. Friend be happy to receive a copy of the book? What steps is the DWP taking to promote education and awareness of hidden disabilities in the workplace?

Justin Tomlinson: I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting that fantastic book. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Robert Buckland) and I recently went to Swindon Council library and were handed a copy of this excellent book. It is currently sitting on the back seat of my car. It is a brilliant edition, and I hope that as many MPs as possible can see this proactive and constructive way to champion opportunities that people with hidden disabilities can offer.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): I am sure the Minister will agree that we want all our pupils to stay in full-time education until they are 18, including those with special needs and disabilities. However, at 16 these pupils face the change of moving from disability living allowance to personal independence payment. That is out of step with changes faced by other children. For example, other children aged 16 in full-time education are able to continue to claim free prescriptions, free eye tests and free dental checks, but children with special needs and disabilities have to face this change in benefits at 16. This is extremely stressful—it is stressful enough for these children to be going on to college, let alone having to change benefits. Will the Minister look at changing that, so that children in full-time education at 16 do not change benefits until they finish?

Justin Tomlinson: I thank the hon. Lady for raising that important point. I recognise the points that she made, but it is a balance. The decision to do this has been in place for a long time, to allow for everything in be in place for when they get to 18, but I am happy to meet her to discuss this further.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): Can the Minister explain the very long delays in the limited work capability assessment to qualify for the working element of universal credit, and why disabled people who are trying to work are being penalised because of the apparent inefficiency of the contractor, Maximus?

Justin Tomlinson: Under universal credit, from the initial conversation with a work coach, individual claimants—including those with disabilities—can get support. We continue to make improvements to the work capability assessment, following the five independent reviews. Over 100 different recommendations have been taken on board. I work very closely with stakeholders, as do all the ministerial team. We look to continue to improve the process.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): Support for disabled people in work should be a top priority for this Government, but on several occasions I have raised with Ministers a fundamental flaw under universal credit for disabled people in work, which is that to qualify for in-work support, such as the work allowance, one must be found unfit for work under the work capability assessment. That contrasts with legacy social security, where someone qualifies for in-work support by being in receipt of DLA or PIP. Does the Minister agree that this is absurd, and will he commit today to rectifying this illogical and damaging policy?

Justin Tomlinson: I will commit to continuing to do everything we can to ensure that all people with disabilities and long-term health conditions have the maximum chance to get into work. I am very proud of the fact that over the last five years alone, 950,000 more disabled people are in work, and we continue to make good progress towards our target of a further 1 million disabled people in work by 2027.

Universal Credit: Food Banks

5. **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What assessment her Department has made of the effect of the roll-out of universal credit on the level of referrals to food banks.

[911643]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince): There are a range of reasons why people make use of food banks. The key for the DWP is to ensure that welfare claimants are able to access funds in a timely manner. That is why advances are available, so that no one has to wait five weeks for their first universal credit payment.

Diana Johnson: Even before universal credit was rolled out in Hull, the use of the Hull food bank was very high because we have widescale in-work poverty, and a third of the children in Hull are living in poverty. The Trussell Trust has said that nearly half of all food bank referrals are due to a delay in benefits being paid when universal credit is rolled out, which happened in Hull before Christmas. Does the Minister now accept that, and what is he going to do about it?

Will Quince: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. We continue to provide a strong safety net through the welfare system for those who need extra support and, as I have said, people use food banks for many and varied reasons. We review research carried out by organisations, including the Trussell Trust, to add to our understanding of food bank use. I intend to work far more closely with the Trussell Trust and other food bank providers, including other stakeholders in this area. I want food bank providers and jobcentres to work far more closely together so that we can better understand the issues and then put in place the interventions to make the situation better.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): A few weeks ago, I and a colleague of mine visited a major food bank in Coventry. One of the lessons we learned from the food bank in Coventry—it has nine outlets throughout Coventry and Warwickshire—is that universal credit is forcing people to use food banks. What is the Minister going to do to sort out the problem that people have who are forced to use food banks? Surely we should have another look at universal credit and abolish it, because it is not working.

Will Quince: I am sorry to hear the hon. Gentleman's example. If I get a chance to visit his local food bank, I will certainly do so, but I have to stress that no claimant needs to wait more than five weeks to receive their first regular universal credit payment. We have listened to feedback on how we can support our claimants and made improvements, such as extending advances, removing waiting days and introducing housing benefit run-on. I will continue to work with the Trussell Trust and others to improve our system in any way we can.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Ind): I am afraid to say to the Minister that the advance payment is missing the point. The biggest driver of people going to food banks is the five-week wait. Because of the benefit freeze, the basic amount people have to live on, particularly the very vulnerable, is not enough. We cannot then expect them to live on less by taking away their advance payment, which is a debt. There is a simple way to deal with this. Some 60% of claimants are already taking advance payment, which tells us they cannot wait. The money is already going out of the DWP's door. Make it a grant. It should not be repayable for the most vulnerable people in society.

Will Quince: I respect the hon. Lady's knowledge in this area on the Select Committee, but I would say that advances are not loans from a separate fund; they are the claimant's benefit paid early, which is then recovered over an agreed period. So they are in place to ensure that those in genuine need are able to receive financial support and are not reliant on illegal or high-cost lenders. But if a claimant considers they are facing financial hardship because of the amount that is being deducted from their universal credit award, they can ask the Department to consider reducing their deductions. As of October this year, the maximum deduction goes down from 40% to 30%.

Universal Credit: Working People's Incomes

6. **Mr Bob Seely** (Isle of Wight) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to increase working people's incomes through universal credit. [911644]

The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma): One of the key transformations that universal credit provides is to support people who are in work, ensuring they can increase their earnings and develop in their career. It removes the 16-hour cliff edge, which held so many back on legacy benefits, and gives improved, tailored support through jobcentre work coaches.

Mr Seely: Will the Minister join me in thanking the excellent DWP staff on the Isle of Wight, some of whom I met in Newport a few weeks ago? I am sure he and the team will seek to make further improvements to universal credit, but it was clear to me, talking to those staff, that universal credit enables them to do more good for more people than the inflexible system that preceded it.

Alok Sharma: I thank my hon. Friend for being a huge champion for the Isle of Wight and working so well with his local jobcentre. I am very pleased about that and he is absolutely right. As a result of universal credit, people are able to get the support—that one-to-one support—that is so vital. Since 2016, an extra £10 billion has gone into the system.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): My constituent, Amanda, who is a single mum with significant mental health problems, had her UC claim closed—unknown to her—at the beginning of May. She was told by the DWP that this was a sanction because she failed to complete an online review. I should also mention that she was in the last few weeks of her pregnancy. Given that Amanda is clearly a vulnerable person, will the Secretary of State commit to ensure that all work coaches are aware of their obligations following last year's High Court judgment, which demands that they should treat vulnerable claimants appropriately?

Alok Sharma: Of course. The Secretary of State, I and all colleagues want to ensure that absolutely every single person claiming universal credit gets the appropriate support and the right level of support. I would be very happy to look at that individual case with the hon. Lady. I would just say on sanctions that these are not just handed out; there is a clear process. I can tell her that, in February 2019, only 2.45% of those who were

under conditionality requirements actually had a sanction and the average sanction's length was 30 days. But I will look at that case for her.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): My constituent, Craig Ferguson, has Asperger's, but works in retail. He broke his leg, was not entitled to statutory sick pay and was advised to switch to UC. He then lost his severe disability premium. His UC has automatic deductions for an employment support allowance overpayment and, at times, he receives no UC award at all, which means that he has to depend on savings. How is that fair? Can his case be reviewed?

Alok Sharma: Of course, I am happy to look at that individual case. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will get in touch with my office after this session.

Local Housing Allowance

7. **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): What recent assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of levels of local housing allowance. [911645]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince): Welfare reforms were designed to ensure a fair balance between public spending and supporting vulnerable people to meet their housing costs. LHA rates are not intended to meet all rents in all areas. However, the Secretary of State and I have committed to end the freeze to LHA in March 2020.

Vicky Foxcroft: Local housing allowance is supposed to cover the lowest 30% of market rents, but research by Shelter found that that is not possible in 97% of England. For example, in south-east London, local housing allowance will cover only the bottom 10% of rents. We have a housing crisis across the country and local housing allowance is not fit for purpose. Does the Minister agree that it must be raised to reflect the true cost of renting?

Will Quince: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. As I said, LHA rates are not intended to meet all rents in all areas. Housing benefit claimants have to make the same decisions about where to live as people who do not receive benefit. In 2019-20, targeted affordability funding has been used to increase over 80% of rates in London. Nevertheless, we recognise that this is an issue. The Secretary of State and I are alive to it and we are looking at several options ahead of a spending review bid.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): Does the Minister recognise that recent changes to the tax treatment of the private rented sector, particularly the buy-to-let sector, will mean an increase in rents across the board? That will have a very real read-across to the local housing allowance. Will he give some assessment of what allowance he will make for that increase?

Will Quince: That is, of course, a question for the Treasury. Any rise or potential rise in LHA rates has to go hand in hand with addressing supply. I urge my hon. Friend to address that issue with my counterparts in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and, indeed, the Chancellor and Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome what the Minister said the other day about reviewing how local housing allowance areas need to be redefined. Does he accept that, because Stroud is in the same area as Gloucester, we are now losing a significant number of people from the private sector because they cannot afford to top up? Will he therefore look at this as a matter of urgency?

Will Quince: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. He is right that the broad market rental areas have some anomalies. I have officials looking into this. It is a huge and complex piece of work, given that there are approximately 900 of those areas. It is therefore not something that can be done quickly, but I recognise the issue and I am working on it.

Pensioner Poverty

8. **Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): What recent assessment she has made of the level of pensioner poverty in the UK. [911647]

19. **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): What recent assessment she has made of the level of pensioner poverty in the UK. [911659]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman): The overall trend in the percentage of pensioners living in poverty has fallen dramatically over recent decades. Relative pensioner poverty rates before housing costs have halved since 1990 and rates of material deprivation for pensioners are also at record lows. We want to maintain this achievement.

Joanna Cherry: On Friday, I met constituents and campaigners from Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign Scotland. Those women told me that they are suffering poverty, distress and significant inequality as a result of a pension decision taken in the name of equality. At a time when the Tory leadership candidates are promising billions of pounds of public spending, those women would like to know why the Government cannot find the cash to right the wrong done to the WASPI women.

Guy Opperman: It is not the Government's intention to change the Pensions Act 1995, the Pensions Act 2007 or the Pensions Act 2011. There was a £1.1 billion concession in 2011. The policy was conceived in 1993, continued under the Labour Government for 13 years, continued under the coalition and will continue under this Government. I should also point out that a judicial review is pending. I cannot comment any further than that.

Martyn Day: Does the Minister think it right that the UK has the lowest state pension in the developed world?

Guy Opperman: The reality of the state pension in this country is that it has risen by £1,600 in real terms through the triple lock. It also needs to be looked at in the context of the significant high private pensions that, thanks to automatic enrolment and other reforms, show that this is comparable to many other European countries.¹

1. [Official Report, 9 July 2019, Vol. 663, c. 2MC.]

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Free TV licences for older pensioners used to be a proud part of DWP policy. Ministers were warned that they would go under the Government's TV licence plans, so please do not tell us that pension credits are the answer when thousands of pensioners in our area have small occupational or widows' pensions, which mean that they are just above the threshold but are still on tight budgets. They will be hit by the free TV licence being taken away. What are the Government going to do to support those pensioners and to reverse this unfair plan?

Guy Opperman: The right hon. Lady will be aware that this is a matter for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. In the 2015 funding settlement the Government agreed with the BBC that responsibility for the concession would transfer to the BBC after June 2020. I reassure the House that the Government recognise the importance of this, but we are very disappointed with the BBC and we expect it to continue the concession.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey), who is a keen young pup in the House, is perched as though he is about to expatiate. However, I had him down as coming in on the next question. [Interruption.] He wishes to expatiate now. Well, our delight is unanimous.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): The pensioners who built Britain deserve nothing but the best in retirement, yet there are 1 million households in poverty because, according to research conducted by Independent Age, the Government have held on to a staggering £7 billion since the general election in unclaimed pension credit, increasing to over £17 billion by 2022—£10 million a day. What has been the Government's response? An online toolkit used by 2,000 people last year. How do the Government begin to justify plunging 1 million pensioners into poverty? What will they do to ensure that all pensioners get the security and dignity they deserve?

Guy Opperman: The hon. Gentleman will know that, actually, pension credit applications are up significantly. It is also the case that successive Governments have attempted to promote pension credit. I share the frustration of colleagues that it is not higher than it presently is, but I want to emphasise that the DWP uses a variety of means to communicate and we urge all pensioners to apply for pension credit through the usual manner, whether through trusted third parties, jobcentres, local authorities or the like.

Pensioners' Incomes

9. **Eddie Hughes** (Walsall North) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to increase pensioners' incomes. [911648]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman): Due to automatic enrolment, 10 million workers have been automatically enrolled into a workplace pension, including 17,000 in my hon. Friend's Walsall North constituency. In addition, the

Government's commitment to the triple lock has meant that the full basic state pension is now worth about £1,600 a year more in cash terms than it was in 2010.

Eddie Hughes: I thank the Minister for that answer, but 3,440 households in my constituency will lose their free TV licence as a result of the BBC's recent decision. Can he assure my constituents that pensioners with increased costs will be at the forefront of the Department's decision making during the comprehensive spending review?

Guy Opperman: Clearly, I cannot comment on the specifics of the comprehensive spending review—I suspect that will be for the new Prime Minister—but the reality of the situation is that the triple lock and the various reforms we have introduced have meant that pensioners have done considerably better. We spend £120 billion on pensioners, of which £99 billion is on the state pension. That is a record sum.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Pensioners who apply for disability living allowance after the age of 65 are not eligible for the higher mobility component and are therefore not able to access the Motability scheme. The regulations are not new—they date to 1991—but our understanding of what it is to live a good life in retirement has changed in the intervening three decades. Will Ministers reconsider the regulations, so that pensioners continue to have the opportunity for full social participation?

Guy Opperman: I will take the hon. Lady's point on board and write to her.

State Pension

10. **Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): How many people receive a state pension of less than £168.80 a week. [911650]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman): The Department does not publish statistics on the number of people who receive a state pension below the full new state pension amount. As of November 2018, the average amount of the new state pension that people received, including any protected payments, was £154.91 per week.

Gareth Snell: I thank the Minister for that answer. While he may not have that figure, I can tell him that two of the people who do not receive that amount are Bob and Hilary Heyes from my Stoke-on-Trent constituency. Had they started to claim their state pension under the new state pension, they would have received the full amount because they had 35 qualifying years, but because they were born before 1951 and 1953 respectively, they receive considerably less. What would the Minister have me tell Mr and Mrs Heyes when they come to constituency surgery next?

Guy Opperman: It is hard for me to comment on the specifics of the particular case. If the hon. Gentleman writes to me in advance of the forthcoming constituency surgery, I will write back to him and he can hand over the letter.

Mr Speaker: Very helpful.

Disability Confident

11. **Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): Whether she has discussed with Cabinet colleagues the potential merits of making all public bodies join the Disability Confident scheme. [911651]

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson): Disability Confident is a very effective voluntary scheme, so compulsory options have not been discussed with Cabinet colleagues. Public bodies are already subject to the public sector equality duty. All main Government Departments are level 3 Disability Confident leaders, and 80% of local authorities are Disability Confident.

Mr Speaker: I hope I can be forgiven for saying—because I am going to say it anyway—that the House of Commons is a Disability Confident employer. It is absolutely right that we should be, but in case there are Members here who were not aware of that fact, they are now.

Robert Halfon: Thank you, Mr Speaker. My Harlow constituent, Lacey-Rose Saamanthy—a deaf lady—had a catering assistant job offer retracted by the Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust on the basis that it could not mitigate against the so-called risks of her employment. This is despicable, so what steps is the Department taking to ensure that all employers, including the NHS, are signed up to the Disability Confident scheme and are aware of the funding available through the Access to Work scheme, as advocated by the National Deaf Children's Society and others?

Justin Tomlinson: I know my right hon. Friend has championed the case of Miss Saamanthy and I understand that the trust has contacted her to discuss alternative roles in the organisation, including roles that staff with hearing disabilities have successfully been recruited into. I also encourage that particular NHS trust to sign up to the Disability Confident campaign.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Speaker's parliamentary placement scheme, which offers paid internships with training. The graduates graduated just last week. The one that I had the joy of hosting did very well out of that, and that was on the disability strand, hence my question. Will the Minister add his support to the disability strand of the scheme and also look at strengthening the learning from that scheme, so that we can help more employers in the public sector be better employers under Disability Confident?

Justin Tomlinson: Absolutely, and I am really encouraged to hear about that. Through the Disability Confident scheme and the Access to Work scheme, we want to do everything that we can to support these new opportunities being created, because ultimately, the employers benefit when disabled people's talents are unlocked.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP)
rose—

Mr Speaker: Ah yes, young Docherty-Hughes.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: Thanks for the “young”, Mr Speaker.

The Minister seeks, in the Government’s proposal, to promote Disability Confident employers, but does he not recognise that, in April 2019, 85% of all mandatory reconsiderations for personal independence payment modified the original decision? Does he not agree that there seems to be rank hypocrisy in promoting Disability Confident employers while the Government are impoverishing my constituents in West Dunbartonshire and those across the United Kingdom?

Justin Tomlinson: We have over 2 million claimants on PIP, and only 5% of the applications have been taken to appeal. I recognise that those who go through the independent appeal process will, more often than not, have a decision overturned, which is why we have been working extremely hard, through a series of pilots within PIP, on the mandatory reconsideration stage and the independent appeals stage, so that we can get hold of the additional oral and written evidence earlier, which is what is often used to get the decision changed. This is an absolute priority for the Secretary of State and we are making sure that we are doing everything we can, as quickly as we can.

Universal Credit: Vulnerable Claimants

12. **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to increase financial support for vulnerable universal credit claimants, compared with the legacy system. [911652]

15. **Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to increase financial support for vulnerable universal credit claimants, compared with the legacy system. [911655]

20. **Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): What steps she is taking to support vulnerable people who apply for universal credit. [911661]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince): Universal credit ensures that support goes to those who need it most by simplifying the previously complicated legacy system, allowing 700,000 more people to receive approximately £2.4 billion in unclaimed benefits. Since 1 April this year, the Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland Help to Claim service has been in place, providing free, confidential and impartial support to help people, including those who are vulnerable, to make a universal credit claim.

Peter Aldous: I acknowledge the work that the Minister and the Secretary of State have done to improve universal credit, though concern remains that the five-week wait for the first payment is presenting a serious challenge to many people. To address this, will he accept the recommendation of the Bright Blue think-tank for one-off, up-front helping hand payments?

Will Quince: Those moving to universal credit will get more than 25% of their award through two weeks of additional housing benefit and, as of next year, jobseeker’s allowance, employment and support allowance and income support. Advances are available to cover the interim period, but we recognise the concerns about the payments in arrears and would welcome further ideas.

Nigel Huddleston: Vulnerable universal credit claimants often need to travel, sometimes long distances, to regular hospital appointments. What can the Minister do to help give these people the financial security they need to attend those regular and important appointments?

Will Quince: Universal credit claimants may be able to claim a refund for the cost of travelling to a hospital for treatment through the NHS healthcare travel costs scheme. To claim travel costs, claimants should take travel receipts, as well as their appointment letter or card and proof they are receiving a qualifying benefit, to a nominated cashiers office, which will be located in the hospital or clinic that treats the claimant. I should advise my hon. Friend that costs can be claimed back up to three months after an appointment.

Nic Dakin: The requirement for explicit consent built into universal credit makes it difficult for organisations such as Macmillan to support claimants as they did those on legacy benefits. When will the Government meet their commitment to review this requirement with the Social Security Advisory Committee, how will they engage stakeholders and when do they expect to report their findings?

Will Quince: The hon. Gentleman raises a very good point—it concerns me too. We have agreed to work collaboratively with the Social Security Advisory Committee to consider how current practices could be enhanced, and to publish a report on our joint conclusions.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): A constituent of mine, Claudette, lives with her son, who is disabled, in private rented accommodation. She is in receipt of universal credit, but she did not receive her April rent payment, and the Department is refusing to investigate. Prior to that and ever since, universal credit has covered her rent. Will the Minister meet me to review this case, as my constituent fears eviction?

Will Quince: I thank the hon. Lady for raising that individual issue. I would like her to raise Claudette’s case with me. My door is always open, as I know are those of other Ministers in the Department, and of course I would be delighted to meet her.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): At the last oral questions, I raised the case of single parent Alicia in my constituency, who had seen fraudsters claim universal credit for her. The Minister promised to investigate but still has not. In the meantime, we have seen hundreds more cases across Greater Manchester, including that of my constituent Sarah, who has now, in spite of reporting the fraud, been asked to attend an interview under caution and been further victimised by the Department. Will the Secretary of State please make sure that victims of fraud and crime are not further victimised by her Department?

Will Quince: We take fraud incredibly seriously, and I believe that the matter in question is being investigated. If the hon. Lady has further cases, she can refer them to me or the Minister for Employment, and we will look at them very carefully.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): The pilot of the Government's ill-conceived managed migration of universal credit is meant to start this month, but the Government have been very slow in coming forward with details. Is this because the level of payment to severely disabled people who lost out when they transferred to universal credit was found to be unlawful by the High Court?

Will Quince: The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work has been very clear on this. We are still considering it and will come back to the House in due course.

Margaret Greenwood: The Government have repeatedly responded to criticisms of social security cuts—and have done so today—by claiming that they are targeting those who need support the most. How does that accord with spending nearly £200,000 on legal battles with severely disabled people and single mothers who have lost out under universal credit?

Will Quince: Let me gently point out to the hon. Lady that we are spending more than £6 billion a year on the main disability benefits.

Personal Independence Payment

13. **Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): What steps her Department is taking to support claimants whose mobility awards were (a) reduced and (b) stopped when they moved from disability living allowance to personal independence payment. [911653]

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson): Let me answer the hon. Gentleman's question and provide an important update on the Government's work with Motability.

When PIP was first introduced, the Government worked with Motability to design a £175 million transitional support package to support Motability scheme customers who have not been awarded the enhanced mobility component on reassessment from DLA to PIP. Motability announced today that it would provide substantial additional financial support, including £1,000 for customers who lose eligibility for the scheme as a result of a PIP reassessment. It will also fund grants for personal contributions to the Access to Work scheme, and will accelerate the programme that is being undertaken with Family Fund to help many more families with severely disabled children under the age of three. I pay tribute to the proactive and constructive work done by Motability Operations in further supporting disabled people in society.

Jamie Stone: Notwithstanding what the Minister has said, some 52% of UK claimants who were claiming a mobility element under DLA found that it was either reduced or stopped altogether when they moved to PIP, and 2,370 people in the highlands have been hit in that way. Obviously, getting around in the highlands is not easy, and access to transport is not easy. Will the Government please look at this issue? My constituents are losing out, and it seems to me extremely unfair that those figures are so high.

Justin Tomlinson: Among those who have made the transition from DLA to PIP, an extra 144,000 who did not qualify for the enhanced mobility rate under DLA now do so under PIP. We have continued to work with Motability in respect of the additional transitional support that it has announced, and we will continue to keep a close eye on this important area.

Mr Speaker: Given the time constraints, it would be helpful to the House if the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) were to shoehorn her inquiry in the next question into this one.

14. [911654] **Mrs Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): My constituent Siobhan Fennell spends a great deal of time training local businesses in Belper in how best to accommodate customers with disabilities such as autism and dementia and conditions that cause limited mobility, and she has made a huge difference to the local community. Will my hon. Friend commend her work, especially given that she is in a wheelchair herself? She is passionate about her mission.

Justin Tomlinson: I absolutely commend my hon. Friend's constituent for the work that she does in her community. I also congratulate Ms Fennell on receiving the British Empire Medal in the Queen's birthday honours, as well as a national citizenship award in recognition of her work: a true tribute.

Universal Credit: Access to Legal Aid

16. **Shabana Mahmood** (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): What recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Justice on universal credit claims and access to legal aid. [911656]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Amber Rudd): The Ministry of Justice is responsible for access to legal aid, and we will continue to work closely with it as it reviews the means test for entitlement. However, that is not the only initiative on which we have been working together. For instance, I recently announced an ex-offenders pilot scheme, which will provide enhanced employment support and help with access to universal credit in order to lift people out of the cycle of reoffending.

Shabana Mahmood: Solicitors in my constituency have told me that the DWP is refusing to supply written confirmation in the precise legal format that is required for legal aid applications made by people on universal credit. It is a case of one Government body refusing to comply with the rules of another. Is the Secretary of State aware of how deep these problems go, and will she ensure that no universal credit claimant misses out on legal aid because the DWP cannot follow the rules of the Ministry of Justice?

Amber Rudd: I am surprised to hear that question from the hon. Lady. According to my experience and the evidence that I have received during my conversations with the Ministry of Justice, there is no problem and it has been possible to passport in the same way. I hope that that will continue, but, as the hon. Lady knows, the Ministry of Justice is conducting a review. If she will write to me about that particular case, I will look at it myself.

Mr Speaker: Finally, on the matter of plumbing and pensions, Mr John Mann.

Pension Liabilities: Plumbing Industry

18. **John Mann** (Bassetlaw) (Lab): What recent discussions she has had with representatives from the plumbing industry on section 75 pension liabilities. [911658]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman): I met plumbing representatives from Lancashire recently, and those in Angus and Perth last year. We also debated this matter in the House last year. There are nearly 1,000 last man standing multi-employer schemes. Most respondents to the Green Paper on defined-benefit pensions felt that the current buy-out basis was a clear and fair way in which to calculate an employer debt.

John Mann: My constituent Margaret Briggs, having paid £21,000 over 11 years with four employees into a pension scheme, has in the past four weeks received a demand for £331,000. How is she expected to pay this, and how can that possibly be rational and fair?

Guy Opperman: I cannot speak on the specifics of the individual scheme, but the majority of the employers in these schemes are incorporated and are not personally liable for any debt. The flexible apportionment arrangement can be used to help unincorporated employers who wish to incorporate, and the plumbing pension trustee has a streamlined flexible apportionment arrangement process that employers can use. Alternatively, where the employer debt arises in multi-employer schemes as a result of an employer cessation event, there are a number of mechanisms in the occupational pension schemes employer debt regulations that can be of assistance.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Rubbish.

Mr Speaker: I think that is the technical term.

Topical Questions

T1. [911664] **Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Amber Rudd): Now that we have moved from the design to the implementation of universal credit we continue to seek ways to ensure that it is a fair, compassionate benefit that takes account of people's circumstances. I know that there have been concerns across the House about how overpayments of benefits that result from fraud or error are recovered from claimants, and I pay tribute to the hon. Member for High Peak (Ruth George) and my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy) for alerting me to this issue.

I am able to announce today that in cases where a claimant has been convicted of defrauding the Department and their only considerable asset is their home, we will take account of this prior to instigating Crown court proceedings to recover assets under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. This ensures a proportional response that should not result in the claimant having to subsequently apply to the Department for housing benefit. We believe this provides the right balance between pursuing what is owed to the Department and acknowledging the deprivation debt recovery can cause some claimants.

Robert Halfon: I had intended to ask another question, but I want to refer to the answer given to me by the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work; he is a very serious Minister but gave a very disappointing answer worthy of Sir Humphrey. The fact is that my constituent Lacey-Rose Samaanth, who is deaf, was offered a job by the NHS in mid-Essex; I saw the letter. That job offer was then rescinded because it said it was too difficult. She then got another very similar job in another organisation and it was able to adapt to her needs. This sort of thing should not be happening; it is incredibly unjust, and I want to know what the Department is going to do about it by being humane and showing compassion to my constituent.

Amber Rudd: I thank my right hon. Friend for being such a great champion of people with disabilities and tackling the challenges they have in the workplace, and I must say that the example he has given is very disappointing, because we would always hope and expect employers to show compassion and support where they have applications and the opportunity to employ disabled people. The work that this Government are doing will always try to address that, and with my right hon. Friend's help we will make sure we get it right.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): The two men competing to be the next Prime Minister have both said they would be willing to push through a catastrophic no deal. That is despite long-running warnings that disabled people will be hit hard by a no deal, with risks to vital medical supplies and the recruitment of care workers and the loss of the European social fund. However, last week Ministers revealed that the Government have not carried out any assessment of the impact of no deal on disabled people, so will the Minister commit to carrying out such an assessment, and could he in good conscience be part of a Government who pushed through such a reckless act?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Lady may be aware that I have some concerns about no deal; I would much prefer that this country chooses to leave the European Union on the basis of a deal, and I am hopeful that when we have a new leader in place we will be able to arrive at that position, possibly even with the support of the hon. Lady, to try to ensure that we get an exit that supports disabled people as well as everyone else.

T6. [911669] **Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): I established a universal credit action group in my constituency to track local progress and add performance indicators to see how the roll-out is going in Clackmannanshire. What measures are in place to track local success and progress? Are Ministers willing to meet me to discuss the progress of my action group?

The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma): I thank my hon. Friend for the energy with which he is supporting his constituents on universal credit. One of the key performance indicators is, of course, payment timeliness, which has improved significantly over the past couple of years, and that progress is matched in Alloa jobcentre. His local jobcentre staff will be happy to interact with him and, of course, I am also happy to meet him.

T2. [911665] **Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I have the honour of chairing the all-party parliamentary group for terminal illness, and we have been taking evidence over recent months on the challenges that dying people face in accessing social security due to the six-month rule. Incidentally, the Scottish Government are already committed to allowing clinicians to make judgments for PIP, with their limited powers. We will be launching the report on Wednesday at 4 o'clock in the Members' Dining Room, so will the Minister attend and agree to meet me and Marie Curie to discuss the report's findings?

Amber Rudd: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his work in this area, and I reassure him that there have been several meetings with Marie Curie on this subject. I will take an interest in the report that is coming out on Wednesday, and I can tell him that we are once more looking at this matter again.

T8. [911671] **Eddie Hughes** (Walsall North) (Con): Will the Minister provide an update on the Department's work to help people who are out of employment back into work, particularly in the Black Country and, more specifically, in my constituency of Walsall North?

Alok Sharma: As my hon. Friend knows, more people are in work now than ever before. Indeed, the employment rate is higher in every region of the country than in 2010, including in the Black Country. Specifically, he may already be aware that Willenhall jobcentre is working closely with major employers on employment opportunities and, of course, that our mentoring circles programme is being rolled out for 18 to 24-year-olds to help them increase their employability skills.

T3. [911666] **Frank Field** (Birkenhead) (Ind): I want to ask the Secretary of State about my constituent who hanged himself shortly after losing his personal independence payment. I wrote to her asking whether she would establish an inquiry, whether that inquiry would be independent, whether it would be headed by somebody who knows something about this area, whether it would report in three months, and whether the report will be made public.

Amber Rudd: I am taking this case very seriously, and I have had the right hon. Gentleman's letter. At the moment, we are doing an internal inquiry, and if the right hon Gentleman will leave that with me, I will come and talk to him if anything additional is required.

T10. [911673] **Douglas Ross** (Moray) (Con): Earlier this year, I visited the Friendly Autism Moray Experience in Lossiemouth. FAME is paid for by the Lossie Entertainment Academy and works in collaboration with the DWP and Moray's autism services. Local DWP manager Jane Munro has seen people on the project and believes that their contribution increases both their capabilities and their confidence. Does the Minister agree that we should support this valuable project? Will he also wish everyone involved with FAME all the best for the future?

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson): I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting such a fantastic proactive example that is making a real difference, and I support anything further that we can do. The number of applicants to the Access to Work

programme with a learning disability increased by 22% in the last year alone. That is an encouraging trend, and we must do much more in this important area.

T4. [911667] **Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): With £7 billion of unclaimed pension credit since 2017—equivalent to two out of five pensioner households entitled to that credit not getting it—how will Government respond to Independent Age's "Credit Where It's Due" campaign to ensure that everyone who is entitled to pension credit gets it?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman): I saw the report, which was published last week, and noted the findings on page 15 and the four recommendations, many of which we are already doing. Whether through jobcentres, third parties, local authorities or our various other communications, we want more people to be claiming pension credit, and we are trying to do everything possible to make that happen.

Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con): Last week I had a meeting with a Parkinson's support group in my constituency and was told about the many struggles that sufferers face. Will the Minister review the 20-metre rule, so that more people with Parkinson's who have mobility problems can qualify for essential support, such as the blue badge scheme?

Justin Tomlinson: I thank my hon. Friend, and I would be happy to meet her to discuss this further. It is a rule of thumb, but we have to look at whether somebody can repeatedly, regularly and safely travel 20 metres. I welcome the fact that, under PIP, 55% of those with Parkinson's qualify for the highest rate of support.

T5. [911668] **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): I spoke to a constituent at the weekend who has a lifetime disability living allowance award, but she is now being told that she has to apply for personal independence payment. She is obviously very worried about the situation, not least because there are so many cases online of people with indefinite awards being turned down for PIP. Why can we not transfer the data over so that somebody who has been assessed as having a lifetime need can automatically qualify for lifetime PIP?

Justin Tomlinson: I understand why the hon. Lady raises that question but, under DLA, only 15% of claimants actually got the highest rate of support, whereas the rate under PIP is now 31%. One of the key things is that 70% of DLA claimants were on lifetime awards, yet one in three claimants' condition had significantly changed within 12 months and they would have been entitled to a different rate—predominantly a higher rate, rather than a lower rate—and we do not want people to miss out. That is why, under PIP, we are now spending an additional £6 billion a year to support some of the most vulnerable people in society.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): There has recently been a noticeable increase in the number of my constituents in receipt of personal independence payment who, on reassessment, have had it stopped or reduced. Will my right hon. Friend agree to meet me to discuss this worrying trend and to see what we can do to sort it out?

Justin Tomlinson: I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend. We work closely with stakeholders to look at how we can continue improving the system, but I repeat that we are now spending an additional £6 billion and that a significantly higher rate of claimants are now on the highest level of support, and rightly so.

T7. [911670] **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): With the childcare element of universal credit being paid in arrears, many people, particularly women, face a real barrier to entering work. Will the Secretary of State look at either paying that element in advance or paying for the first month of childcare for free so that all parents can access the employment market?

Amber Rudd: I thank the hon. Lady for raising this question, and I am mindful of the Select Committee report that addressed some of it. We have now made changes so that women going into work for the first time from benefits—either universal credit or a legacy benefit—will be able to access advance payments for that first month so that they do not have to find the money themselves. I am making sure that work coaches have more independence to support people back into work; that is one of the changes I have made.

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): Can my hon. Friend tell me whether poverty has risen or fallen since 2010?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince): I thank my hon. Friend for that question. The Government remain committed to tackling poverty so that we can make a lasting difference to long-term outcomes. I am pleased to say that the Government have lifted 400,000 people out of absolute poverty since 2010, and income inequality has fallen.

T9. [911672] **Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Have the Government come to a view on Philip Alston's report on poverty in the UK?

Amber Rudd: We have made substantial responses to Philip Alston's report. We have acknowledged some of his suggestions, and we will look at changing our assessments on poverty by using the Social Metrics Commission's proposal. Otherwise, we are disappointed by the very political nature of his approach.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I would not want the hon. Gentleman to feel socially excluded.

Mr Hollobone: Will the Secretary of State confirm that, when fully rolled out, spending on universal credit will actually be £2 billion a year higher than is currently spent on the equivalent legacy benefits, and that this will be worth some £300 a year to each recipient family?

Amber Rudd: I can confirm that, and it is refreshing to be able to point out that universal credit is, compared with the legacy benefits, a more generous, more effective and better-targeted system, and it is also better funded.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): My 16-year-old constituent has a severe hearing impairment and has been on DLA since the age of three. My constituent has recently been reassessed and is now receiving no support whatsoever. How do the Government justify such decisions?

Justin Tomlinson: Without having the full facts of a case it is difficult to comment, but I am happy to look into that specific one. When we compare DLA with PIP, we are talking about an additional £15.04 of benefit support a week per claimant.

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Okay, I will take the point of order now. The hon. Gentleman has been jumping up and down like a veritable Zebedee, and so I shall accommodate him on this occasion, but I advise him that in the ordinary course of events points of order tend to be taken after statements. *[Interruption.]* It is not obligatory, and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care can wait for his statement. I know he has all sorts of other activities in which he wishes to be busily engaged, but I am afraid he will have to wait.

Jon Trickett: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Thank you very much for finding the time for this. I am standing next to the Leader of the Opposition, whose fitness is legendary. I wonder whether you have received an application by a Minister to make a statement to the House on the principle of civil service neutrality. I ask following the undemocratic and unconstitutional public intervention attributed to senior civil servants and based on a falsehood printed in Saturday's *The Times*. No doubt you will agree that since the 1854 Northcote-Trevelyan reforms the professionalism and objectivity of our public servants has been admired throughout the world, and it is a cornerstone of our democracy. But there must be no hesitation at all in condemning the kind of behaviour reported, and I would hope that the Government will root out any miscreants who have behaved in this way. Finally, I wonder whether you can do anything to encourage Ministers, if they have not already approached you, to make a statement in the House or arrange time for a debate about this very important principle.

Mr Speaker: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. I have not received any indication that a Minister is planning to make an oral statement in the House on this matter, although it is perfectly open to a Minister to offer to do so. The Northcote-Trevelyan principles are of the utmost importance, and I hope they will be upheld by Governments indefinitely. They have existed for a long time because the principles involved—permanence, anonymity and neutrality—are absolutely sacred. I simply suggest that the hon. Gentleman pursues the matter with his characteristic persistence and vigour, and I feel sure that, using the Order Paper and the resources provided by the Table Office, he will be happy to do so.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Amber Rudd): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I just want to reassure the House that we have complete confidence in the fairness and independence of the civil service. It has said that it will respond and I frankly question the good judgment of the shadow Minister for bringing this up in the House at this stage, before it has had the chance to do so.

Jon Trickett *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I do not want to dwell on this matter. Suffice it to say that the Leader of the Opposition looks perfectly healthy to me; I have known him a long time and he is a very healthy-living fellow in my experience. On a serious note, I do think that the convention is

sacred and it really should not brook of any dispute across the House. It might be best to leave it there. I gently suggest to the hon. Gentleman that he has made his point with considerable lucidity and let us leave it there.

We come now to the statement from the Health and Social Care Secretary, which he has been eagerly awaiting. I know that he will want to deliver his own words with every ounce of aplomb at his disposal. I call Secretary Matt Hancock.

NHS Long-Term Plan: Implementation

3.43 pm

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House on the implementation of the NHS long-term plan and the delivery of improvements to the health service. Today marks the 100th anniversary of the Ministry of Health, founded under the Liberal and Conservative coalition of Lloyd George, and the Department has been staffed by brilliant, impartial civil servants ever since, and is today.

I can tell the House that on Thursday last the boards of NHS England and NHS Improvement agreed the long-term plan implementation framework. Alongside the clinical review of standards, and the interim workforce plan, published last month, this framework is a critical step in delivering on our 10-year vision for the NHS, and in transforming our health service with the record funding that this Government are putting in. The document sets out the framework within which each of the 300 commitments in the long-term plan will be delivered, and it also sets out the 20 headline commitments and how we will monitor the delivery of the plan. In the past, there have been criticisms that NHS plans have not led to full delivery. We are determined to ensure that the long-term plan fulfils its potential to transform the health service for the better, and I am placing a copy of the implementation framework in the Libraries of both Houses.

I wish to draw attention to three particular areas, the first of which is cancer care. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) for his efforts to ensure that we focus on the vital indicator of cancer survival. The Prime Minister set out the ambition that by 2028 three quarters of all stageable cancers are detected at stage 1 or stage 2. Early detection and diagnosis are essential to the enhancement of people's chances of surviving cancer.

Since 2010, rates of cancer survival have increased year on year. However, historically our survival rates in the UK have lagged behind the best-performing countries in Europe. The implementation framework sets out our goal of measuring the one-year cancer survival rates as one of the core metrics for the long-term plan. The one-year survival rate is how we measure our progress in achieving the ambitions set out in the plan. To realise those ambitions and ensure that we do everything we can to give people diagnosed with cancer the best chance of survival, the framework sets out first, a radical overhaul of screening programmes; secondly, new state-of-the-art technology to make diagnosis faster and more accurate; and thirdly, more investment in research and innovation.

From this year, we will start the roll-out of rapid diagnostic centres throughout the country, building on the success of a pilot with Cancer Research UK, so that we can catch cancer much earlier. NHS England is further extending lung health checks, targeting areas with the lowest survival rates, and Health Education England is increasing the cancer workforce, which will lead to 400 more clinical endoscopists and 300 more reporting radiographers by 2021. With these steps, our ambition is that 55,000 more people will survive cancer for five years, each year from 2028. Improving the

one-year survival rate is how we ensure that the NHS remains at the forefront of cancer diagnosis and treatment and continues to deliver world-class care.

The second area is mental health. The Prime Minister and her predecessor rightly prioritised the treatment of mental health so that we can ensure that mental health finally gets parity with physical health. The £33.9 billion cash-terms settlement, which is the longest and largest cash settlement in the history of the NHS, includes a record £2.3 billion extra in real terms for the expansion of mental health services. The framework sets out how 380,000 more adults and 345,000 more children and young people will get access to mental health support. I pay tribute to the mental health Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), who has done so much work to put the issue on the agenda.

We are introducing four-week waiting-time targets for children and young people and testing four-week community mental health targets for adults. The implementation framework refers specifically to the vital improvements to community mental health services that we all know are needed. Those improvements include services for adults living with serious mental disorders, including eating disorders, and for those coping with substance misuse. The framework also sets out how we will create a new workforce of mental health support teams to work with schools and colleges to help to identify young people who need help and reach them faster. In all, it is a fundamental shift in how we treat mental illness and how the NHS will prioritise mental health services.

The third area that I wish to touch on is people. Three quarters of the NHS budget goes on staff, because people are the most valuable resource that we have in the NHS. We need not only the right numbers but to ensure that staff have the right support. The long-term plan sets out our ambition to recruit, train and retrain the right numbers of staff over the next decade. Last month, Baroness Dido Harding set out the interim people plan, which sets out how we will build the workforce we need and create the right culture, so that doctors, nurses and other NHS staff have the time to care for patients and for themselves.

Last week, the British Medical Association accepted in a referendum the new agreement with junior doctors that will improve both pay and working conditions. Thanks to the hard work of my predecessor, we are already taking steps to increase the number of clinical training places by opening five new medical schools and increasing the number of routes into nursing through apprenticeships and nursing associates. Last year, more than 5,000 nursing associates started training through apprenticeships. This year, it will be up to 7,500.

Those are just three of the most vital areas from the 10-year vision for the NHS set out in the long-term plan. Across England, based on the implementation framework, local strategic plans are now being developed and will be brought together as part of a national implementation plan by the end of the year, and all of this will be underpinned by technology. Today sees the official opening of NHSX, the new part of the NHS, which will drive digital transformation to give citizens and clinicians the technology they need and save and improve lives. I am delighted that NHSX has received

such a warm welcome across the NHS because it has so much potential to transform every part of health and social care for patients and staff.

The forthcoming spending review will settle budgets for health education, public health and NHS capital investment, and the settlements will feed into the final implementation of this plan. As part of the spending review, we will also review the current functioning and structure of the better care fund, which is rising in line with NHS revenue growth.

On this the 100th anniversary of the foundation of the Ministry of Health, this framework sets out how we will go about securing the foundations of the national health service into the next century and the creation of an NHS that delivers world-class care for generations to come. I commend this statement to the House.

3.51 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for an advance copy of his statement. I had hoped for a greater sense of urgency from him. He talks about the 100-year anniversary of the Ministry of Health, but this year is the first time in 100 years that the advances in life expectancy have begun to stall, and even go backwards in the poorest areas. Just the other week, we saw that infant mortality rates have risen now for the third year in a row. As this is the first time that they have risen since the second world war, I would have hoped for a greater focus on health inequalities in his statement today, not least because public health services—the services that, in many ways, lead the charge against health inequalities—are being cut by £700 million. Now he says that we should wait for the spending review for the future of public health services, but we do not know when the spending review is. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury has said that it will be delayed, so it could be next year.

In the past, the Secretary of State has talked about a prevention Green Paper. Will that prevention Green Paper be before the spending review or after the spending review? Will he also tell us whether it is still the intention of the Department to insist that local authorities fund their public health obligations through the business rates?

At the time of the publication of the long-term plan last year, the then Secretary of State for Health said that we cannot have one plan for the NHS without a plan for social care, yet we still have no plan for social care. We have been promised a social care Green Paper umpteen times. We are more likely to see the Secretary of State riding Shergar at Newmarket than see the social care Green Paper. Where is it?

The Secretary of State talks about the better care fund revenue increase. May I press him further on that? Is he saying that the clinical commissioning group allocations to the better care fund, which tend to be the bulk of the better care fund, will increase in line with the NHS revenue increase, or is he saying that there will be new money available for the better care fund? Adult social care has been cut by £7 billion since 2010 under this Tory Government, which is why hundreds of thousands of elderly and vulnerable people are going without the social care support that they need. Presumably, we will have to wait for the spending review for proposals on social care.

The Secretary of State talks about the workforce. We have 100,000 vacancies across the NHS. We have heard about the interim people plan, but of course we have seen the bursary cut, the pay restraint, and the continuing professional development cut. That plan is all good and fine, but when will it be backed up by actual cash?

The Secretary of State talks about IT systems and apps—we know that he is very fond of that—but again he gives us no certainty on capital investment. Hospitals are facing a £6 billion repair bill—ceilings are falling in and pipes are bursting. The repair bill designated as serious risk has doubled to £3 billion. When will we have clarity on NHS capital?

We broadly welcome what the Secretary of State said about mental health, but 100,000 children are currently denied mental health treatment each year because their problems are not designated as serious enough, and over 500 children and young people wait more than a year for specialist mental health treatment. He talks of a fundamental shift, so can he guarantee that clinical commissioning groups will no longer be allowed to raid their child and adolescent mental health services budgets in order to fill wider gaps in health expenditure? On mental health resilience and prevention, only 1.6% of public health budgets is currently spent on mental health, so will he mandate local authorities, when setting their public health budgets, to increase the money they spend on mental health?

On cancer, we broadly welcome what the Secretary of State has said, but patients are waiting longer for treatment because of vacancies and out-of-date equipment. Today we learned that consultant oncologists with shares in private hospitals are referring growing numbers of patients to those hospitals. Is that not a conflict of interest? When will we see tougher regulation of the private healthcare sector?

The Secretary of State talked about the clinical review of standards that is being piloted in 14 hospitals, yet those hospitals are not publishing the data. If he wants to abandon the four-hour A&E target, will he insist that those pilot hospitals publish all the data? He did not mention waiting lists. We have seen CCGs rationing treatment because of the finances. We have seen 3,000 elderly people refused cataract removals. We have seen CCGs refusing applications for hip and knee replacements. We have even seen a hospital that until last week was inviting patients to pay up to £18,000 for a hip or knee replacement—procedures that used to be available on the NHS. When is he going to intervene to stop that rationing of treatment, which we are seeing expand across the country because of the finances?

Finally, there are many laudable things in the long-term plan that we welcome. Alcohol care teams were a Labour idea. Perinatal mental health services were a Labour idea. Gambling addiction clinics, which the Secretary of State announced last year, were a Labour idea. Today he is talking about bringing catering back in-house, which is also a Labour idea. Why does he not just let me be Heath Secretary, and then he could carry on being the press secretary for the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson)?

Matt Hancock: Well, it is great that by the end of his questions the hon. Gentleman finally got to the future of the NHS, which is what we are here to discuss. However, what I did not hear—unless I missed it—was a welcome for the extra £33.9 billion that we are putting

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into the NHS. I did not hear him welcome the fact that life expectancies are rising, or our plan to drive up healthy life expectancy still further. I did not hear him say whether the Labour party supports our efforts to ensure that the NHS is properly funded and supported not only now but into the future, because that is what this Government are delivering.

I will go through some of the questions that the hon. Gentleman did raise. He asked about the prevention Green Paper. Indeed, he will know that preventing people getting ill in the first place is a central objective of mine, and it will be forthcoming shortly. He mentioned the better care fund. I was very precise in what I said about the better care fund, because its funding is rising in line with NHS revenue growth. In fact, the overall funding available to deliver social care in this country has risen by 11% over the past three years. Of course there is more to do to ensure that we have a social care system that is properly funded and structured to ensure that everybody can have the dignity of the care they need in older age, and that people of working age get the social care they need, but the Labour party ought to welcome the increase in funding, as well as the aim of ensuring that we get the best possible value for every pound.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the clinical review of standards, which he welcomed when it was announced recently. The pilots that he mentioned started just four weeks ago, and of course we will be assessing the results and ensuring that we get the right structures in place in future. I am glad that he welcomed it, but in relation to publishing data, after just four weeks it is unsurprising that we are still in the early stages.

The hon. Gentleman asked me to ensure that the increase in funding for mental health will happen and that CCGs will be required to see that increase flowing through to make sure that patients get better service. I can confirm that NHS England is already intervening. The £2.3 billion increase that we have set out in the long-term plan will be required to flow through to the frontline. This implementation framework is part of the system that we are putting in place to make sure that that happens.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I very much welcome the Secretary of State's announcement on putting the one-year cancer metric at the very heart of cancer services as a means of encouraging earlier diagnosis. You will be well aware, Mr Speaker, that the all-party parliamentary group on cancer has long championed the need to put this metric at the very heart of our services in order to encourage earlier diagnosis. The inconvenient truth is that despite the best will of those on both sides of this debate on the need to focus on process targets, we have failed to close the gap on international averages in our cancer survival rates. I chaired the APPG for 10 years, and I know that the current chair, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), is waiting to speak as well. Will the Secretary of State ensure that sufficient funds are allocated to the one-year metric, because history would suggest that this metric has been there, or thereabouts, in the mix before, but because the money has been attached to the process targets, local NHS systems have ignored it?

Matt Hancock: I pay tribute to the work that the APPG, so ably led, has done in putting the measurement of improvements of cancer services at the forefront of the debate. I particularly acknowledge the point about early diagnosis. Here in the UK, we are one of the best countries in the world at treating cancer once it is diagnosed, but we are behind the curve on early diagnosis. Putting a one-year cancer diagnosis metric at the heart of the implementation of the long-term plan is a critical step in making that happen. What is going to happen now is that each of the local systems will feed into the framework in terms of how they will be putting this into action. The full implementation plan, which will be published shortly after the spending review, will take that into account, as well as all the budgets that need to be settled in the spending review. I would recommend to my right hon. Friend—my hon. Friend—[*Interruption.*] Just for now. I recommend that he keep up this campaign, because we have made significant progress in the implementation framework but there is still more to do.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman was temporarily elevated to the Privy Council by his right hon. Friend on the Treasury Bench. He might—who knows?—regard that as an earnest of what is to come.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): There is no reference to GPs in the statement—I have just been looking through it. This comes at a time when my constituents are telling me that they are having to wait three weeks to get a GP appointment. Faith House GP surgery on Beverley Road, which I have raised with the Secretary of State directly, is now due to close. It is all very well training doctors for the future, but what is he going to do about the crisis in primary care now?

Matt Hancock: I picked out three of the 20 areas that we are particularly focused on in this implementation framework, one of which is the number of GPs and the broader primary care workforce, because it is not just about GPs but about all those who also support primary care across the board. We have a clear target of 5,000 more GPs, based on the 2015 baseline. We have a record number of GPs in training. Last month, the Minister for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond), announced the consultation on changes to the pension to remove some of the unintended consequences of pension tax changes for GPs to ensure that we retain our highly trained, highly qualified GPs. There is a whole load of work in the people plan being led by Baroness Dido Harding to make sure that we have the number of GPs that we need and the wider primary care health workforce that is necessary.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): As my right hon. Friend said, the first Minister of Health was Christopher Addison, then a Liberal, who abolished his position as President of the Local Government Board to succeed himself as the first Minister of Health in 1919, but the first Secretary of State to hold up a White Paper saying “national health service” was the Conservative Sir Henry Willink in 1944. We must give credit to the Labour party for bringing in the health service, agreed by the coalition Government, in 1948, although we have to recognise that Aneurin Bevan decided to nationalise the hospitals and not the GPs, when most people expected it to be the other way round.

In the experience of my wife, who did five years as Minister for Health and Secretary of State for Health, we should be praising all those who support the clinicians—the support workers, administrators and others who help doctors, nurses and other professionals—to look after us at all stages of our lives. We must have the extra money. I am glad that we have gone beyond the Labour party's ambitious targets to meet our own ambitious targets, and that we can look forward to doing more, because we have to recognise that health will require a greater proportion of our wealth as we live longer and want better services.

Matt Hancock: I wholeheartedly agree with the entirety of what my hon. Friend said. It is true that for the majority of its 71-year history—71 this week—the NHS has been run by Conservative Secretaries of State, and the largest cash injections have come from this party. It is a truly national institution that we should all support, and we have to support not only the doctors, who lead many parts of the NHS, and the nurses, but all the health service staff, because it is a true team effort.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): The Secretary of State may remember that I brought a group of mental health reformers to see him, to make the case for culture change in mental health services to address clear human rights abuses such as locking people up when they do not need to be locked up, often for a long period, shunting people around the country in ways that would never happen with physical health and the endemic use of force in mental health services. We argued that ending inappropriate institutional care would free up money for better prevention and early intervention. He said he loved that approach. Is he doing anything to actually implement it?

Matt Hancock: Yes. First, in terms of the review led by Simon Wessely of the legal powers set by the Mental Health Act 1983, there will be a Government response and then legislation in due course. We want to get that legislation right and bring it forward on an open basis, to ensure that we get a consensus behind it before introducing it formally to the House. On the administrative side, a programme of work is under way to deliver exactly what the right hon. Gentleman mentioned. In my statement, I specifically referenced the expansion in community mental health services that must happen, which will be good value for money and, of course, much better for many patients.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Ah, a veritable galaxy of parliamentary celebrities from whom to choose.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): I felt that my right hon. Friend's announcement deserved a more enthusiastic response than the uncharacteristically churlish one it received from the shadow Health Secretary. In terms of mental health, I particularly welcome the introduction of four-week waiting time targets for children and young people, because I know how much distress has been caused to many of my constituents by undue delays in the assessment and treatment of young people with mental health problems. Can he tell the House when he plans to implement those new waiting time targets and how he will keep pressure on CCGs, so that the benefits are seen on the ground as soon as possible?

Matt Hancock: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question. The shadow Secretary of State is so nice behind the scenes that he sometimes has to get a bit spiky in public, just to prove to his masters in the Leader of the Opposition's office that he is on their side.

Over the rest of this year, we will deliver the plan to ensure that these targets are put in place. The truth is that we can only manage what we measure, and having a target for access to mental health services and pilots on how we do that for children's health services is an incredibly important part of ensuring that the system lines up behind the rapid availability of mental health services, which, as I imagine every Member knows from constituency casework, is critical.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I very much welcome the ambition of this plan, the recognition that it will need appropriate resources—it very much needs appropriate staffing, because the human resource is most important—and the emphasis on cancer and early diagnosis. May I ask the Secretary of State how he will ensure that improvements in early diagnosis for less survivable cancers are central to the target to diagnose 75% of cancers at stage 1 and stage 2? There is a concern that the less survivable cancers will get neglected, given the nature of the plan at the moment.

Matt Hancock: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the tone that he takes, and he is absolutely right in his analysis. I know he met the cancer Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy), last week on this point. We absolutely will address it, and we will not miss the less survivable cancers. Indeed, the focus on early diagnosis will of course help survivability, but it is also a focus across all cancers equally, rather than just on those where survivability has improved so much.

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): This long-term plan for the NHS has been developed by the NHS, not imposed by Government. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this sets the plan apart and means it is much more likely to work for staff and patients alike?

Matt Hancock: Yes, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. The plan is of the NHS by the NHS for the NHS. We in Government will absolutely facilitate it and support it, and of course we are putting in the money, but the NHS as a whole should be very proud of what this plan proposes and the way the implementation is being done in such a rigorous fashion.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Change UK): May I press the Secretary of State a little further on the section of the plan that relates to prevention and early intervention? We are all waiting still for the prevention Green Paper. In particular, there are some diseases and illnesses, such as stroke, where apparently four out of five cases could be prevented by such early action, whether it is diagnosis of atrial fibrillation, or blood pressure and cholesterol testing devices. What more can be done for this Government to show they are serious about preventing ill health, such as stroke?

Matt Hancock: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman. The whole plan—the whole NHS long-term plan—is about prevention as well as cure. The focus of

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the NHS needs to switch more towards prevention as well as, of course, helping people get better when they get ill. Taking the example of stroke, there is a lot on the prevention of stroke in the draft prevention Green Paper—just to give him a bit of a teaser for that. At the core of improving prevention of stroke is both behaviour change but also better use of data, because being able to spot people who have symptoms that are likely to lead to stroke can then help much more targeted interventions. I find it striking that with the big stroke charities, as with the big heart charities, their big ask is for better and more access to data.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): May I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement and his commitment to this implementation plan, alongside the commitment to increase clinical standards? That is not a criticism of the medical professions; it is just a determination to make sure that the NHS is an infinite learning organisation and can learn from its mistakes. In that respect, will he recommit to HSIB—the healthcare safety investigation branch of his Department—which is devoted to doing clinical investigations without finding blame, so that these problems can be surfaced and the learning can be implemented across the NHS? In particular, will he recommit to the legislation, which has been through prelegislative scrutiny and is still waiting to be introduced?

Matt Hancock: Yes, I am looking forward to that legislation being introduced. The work that my hon. Friend's Select Committee—the Joint Committee on the Draft Health Service Safety Investigations Bill—did in the prelegislative scrutiny was incredibly important. The HSIB Bill promises to improve patient safety, which is an important part of the agenda, and I look forward to its being brought forward to the House.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): I have recently become the vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on sickle cell and thalassaemia. Sickle cell is very much a hidden disability which is lifelong. Some people take up to five medications a day, which is very costly. If they have a relapse, they can be hospitalised, but it is more cost-effective and preventive to have free prescriptions than to end up in hospital. Will the Secretary of State review the matter and do what is both best for those patients and in the public interest?

Matt Hancock: I will certainly look at the matter. When I was on a night shift with a London ambulance crew, we attended a patient who suffered from sickle cell, and it was horrific to see the degree of pain that they were in. I have therefore seen at first hand exactly how horrific the condition can be and I will look into the hon. Lady's suggestion.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): I was delighted to be able to show the Secretary of State the health and wellbeing hub in Budleigh Salterton and the opportunities at Ottery St Mary community hospital, and that he confirmed that both places had a role to play in the future of health provision in East Devon. However, last week, the National Audit Office found that community hospitals and GP surgeries were struggling to pay the

rents charged by NHS Property Services and that, nationally, outstanding debt has almost tripled since 2014 to £576 million. If my right hon. Friend is interested in securing a legacy before he moves on to even higher political office, will he please look at that, particularly in advance of the review planned for 2021?

Matt Hancock: I certainly will. I also draw my right hon. Friend's attention to an announcement, which we made last month, to allow local hospital trusts to request property from NHS Property Services so that it can be transferred to the trusts if it can be used better and more flexibly locally, in the way that the hub I saw at Budleigh Salterton absolutely delivers. I can also see such an opportunity for the potential hub at Ottery St Mary, which was a community hospital and has enormous promise for delivering services closer to the community.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for the statement and the substantial moneys that the Government have committed to the NHS long-term plan, particularly given the need for the cancer strategy to be fully implemented. On rare diseases, will he confirm that drugs such as Orkambi, Spinraza and medicinal cannabis will be simple to apply for and accessible for those who desperately need them now, when time is not on their side?

Matt Hancock: I understand the importance of those drugs. Each one is in a slightly different part of the process. We have opened up availability of medicinal cannabis. Indeed, I was talking this morning to the head of NHS England to ensure that our plans to normalise access to medicinal cannabis for those with a clinical need for it can be brought forward. The hon. Gentleman should expect to hear more news soon on the progress that NHS England and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence have made. On Orkambi, we are still engaged with the company, Vertex, to try to bring that to patients in a cost-effective way. I greatly hope that Vertex will make some progress.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): It has been great to hear my right hon. Friend mentioning the new medical schools. The one in Chelmsford is fantastic. It is 12 times oversubscribed for next year—we would love an increase in places. It was lovely to meet three of the medical students last week, when they raced across the high street to have selfies taken with my right hon. Friend's predecessor.

We are also doing well on nurse apprenticeships, but there is an issue, especially with mature students coming in to study adult nursing. Will my right hon. Friend look again at how to give them financial assistance?

Matt Hancock: I thoroughly enjoyed visiting my hon. Friend's local medical school and seeing the expansion that has taken place. The two of us walked into a room occupied almost entirely by dead bodies, which was quite an experience. [*Interruption.*] It was nothing like this place. On the specific and substantive questions she asks, we are looking at both the funding for the expansion of medical schools and how we ensure that we get the nurses we need into the profession. That will be part of the spending review process with the settlement of the budget for Health Education England.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Having been diagnosed earlier this year with a stage 3B melanoma, I always get a bit sweaty when people start talking about how important it is to have early diagnosis to ensure survival rates, but of course they are absolutely right. The number of people, in particular men, with melanoma is rising and people are still dying. I have heard horrific tales of people going to GPs five, six or seven times before a GP was able to send them on to see a dermatologist. I have heard about dermatologists saying, “I’ll look at this mole here, but I’m not going to look at that one because you haven’t been referred for that one. That will have to be a separate referral.” I have heard of people waiting six or seven weeks for histopathology to come back. All those things delay the process. Do we not need to have a wholesale approach to melanoma to ensure that we save more people’s lives?

Matt Hancock: Yes, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I agree with what he says. There is a need for the whole medical profession to be constantly up to date with the latest treatment and diagnostic science. I am determined that part of the drive for early diagnosis is about not just diagnosis once referred, but better referral. We all have a part to play in that—wider society, as well as primary care.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Many people in my constituency find it difficult to obtain NHS dentistry. While that is part of the short-term plan, on the ambitions outlined in the plan for long-term improvements to oral health, what assurance can the Secretary of State give that NHS dentists will be in place to deliver them?

Matt Hancock: NHS dentistry is incredibly important. Ultimately, dentistry is part of prevention; it prevents oral ill health. We are doing a lot of work on what further we can do to support oral health. In fact, I had a meeting with the Minister with responsibility for public health on that subject this morning. I would love to meet my hon. Friend to discuss it further.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): The Secretary of State clearly identified three critical areas for improvement to cancer survival rates. He is absolutely right about early diagnosis. I do not want to make my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) any more sweaty than he already is, but it cannot be repeated enough times that spotting these issues early on is critical to improving survival rates. The Secretary of State is also right about the importance of mental health. The third point he touched on was that the workforce is key to underpinning all this. In that regard, does he know how many specialist mental health and specialist cancer nurses we will have at the end of the 10-year period?

Matt Hancock: The answer to that question is being worked on as part of the people plan, which Baroness Dido Harding is putting together. We published the interim plan last month. The full people plan will be available after we have settled, in the spending review, the budget of Health Education England. The hon. Gentleman raises an incredibly important point.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I very much welcome the plan, with £33.9 billion being committed by 2022-23. My slight concern is where the money is going to

come from. I wonder whether my right hon. Friend has had assurances from the Treasury that that will indeed be the case. With all the other pressures on spending and revenues in the coming years, that might be a little difficult. We have to find ways to ensure that the revenue is there because this money must be spent.

Matt Hancock: Yes, it will in all circumstances. This is a firm commitment, supported right across this House and right across our party, and it will be delivered. There is absolutely no question about that.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): We know that areas of greater deprivation have greater health needs than other areas. Will the Secretary of State tell us what more there is in the long-term plan specifically about increasing the resources for GP practices that serve areas of greater deprivation? They have longer waiting times and greater vacancy lists and we need specific action to support those practices.

Matt Hancock: Making sure that we have the right allocations for CCGs across the country that reflect the needs of the local population is a very important responsibility for NHS England—as the commissioner of those services—to make sure that the money follows need. After all, the principle of the NHS is that it is available to everybody according to need, not ability to pay.

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): We all know that the Secretary of State is a great fan of technology and of improving the mental health of young people, and all people across the country. In my constituency, a man called Richard Lucas has set up a new online system called govovox, which is a revolutionary, technologically enabled way of improving mental health among young people. Will the Secretary of State advise the House how innovative new technological solutions at a local level can best get into CCGs and the local NHS, so that we can improve mental health for everybody?

Matt Hancock: My hon. Friend has raised with me before the new technology developed by Mr Lucas. A new technology such as this can be picked up by all sorts of different parts of the NHS—by different CCGs or mental health trusts—which can then use it. One of the reasons that we have brought in NHSX, which opens today, is to make sure that there is a central place to which people with a good idea for how to improve the health of the nation by using technology can go to find a way into the NHS, so that great practice and good technology can be promulgated across the NHS as quickly as possible.

John Grogan (Keighley) (Lab): Speaking of revenue, what is the Secretary of State’s attitude to NHS trusts that set up subsidiary companies, if one of the main motives is clearly seen to be VAT avoidance, as in the case of Bradford trusts where nearly half the extra revenue of setting up a company in the first five years would be VAT-related?

Matt Hancock: If the hon. Gentleman writes to me with the specifics of the case, I will be very happy to look into it. The use of subsidiaries in the way that he described in principle has been available to NHS organisations for some time, and I am very happy to take up the case that he asked about.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I strongly welcome the 10-year plan and particularly what the Secretary of State said about apprenticeships, and I urge him to push more degree apprenticeships in the NHS. If it is right to have a 10-year long-term plan for the NHS in England, does he agree that we also need a long-term NHS plan for my constituency of Harlow? The only way that we can achieve that is by having a new hospital health campus. He has visited our hospital and realises that it is not fit for purpose.

Matt Hancock: Few people make the case for their constituencies better than my right hon. Friend, and nobody makes the case for Harlow better than him. He invited me around Harlow hospital. I went into the basement to see some of the work that is needed, and the basement of Harlow hospital is in a worse state of disrepair than the basement of this building. That means that it needs work, so I am considering his proposal. The future NHS capital budget will be settled in the spending review, so I suggest that he has a conversation with Treasury Ministers as well. I look forward to seeing the case progress.

My right hon. Friend is also right about how important degree apprenticeships are. Both of us are former Skills Ministers and have heralded the arrival of degree apprenticeships as a route for people into high-paid, high-quality jobs without them having to go to university.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Delayed discharge has a knock-on effect on the whole NHS. The fact that the Secretary of State has said today that all he will do is review the better care fund and that he will not publish a White Paper on social care shows what a low priority this is. When will we see the White Paper on social care for which we have been waiting not just months, but years?

Matt Hancock: The statement was about the implementation of the NHS long-term plan, to which of course the future of social care is vital, which is one reason why the spending power available within social care has risen by more than 10% over the past three years. We continue to work on the long-term future of social care. We will have to wait for a new Prime Minister before publishing the Green Paper—I think that is fairly obvious—but it would also be good to get a bit of cross-party collaboration. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green) made some proposals that were in line with the cross-party work of two Select Committees of this House, within half an hour the shadow Secretary of State's friend, the shadow Chancellor, had rubbished the idea—I do not think he took the time even to read it. We could do with a bit of cross-party work on the future of social care in this country.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Thanks to the record funding boost for the NHS, Cheltenham General Hospital can plan for the future with confidence, but local trust managers consistently cite difficulties with recruiting emergency medicine doctors as a reason for not being able to expand A&E provision. Does the Secretary of State agree that some of the additional resources must go into training additional A&E doctors so that we can give Cheltenham General Hospital the resources it requires?

Matt Hancock: Yes, I agree very strongly with that. When I said that my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) was one of the best constituency advocates, I forgot my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), who is also one of the best, and certainly the best advocate for Cheltenham, that the House has ever seen. He is absolutely right in the substance of his question, which is that we must have the support for the workforce we need, including in emergency medicine, to ensure high-quality emergency facilities near to people—where they are needed—and he makes that case with respect to the expansion of services at Cheltenham Hospital, which he supports incredibly strongly.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Is the privatisation of the urgent care centre in the Runcorn-Halton part of my constituency part of the Secretary of State's NHS plan?

Matt Hancock: I am not sure what specific case the hon. Gentleman is referring to, but I will tell him this about privatisation: I support the NHS being free at the point of delivery so that everybody can use it, and the most important principle at stake is how to deliver the best possible services for our constituents. That is what I will keep doing.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): The success of the NHS long-term plan in Northamptonshire will depend on urgent short-term reform of the combined health and social care system in the county. There are 1,400 hospital beds in the two hospitals in Northamptonshire; 900 are occupied today by stranded and super-stranded patients as a result of delayed transfers of care. This is the worst situation in the country. The number of patients staying more than seven days in a hospital bed is twice the national average. Northamptonshire's over-65 population is the fastest growing in the county. We need to take advantage of local government reform to establish an integrated health and social care pilot, but this requires the personal attention of the Secretary of State. Without that, we will not make any progress. Will he meet Members of Parliament from the county this month to get this under way?

Matt Hancock: Yes, and I suggest we meet also with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. I have met the Northants MPs to progress this, and I have also met the Communities Secretary about it. My hon. Friend is dead right. There is a serious problem, but there is also an opportunity for much more integrated health and social care. If Northants MPs, the Communities Secretary and I can find an opportunity to meet, perhaps we will be able to crack through this one.

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his announcement. I have two questions. First, do he and his Department accept that there are additional costs in providing healthcare on an Island that is of an equal standard to that provided elsewhere? Secondly, will he and his officials agree to meet Island officials to discuss plans for a pilot scheme to help integrate healthcare, adult social care and other local government services to ensure maximum efficiency

in the delivery of services, as my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) just talked about, and to ensure that as much money as possible goes to frontline services?

Matt Hancock: Yes, I shall be happy to ensure that that meeting happens. As for Island healthcare costs, my hon. Friend is right to say that the Isle of Wight is unique in its health geography, and that there are places in this country—almost certainly including the Isle of Wight—where healthcare costs are higher because of the geography. There is a programme for smaller hospitals that are necessarily smaller because of the local geography, as they need special attention.

As I have said, I shall be happy to ensure that the meeting goes ahead, and I shall continue to talk to my hon. Friend, who makes the case for the Isle of Wight better than any other.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): Tomorrow I shall attend the funeral of my Auntie Bib, who has just died of cancer. It was discovered at quite a late stage. May I press my right hon. Friend to ensure that rapid access diagnosis centres are rolled out as quickly as humanly possible, and to give the House more details? May I also—as is my job—remind him that he is, of course, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care for this entire United Kingdom, and ask him how he intends to engage with devolved authorities when targets are being missed to ensure that standards are maintained across the island? Our constituents are all British citizens, and they all require and deserve the same level of support.

Matt Hancock: I am sure that the whole House will want to pass our condolences to my hon. Friend, to his family, and to friends of his aunt. In a way, it is fitting to end this session with a very personal example of why early diagnosis matters.

As for my hon. Friend's second point, ensuring that we have high-quality health services throughout the UK is, of course, vital. It is true that there has been a smaller increase in funding for the NHS in Scotland, and a consequent smaller increase in the number of healthcare professionals there. We need an improvement right across this country. We are delivering that in England, and I am sure that my hon. Friend will continue to make the case for better health services in Scotland from the Scottish National party Government, who receive the money from the UK Treasury but do not put all of it towards the NHS.

Diana Johnson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. I will come to points of order in a moment. We now come to—or we will come to, after the points of order, so I should more accurately say that we shall shortly come to—the motion on the estimate for the Department for International Development. The debate will led by Mr Laurence Robertson. I inform the House that I have not selected the amendment in the name of Margaret Beckett. It may also be helpful if I inform the House that I have not selected either of the amendments to the second motion. After the points of order, I will call the Minister to move the motion, but first we will treat of points of order.

Points of Order

4.37 pm

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Long-suffering rail travellers in the north of England were promised for many years that Pacer trains, described by the Transport Secretary himself as “knackered”, would be replaced by new trains by December 2018. Before the end of 2018, the deadline became December 2019. In the weekend press, news emerged that Pacer trains would not now be replaced by then, and would be in use well into 2020.

Given the billions of pounds spent on rail investment in London and the south-east and the £1 billion-worth of new Crossrail trains sitting idle in London, this latest broken promise is extremely galling to Members of Parliament and passengers throughout the north. Have you received any indication from the Department for Transport, Mr Speaker, that it intends to make a statement on why there is to be this further delay—or does it simply not believe that people in the north deserve such an explanation?

Mr Speaker: I am bound to say to the hon. Lady that I am not aware of any intention on the part of a Minister to make a statement on the matter in the Chamber. Certainly I have received no approach, to the best of my knowledge. I think that if I had been written to about it, I would know, and I don't, so I haven't. Let me say to the hon. Lady, however, that if she wishes to give voice further to her concern about this matter—as the indefatigable representative of Kingston upon Hull North constituents that the House knows her to be—there will be plenty of opportunities for her to do so. I have a feeling that she will be troubling the scorers on the matter for some time to come, irked and aggravated by the decision as she palpably is.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. As you will have noticed, the sun has actually been out over the last few days, and you will know that one of the major causes of skin cancer is exposure to the sun. You might have noticed that Glastonbury has been giving out free high-factor sunscreen to everybody at the festival. Those in the armed forces get given free sunscreen because it is a chargeable offence to suffer from sunburn, yet our police officers and the security staff who stand outside this building, often for many long hours in the blazing sun, get no free sunscreen from the Palace authorities. Can you, Mr Speaker, make sure that that is now available in your capacity as Chairman of the House of Commons Commission? If you were thinking of going to Wimbledon at any point in the next fortnight, I wonder whether you might have a word with the authorities there to make sure that people there too do not end up with burnt faces and burnt ears and that there is free high-factor, high-quality sunscreen available to all.

Mr Speaker: That is a very useful public information notice as well as a request by the hon. Gentleman. I shall always profit by his counsels; I am always grateful to him for his advice, and he speaks on this subject with a passion, knowledge and authenticity that are respected across the House. All levity aside, he makes a very serious point, and I am particularly preoccupied with

[Mr Speaker]

the situation of the staff here. I may or may not make my way to SW19 over the next fortnight, and if I do I will bear in mind his advice, although I am not sure mine will be especially welcome. But as far as the House is concerned the hon. Gentleman makes a good point, and I would like to reflect on that. Of course people should take proper precautions to protect themselves from exposure; it is possible to enjoy the sun, but to do so safely, and that does require appropriate factor cream regularly applied, as the hon. Gentleman knows. I will come back to the hon. Gentleman on the point relating to the staff, but it will have been heard by officials, with whom I will discuss the matter.

Estimates Day

[6TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Department for International Development

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2020, for expenditure by the Department for International Development:

(1) further resources, not exceeding £3,631,122,000 be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 2154 of Session 2017–19,

(2) further resources, not exceeding £1,923,101,000 be authorised for use for capital purposes as so set out, and

(3) a further sum, not exceeding £5,760,680,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

4.41 pm

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): I thank the Backbench Business Committee for approving this debate today. I would also like to put on record my thanks to my right hon. Friends the Members for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) and for Witham (Priti Patel) and the Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), for helping me to prepare for this debate; the experience they have and the work they have done is admirable.

I have long had an interest in international development, and I think probably it comes from the fact that I certainly feel very lucky to have been born in this country. I did nothing to deserve to be born in this country. We have food, we have clean water, we have medical services, and we have education, which very many people across the world do not have; in other words, we have the building blocks to be able to progress in our lives and to normally live beyond childhood, while many in the world do not have that opportunity.

I would go as far as to say that my interest in international development and in trying to help the world's poorest people was one of my main motivations for wanting to enter the House of Commons in the first place, and I have had the privilege of being able to witness the effects of the aid that the United Kingdom has provided. I am aware it goes across the world, but my particular interest has been in Africa and I have the honour of being chairman of the all-party group on Ethiopia and Djibouti. I have been to some very rural areas in Ethiopia as well as the cities and have seen the benefits our aid brings to so very many people.

We should look at the achievements we have made in this country through our official development assistance fund, which is now, I am very proud to say, 0.7% of our gross national income. We have donated more than £77 billion since 2013, when we set that target.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): I am glad that my hon. Friend has introduced the debate in this way. He has mentioned the 0.7%, and if anyone says that we cannot afford 70p out of every £100 of our wealth, they are wrong. We should be able to look after our own people and make this contribution to meet the United Nations target, which we have started to meet rather late but before most other countries.

Mr Robertson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. For a prosperous country—we are supposed to be the fifth largest economy in the world—that is a small amount to be asked to pay, but it has an enormous impact across the world.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I wholeheartedly agree with what has just been said. Our aid has made a huge impact. Under both Labour and Conservative Governments, there has been cross-party consensus on this. It is one of the few issues on which we have consensus in this House, and it is a good job we do, because it has made a huge difference. I chair the all-party parliamentary group on HIV/AIDS, and our aid through institutions such as the Global Fund has made a huge difference. I want to commend the Government for their fantastic announcement of £1.4 billion for the Global Fund in recent days. In 2000, when I was starting to work on these issues, there were only 2 million people globally receiving antiretroviral treatment for HIV; today, that figure is 22 million. This is literally life-saving treatment that we have been able to provide through our aid.

Mr Robertson: The hon. Gentleman is right to talk about the cross-party support for this issue in the House. The 0.7% target goes back a very long time, and I am pleased that it was a Conservative-led Government who actually reached it, but it would be churlish not to recognise the work that Tony Blair did, for example, in highlighting the issue, and I am pleased to do so. Many other leading politicians have also done work on this. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point, and I will come back to it in just a minute.

I mentioned the fact that we had given that £77 billion in aid since 2013, but what does that actually mean? It means that we have helped more than 1 billion children across the world to get an education, as well as helping more than 37 million children to be immunised and more than 40 million people to have access to clean water. These are things that we in this country take for granted, but our aid has helped people in those ways across the world and I am very proud of that.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman also agree that a particularly important facet of our investment in children's education has been the investment in the education of girls? If we invest in girls' futures, we invest in the future of the whole community and the whole country. Does he agree that the efforts we have made in that regard have been admirable and must be sustained and indeed increased?

Mr Robertson: I entirely agree with the hon. Lady on that point; I am glad that she has raised it. In rural areas in Ethiopia, I have witnessed situations in which girls have had to walk a number of miles every day to collect water to bring back to their families. That is neither sustainable nor efficient. It keeps the girls away from school, it prevents any progress from being made in the neighbourhood and it is wrong. We have to do a lot more to help in those situations. I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady on that. Of course it is important that boys and girls attend school, and there are distractions to keep boys and girls from attending school in such countries, but we really have to address that and get over it; otherwise, we will not make the kind of progress that we want to make.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech, particularly in his focus on education. I am the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on disability. Does he agree that in many developing countries, children with disabilities still find it too challenging to get to school and that we must focus on those extremely vulnerable children, who are often kept behind closed doors and never seen? We must ensure that they get every opportunity in life and that, in line with the sustainable development goals, we leave no one behind.

Mr Robertson: Absolutely. The hon. Lady makes an extremely good and useful intervention. As many hon. Members have done, I have seen the disabilities that some children have that prevent them from attending school or from doing very much in life, really. For example, we see children who cannot stand up because their limbs are damaged, and children with cataracts who are blind because they cannot get a simple operation. That situation really is unacceptable. So, if our aid can help reduce such incidents, it really is worth doing. We have to increase aid, and we have to improve so much.

It is a sad fact that we are one of only eight countries that actually meet the aid target. Other countries do give a lot of money, but few actually meet the target, and we need to work with and encourage others to do so. The situation is a bit like reducing emissions in this country, because we produce only 2% of the world's emissions, but if other countries are not going to play their part, we are not going to get the progress that we need. The situation is exactly the same with aid.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): It is appropriate to follow up on the contribution from the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), because our international aid and development programmes are largely centred in East Kilbride. That is yet more evidence of the strength and vitality of this Union that we enjoy and the blessing that it is across the face of the earth.

Mr Robertson: Absolutely. I am sure that Madam Deputy Speaker would not want me to go too far down that road, but it is a good point.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is also in our national interests to keep up our investment in international aid? By making poorer countries more stable, we improve the world's stability. By tackling diseases, we stop them spreading to our own country. If we are to fight climate change, we need to fight it globally. Aid is not just the right thing to do morally, but it is in our interests to continue it.

Mr Robertson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We could take things even further because, in the commercial sense, if countries across the world are richer, that affords us new markets as well, which is in addition to the humanitarian reasons for aid that she rightly outlines.

DFID's budget is around the £14 billion mark. While it is certainly a small part of our overall income, as was raised earlier, it is still a considerable amount of money. The aid budget has its critics and criticisms, of course, and I will come on to one or two of them, because some may be valid. Perhaps we can improve matters, and we

[Mr Robertson]

should certainly never be satisfied with where we are, because we can always do better. We all have constituents who point out that some of our schools and our police are short of money, so if we are going to spend money abroad, helping people who are not from this country, then we must ensure that we spend it wisely and effectively, and this estimates day debate is about addressing the budget in the wider sense.

It is worth touching on exactly how aid works. This may come as a surprise to some, but DFID itself spends around 75% of the aid budget, with the other 25% being spent by other Departments, such as the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for Health and Social Care and the Home Office, and other outside organisations. Some of the aid that we provide is bilateral and some is multilateral, and I will come on to the difference in a minute.

The National Audit Office report, which came out just a few days ago, says that most of our aid is going to the right places and having a great effect, but it did point out that there is room for improvement. As I go through one or two areas in which we can improve, the observations that I will make are not in any way a criticism of our approach of our aid policy because, as the House has heard, I am supportive of it.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman for being so generous in giving way. He is making a good point, but does he not agree that part of the reason why DFID is so good at focusing its share of the aid is that it is a discrete Department and not just part of another bigger Department? Does he share my concern that some right hon. and hon. Members have talked about amalgamating DFID into the FCO? Will he perhaps commit on the House's behalf to talk to the candidates for the leader of the Conservative party to assure the House that DFID will continue no matter who wins the upcoming contest?

Mr Robertson: The hon. Lady raises a good point. I think it was Tony Blair who set up the separate Department, which provided it with focus. Thinking back before that, however, most right hon. and hon. Members would acknowledge the excellent work carried out by Baroness Chalker, even though the Department was then within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

I suppose there are two ways of looking at it. When I travel and meet DFID officials abroad, I often meet officials from the FCO, and maybe also from other Departments linked to it. Overall, I agree with the hon. Lady that this is such an important subject, and it obviously should have close ties to the Foreign Office, and probably to other Departments, too. As I say, 25% of the overseas aid budget is spent by other Departments, so there has to be a close link. I am probably persuaded that that should be the case. I will talk to the successful leadership candidate, whoever they are, about this issue in due course.

I mentioned that other Departments spend about 25% of the aid budget, and that proportion has increased significantly—it was 11.4% in 2013. That spending can be a good thing, because it draws on the expertise of those other Departments. In certain cases, money is

provided that might not have been so quickly forthcoming if those Departments had to queue outside the Treasury for it.

However, the spending raises the question of whether these other Departments quite have DFID's experience and expertise in delivering aid. The Department of Health and Social Care, for example, might be expert in handling health-related issues—I am sure it is—but DFID has that experience of delivering projects abroad. There is a question mark over whether we have got to the right level. Hopefully the Minister will give us some guidance.

Stephen Doughty: The hon. Gentleman is generous in giving way again. Does he agree that that underlines the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) on the importance of having DFID leading on this? DFID has that expertise and experience as a separate Department and, actually, some of the criticisms levelled by the National Audit Office and others—I am not an aid purist, and some important aid spending needs to be done in conjunction with other Departments, such as through the Stabilisation Unit, International Climate Finance and other institutions—have been levelled at spending when it has been done well but without the remit of DFID. We need to see DFID in a leading role, using its expertise to ensure our money is spent effectively.

Mr Robertson: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, and I look forward to hearing whether the Minister thinks that 25% of the budget being spent by other Departments is about right, too high or too low. I have not necessarily come with answers. I am asking as many questions as I am giving answers, but that is the nature of this debate.

This spending also raises the question of transparency, because the other Departments do not have the same legislative requirements. For example, the International Development (Reporting and Transparency) Act 2006 requires DFID to report to Parliament on where the money is spent, but other Departments are not covered by the Act.

The targeting of aid is something else that concerns some people. In 2017, the last year for which figures are available, DFID spent 66% of its bilateral aid budget on the world's poorest countries, but the other Departments spent only 25% of their bilateral budgets on the least developed countries. There are always explanations and more details behind these figures but, on the face of it, we need to look at it and ask questions.

Through bilateral aid, we have complete control of the projects we fund; and through multilateral aid, we work with other agencies and do not have the same control, and the priorities of those other agencies might be slightly different from ours. There are different nuances within each of those headings, too. This is never a simple subject.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): Before the hon. Gentleman launches into multilateral aid, may I take him back to the point raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) and for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty)? In my experience, since 2010 it is the Treasury that has been the principal driver of other Departments increasingly

being allowed to count some of their spending as international development spend. To what extent has the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) already had conversations with Treasury Ministers about the comprehensive spending review they are preparing for the next Conservative Prime Minister? I suspect the Treasury has already done work to try to identify ways to get that 25% figure even higher.

Mr Robertson: The hon. Gentleman raises a good point. I have not had those discussions with the Treasury, but they are certainly discussions we will need to have. I raise this with the Minister to find out her view, because this is increasing quite a lot—it has more than doubled in the past few years, so the hon. Gentleman is right to raise the point. This is why I make the point about spending in the countries that most need it and targeting it at the poorest people in the world. That is what most people would want us to do. There can be knock-on effects that come to this country, but the primary concern must be about helping the world's poorest people.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): On the comment just made by the former International Development Minister from the Opposition, surely the issue is not just the 0.7% but the rules. Any expenditure undertaken by other Departments must of course be within the rules; otherwise, the Treasury would have a fit, as it would have to find the additional money if spending were undertaken outside those rules. The important thing is that this expenditure should be well spent—a point I hope to make if I catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. It does not matter which Department is spending any expenditure that falls within the rules that Britain has accepted so long as it is spent well.

Mr Robertson: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that intervention. He has expert knowledge of this issue. We had a meeting before this debate and it could have gone on a lot longer because we discussed so very many things. Where this spending goes does matter, and it does matter that there is accountability and transparency. That is the important point.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): What concerns me is the issue of which partners we use to deliver our aid. DFID has great relationships with large trusted partners, but I am always concerned that smaller, more effective organisations operating in the most dangerous places, such as the Hands Up Foundation, do not get the funding and support from DFID that they need. Does my hon. Friend agree on that?

Mr Robertson: My hon. Friend raises a good point. It is very important to consider the partners we use. Accusations are made that some of the partners—the intermediaries—might take too big a chunk of the money before that money gets to ground level, and there are concerns about that. With multilateral aid, who we deal with is certainly one of the issues. Sometimes these bodies do not have the same priorities as we have.

Victoria Prentis *rose—*

Mr Robertson: If my hon. Friend will allow me, I will deal with this immediately. The bilateral aid of DFID was 62.6%, as against multilateral aid of 37.4%, and this has remained steady over the past few years. However,

that is still a lot of money going on aid that we do not fully control. There are some good projects out there. The World Food Programme is an excellent example of multilateral aid that saves lives. The hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) mentioned the money going to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and today we had the announcement of this being £467 million a year. As I understand it, that is multilateral aid, so there are some excellent projects we are involved in, but there are delays in reporting by the multilateral agencies, which impedes our ability to analyse the work they do.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Gentleman, an old friend, knows of my passion for cutting road deaths worldwide; this is the biggest killer, especially of children and young people, and mainly of poorer ones. He knows of my role as chair of the World Health Organisation's Global Network for Road Safety Legislators. Does he agree that bilateral and multilateral approaches are both good in the right contexts and with the right partners? We are doing work in the real target countries, and in some countries this can be bilateral but often we are looking for a number of partners.

Mr Robertson: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman, to whom I pay tribute for all his work in that respect. I shall come back to that issue in a moment.

Let me turn to the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, which was set up by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell). It has identified some spending by, for example—this is only an example, and it is not the only one—the Newton Fund, which the commission said

“is not promoting the best use of ODA and some projects appear not to be within the ODA definition.”

That is of some concern. The commission lists some of the projects about which it is concerned. Sometimes when one looks into the projects and gets into the details, one finds they actually do help people who need help, but the headlines that they receive do not necessarily suggest that. Nevertheless, we have to be careful, because we all have constituents who want to see that their hard-earned money they pay in taxes goes to the right target.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): My hon. Friend has just made an important point. It is absolutely right that we fund multilateral projects, and some of the organisations involved, such as the UN, are huge. In respect of the big multilateral projects it is easy to pick on the tiniest point about where some aid might go and blow that up into a huge headline, and that is what our constituents hear. We are not going to change that in the press—the newspapers will not print a headline that says, “All the planes took off on time yesterday”—but it is the House's responsibility to emphasise exactly what my hon. Friend is talking about.

Mr Robertson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention, which enables me to move to another point. Contrary to what is sometimes said, we do not actually finance corrupt dictators in other countries. Another point raised—I have taken so many interventions that I cannot remember who made it—was that it can be difficult to get aid to the people who need it most.

[Mr Robertson]

For example, people who live in war-torn countries are going to be desperate and will need help of one form or another. The people who live in countries with very poor Governments that have dictatorships need help. It is not the dictator who needs it, but the people who live in those countries certainly do need help. The trick is to get under the radar to help those people, but that should not be confused with the financing of wicked dictators. The two situations are different.

Gareth Thomas: Is not another benefit of multilateral aid that it enables a country such as Britain to help by combining with other countries to get significant sums of money to the poorest people, with a minimum impact on that country? I think of a country such as Ghana, which has lots of poor people and a civil service with nothing like the capacity that our great civil service has. Imagine if all 27 EU countries that give money through the European development fund suddenly decided that they wanted not to give money to Ghana through Europe but to do it themselves. The Ghanaian civil service would suddenly have to deal with all those 27-plus reporting lines. Is not one of the benefits of multilateral aid that it minimises the administrative burden of getting aid to the very poorest in the country in question?

Mr Robertson: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Of course, countries working together has to be the way forward, but the system really does have to be accountable, transparent and delivered efficiently and effectively. When it is those things, it is obvious that countries working together is a good thing.

All that takes me to another point: we all want humanitarian assistance to be provided—I certainly do, and we certainly do provide it—and it is easy to justify that, but we also want to see countries being given the building blocks and facilities to develop. The hon. Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas) gave the example of the civil servants in Ghana. Tax-raising and collecting authorities in such countries are important. The problem is that it is sometimes difficult to explain to our constituents the difference between development aid and humanitarian aid. It is not always easily understood. It is important that we help countries to build the capacity to move forward. The old adage about giving a man or woman a fish and feeding them for a day or teaching them how to fish so that they can feed themselves for a lifetime is absolutely right. We have to find ways to do that, or we will never make the progress in the world that we all want to see.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): On that important aim, let me say that, like me, the hon. Gentleman probably attended the Fairtrade Fortnight event, which looked at the impact that DFID has when it works with developing countries to ensure that producers receive fair prices for cocoa through the She Deserves campaign. Does he agree that that kind of intervention is vital not just at a governmental level but at an individual level, ensuring that families, and women in particular, are able to support and sustain their families?

Mr Robertson: I totally agree with the hon. Lady. We have had campaigns in this country to get fair milk prices for our farmers, so it is certainly right that we

should ensure that farmers and traders in other countries get fair trade as well as fair prices. It is very, very important indeed.

Mr Sheerman: The hon. Gentleman is being very kind in giving way. He will know the sterling work that my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) has done in this area. She, like all of us here, absolutely believes not only in tackling world poverty but in the absolute scrutiny and accountability that go with it. For all of us in this field, they are our watchwords, our doctrine. When the newspapers accuse us of being do-gooders who do not care, it is just not true. My hon. Friend is a champion of that sort of scrutiny.

Mr Robertson: It is right that we do scrutinise things and that we do demand transparency, but it is also right that we put things in perspective as well. I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman.

I want to try to draw my remarks to a close, because, presumably, lots of hon. and right hon. Members wish to speak. In summary, I want to see an increase in the amounts going to the least developed countries and an increase in transparency, certainly in non-DFID and multilateral spending. I also want us to have a bit more control over, and understanding of, where the multilateral aid actually goes. We need to be aware that when we leave the European Union—and I will say “when”—we will get something like 10% of our budget back. We then have to decide where that goes. I am sure that there is no shortage of places or projects for which we want to provide.

In conclusion, I am very proud of our aid budget and of the fact that we have saved and transformed so many lives. The suggestions that I have made and the queries that I have raised today in no way challenge my commitment to our aid budget, but I want to make sure that we help even more people even more effectively than we already are. Most people want to see the United Kingdom, one of the richest countries in the world, helping the poorest people in the world, but they do have a right to make sure that their hard-earned money—it is not our money, it is theirs—actually goes to the people who need it the most. Much of it already does, but I think that all of it needs to do so. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak in this debate.

5.13 pm

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson). I congratulate him on securing this opportunity to scrutinise in the main Chamber DFID and its work. I agreed with every single word that he said. His speech demonstrated that there is strong cross-party support for this commitment.

It is opportune that we debate the Department's estimates this year because we are in the 50th anniversary year of the Pearson commission, which was undertaken by the World Bank and which first suggested a commitment of 0.7% of gross national income for countries to follow. The United Kingdom met that target in 2013. As the hon. Gentleman rightly reminded us, we are alone among the major economies in the world in achieving that target and one of just eight countries to have done so.

The cross-party commitment is incredibly important. I agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about the importance of the 0.7% commitment and the importance of DFID as a stand-alone Department—a voice for development in the British Cabinet, but also a strong British voice in international institutions. DFID has earned, rightly, enormous praise in international institutions as a strong leader on development. I also agree with him that those of us who support the 0.7% target and DFID have an added responsibility to demonstrate value for money, to call to task when there is not value for money, and to ensure that every penny of taxpayers' money that goes to international development is spent wisely and efficiently.

Another point that we should make, although it is not a focus for today, is that if we are to achieve the sustainable development goals—the ambitious Agenda 2030 programme to which the world is committed—aid alone will not get us there. Aid will be a fraction of the resources required to achieve those goals around the world, but especially in the poorest countries. Mobilising other forms of capital, including private sector investment, will be vital. I strongly agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is vital that we assist those countries to develop strong tax collection systems so that they can collect taxes from domestic taxpayers and international companies operating there.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely important point. Does he agree—this has been brought up by the International Development Committee, which he so ably chairs—that what the UK needs in addition to DFID, or perhaps inside or alongside DFID, is a development bank, which so many other major economies have but we do not?

Stephen Twigg: I am delighted to take that intervention from my friend the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), whom we miss on the Committee. He is an extremely eloquent and powerful voice for international development in this House and beyond, not least through his role in the World Bank parliamentary network. I am very sympathetic to his point about having our own development bank. I have just come from an event with the Commonwealth Development Corporation, which performs some of those functions, but I know that he argues for a distinctive UK development bank, and I hope that he will have an opportunity to elaborate on that later in the debate.

I will comment briefly on five areas, all of which were covered by the hon. Member for Tewkesbury: humanitarian versus development; multilateral versus bilateral; localisation and small organisations; scrutiny; and addressing some of the issues with non-DFID official development assistance.

We know that the world is facing some huge crises. Some of them are global, such as climate change, and some are a consequence of natural disasters, but many of them are man-made—person-made—and often a consequence of conflict. We look at Syria, Yemen, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and the crisis affecting the Rohingya people of Burma, most of whom now live in neighbouring Bangladesh. In that context, the distinction between what is a response to a humanitarian situation and what is development is increasingly irrelevant. People are escaping conflict and

living as refugees or internally displaced people for large parts of their lives. Children are spending their entire childhoods displaced. They need humanitarian assistance, but they and their communities also need development support.

That is why the International Development Committee has focused so much on the importance of investing in global education. As the Minister well knows, we have consistently called on the Government to devote a larger part of the UK's development assistance to education. I welcome the commitment that she made recently—at the last but one DFID Question Time—to the UK increasing our commitment to Education Cannot Wait, the multilateral fund aimed at supporting children and young people in emergency situations. I encourage her to put today, or quite soon, a figure on that commitment—and for it to be a high figure—because the earlier we make a pledge on Education Cannot Wait, the more likely other donors are to follow so that we can ensure that that excellent fund can play its part to support education in emergencies.

That brings me on to the broader issues around multilaterals and bilaterals that the hon. Member for Tewkesbury set out fully. First, let me strongly echo my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty): we hugely welcome the commitment that was made on the Global Fund over the weekend. It is really excellent news that the Government have made that commitment to replenishment, and have made it early, which has lessons for replenishments in other areas and again demonstrates strong leadership in this field. The last-but-one Secretary of State—I think we are on the fourth Secretary of State since I took over the Chair of the Committee four years ago—oversaw the multilateral development review. That was a very thorough piece of work by the Department looking at the relative strengths of different multilateral institutions and showing that some of those working in the health field, notably the Global Fund, came out very strongly.

Interestingly, other institutions that came out very strongly—the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel) oversaw the review—were the European ones, including the European Commission. I have been encouraged by the responses that we have had from Ministers about the issues that we will face in the event of Brexit and about ensuring that the excellent programmes that are provided through European institutions, like the European development fund, do not suffer as a result of Brexit. What we should have uppermost in our minds is the needs of those who are benefiting from those programmes. I urge the Minister, and the Government more generally, in deciding whether to continue to work closely with and fund European development programmes after Brexit, to follow the best evidence as to what is good for the beneficiaries. I hope that whoever the Prime Minister is, the Government will not be guided by an ideology that says, “We can't work with European institutions.”

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Harriett Baldwin): The hon. Gentleman is making an important point. Would he also urge those on the EU side of the debate to leave their ideology aside and, where there are fantastic non-governmental organisations from the UK that could deliver some of these programmes, to ensure that they can continue to do so?

Stephen Twigg: I absolutely agree with the Minister on that. It is very important that, if we are no longer in the European Union, British NGOs are still able to apply for these sorts of programmes. If they are best suited to deliver them, it is absolutely right that they should have that opportunity.

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech. Further to the point that the Minister made, are we not in a very strong position, when we leave the European Union, to decide for ourselves—in the same way that the multilateral aid review takes place—which of the programmes that the European Union is delivering are worthy of our support, and support them? Then, where there are programmes that we perhaps do not choose to support, we can use our money in a different way, giving us the flexibility always to go where the money is best spent.

Stephen Twigg: I agree. I am keen to emphasise that the Government's own reviews suggest that most of these European-run programmes are good, so there is a strong likelihood that we would, if given the opportunity, volunteer to remain part of them, but the right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that we would have more flexibility in terms of any programme that we might not want to support, and that would free up some money.

Stephen Doughty: I very much hope that, whatever happens on Brexit, we will be contributing to those European programmes that have been so well regarded.

Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the crucial things about having DFID as a separate Department with a Cabinet-rank Secretary of State has been our ability to influence and shape global institutions? Having a Secretary of State going to World Bank board meetings, attending sessions of the Global Fund and attending crucial UN meetings has given us greater influence, not just through our money but through political investment. That is why we need to ensure that we have a strong, separate Department with a Cabinet-rank Secretary of State.

Stephen Twigg: I absolutely agree. When DFID was created in 1997, the UK governorship of the World Bank shifted from the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the Secretary of State for International Development. That was absolutely the right thing to do. It has given us a strong voice in these multilateral organisations, including the World Bank.

Let me comment briefly on the three other areas that I identified—first, localisation. The hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) made this point earlier, and it is very important. We frequently take evidence from organisations that say that it can be hard for a smaller company or smaller non-governmental organisation to get access to some of DFID's contracts and programmes. That applies whether those companies and NGOs are in this country or in other countries. Greater opportunity for those smaller organisations to access programmes is important.

Alongside that, it is important that we see more autonomy for DFID's country offices. I was interested to listen to the Secretary of State when he came to the Committee last week, because he was proposing something quite radical in terms of greater autonomy for the country offices. He made an important point—it is

something we said in one of our reports—about the concern that, in recent years, DFID has lost some of its in-house expertise in certain areas and made itself much more reliant on contracting for that expertise. Indeed, many of the people now getting the contracts used to be the in-house experts. The Secretary of State contrasted how much DFID spends on specialist country advisers on education or climate change with some of the other donors who spend a lot more. I welcomed him saying to us that he would look at that again, and all power to his elbow.

Mr Sheerman: My hon. Friend knows that I have boundless admiration for him as Chair of the Select Committee. He mentioned localism and smaller groups. There are a lot of fashions. Something less fashionable but none the less effective is cutting road deaths. In the developing world, the loss of a breadwinner or the breadwinner becoming injured or an invalid for life is a sure path to poverty. I have lobbied him to look at road deaths and casualties. Rather than the bigger, more glamorous issues, will he look again at something like that, which is very effective?

Stephen Twigg: I thank my hon. Friend. He is tireless. He has lobbied me privately to do that and I do not blame him for lobbying me publicly. There are other members of the Committee here who can bear witness, so we will consider that. We have been looking at the global goals, which make reference to cutting road deaths, and we have the voluntary national review later this month. I can give an undertaking that my good friend, the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham), the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) and my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) and I will raise that when we are in New York later this month—Whips permitting—to attend the voluntary national review.

As the hon. Member for Tewkesbury said, aid spending is quite widely and deeply scrutinised, and rightly so. It is scrutinised in the media and by the public. Like all other areas of Government spending, it is scrutinised by the National Audit Office. We also have the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, established when the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) was Secretary of State, which is a very powerful lever for improvement in our system.

Alongside that scrutiny—this is something we are focusing on more as a Committee—we need to get better at hearing the voices of those who are beneficiaries of aid and those who are working in the field. That was brought into sharp focus by the issues around sexual exploitation and abuse that arose last year. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire, who has been raising that issue for years, well before *The Times* coverage began last February. It brought to light the failure of the aid sector, including those of us who scrutinise it, to hear and to create opportunities for those who live in some of the poorest countries in the world to have their voices heard about the impact of aid—hopefully when it is positive, but also, in this extreme case, when it is negative.

James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way; this is the second speech I have heard by him today, having been at his CDC speech. On that issue, and particularly sexual

exploitation, we are clearly out of touch—having served twice on the Committee, I include myself in this—with what is going on on the frontline. I understand that Voluntary Service Overseas, which I associate more with students and what are now called gap years, offers opportunities for more mature people. Instead of going on a typical Committee visit where everyone goes to one place, would it be possible to starburst out and use an organisation such as VSO to be in the ditches, in the huts and at the delivery units and warehouses, keeping our ear to the ground—not with any fixed purpose, but genuinely to listen and engage? As we all know from our constituency visits, that is sometimes when we get the most powerful evidence.

Stephen Twigg: I thank the hon. Gentleman, who served with distinction on the Committee until relatively recently. This is always a challenge when we undertake visits, because we are there to scrutinise how the money is being spent, so we are often somewhat in the hands of DFID about where we go, but there is a case to separate ourselves from that sometimes to get to hear those voices and to work with organisations such as VSO, so I thank him for that suggestion.

The final thing I want to address is what the hon. Member for Tewkesbury focused on, which is the fact that roughly 25% of official development assistance now goes not through DFID, but through other Government Departments. He made the case well. He asked whether it is too high or too low. I think the test is not so much whether it is too high or too low. For me, the test is whether it is as effective as the money spent through DFID. The current DFID permanent secretary, Matthew Rycroft, when he was before us a few months ago, said he felt that the DFID share should not go below 75%. That sounds about right to me and I think that is about where it is at the moment.

DFID has an important role to play as a driver of all the spending, and we have said as a Select Committee that DFID should sign off all ODA spending, including what goes through other Government Departments. We were supported in that in a recent report by the TaxPayers Alliance, which recognises that DFID has a stronger record than the other Government Departments. For me, it comes down to this. When we look at the Newton Fund, which the hon. Gentleman referred to; the prosperity fund; the conflict, stabilisation and security fund; or individual programmes by other Government Departments, are they absolutely focused on poverty reduction and, in particular, on creating jobs and livelihoods in the poorest parts of the world? Those programmes are perfectly capable of delivering that, and some of them do, but I do not think that is yet in the DNA of those other Government Departments in the way that it is in the DNA of DFID. By putting DFID in the driving seat, we can ensure that that is the case.

I am really pleased to have had the opportunity to speak in this debate. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman again. I finish by mentioning again the sustainable development goals and the voluntary national review that we will undertake this month. There is an opportunity here for us to ensure that we take these important issues out there and engage and re-engage with the Great British public. I think there is a huge generosity in the British public—that is seen in the charitable donations when there are appeals during emergencies—but there

is a scepticism about whether we are really getting value for money in aid spending. I believe, based on the evidence, that in most cases we are, but we have an opportunity as parliamentarians, on a cross-party basis, to get out there and persuade our constituents and the wider public that some fantastic things really are being done in their name.

5.32 pm

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I am most grateful to have an opportunity to contribute to this debate, and indeed to follow the Chairman of the International Development Committee, the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), who does the job so very well and in such an open and transparent way. I draw the House's attention to my interests, which are documented in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

In discussing these estimates, I want to make the point that DFID is one of the most transparent Departments of State. Almost all its expenditure, from a very low level, is in the public domain. When it comes to transparency and the ability really to scrutinise where money is going, DFID is not surpassed by many, if any, Departments in Whitehall. I am particularly pleased about the level of agreement, although we must be wary when the House of Commons appears to agree in almost every corner—we must remember the words of the late Harold Macmillan, who said that when the House of Commons is in complete agreement, there is probably something wrong—so we must maintain self-criticism in spite of such agreement. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) on launching this debate, and doing it with his customary efficiency, good sense and judgment.

I am very pleased that the issue of development has not been caught up in the leadership election that my party is going through, and that what I would call the David Cameron development consensus continues to motivate and define British policy in this very important area. With all the Brexit distractions, global Britain is something that, across the House, we are very keen to see driven forward in the post-Brexit era. In many ways, the progress being made at the moment in respect of global Britain is almost entirely in this area, as I will come on, I hope, to demonstrate.

The Department for International Development contains many leading international experts who are respected around the world. It is important to underline just how respected this relatively new Department is. Hon. Members of all parties have emphasised this afternoon the importance of its remaining a separate Department. I do not think that anyone is suggesting that it should not be a separate Department, but let us be clear that it does not need to be part of another Department, because of the National Security Council. That is the link between diplomacy, development and defence. The policy is beaten out and agreed there, and that provides the right level of co-ordination and underlines the importance of keeping DFID as its own area of expertise, which makes such a large contribution internationally.

United Kingdom leadership is about not just DFID, good though the Department is, but many of the academic institutions throughout the UK, which, through their academic work and thought leadership, lead on development policies around the world. Development

[Mr Andrew Mitchell]

is of huge interest to the younger generation. I am able to do a little bit of work at Cambridge University, Birmingham University and Harvard on the matter, and I am struck by how many of the next generation are united in a determination to tackle the appalling inequalities of wealth and opportunity that disfigure our world, about which our generation and theirs can do so much through technology, globalisation and so on.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): For many years, the right hon. Gentleman has made a major contribution to DFID debates and at one stage he had responsibility for the Department. Last week, it was heartening when we had a number of young people down here, talking about not only climate change but concerns about the medical welfare of people in some developing countries. They wanted to maintain the level of financing for tackling, for example, HIV. DFID also plays a major part in developing British markets for the future. That means jobs for British people. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that people tend to forget that when they look at the amount of money we spend overseas?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman makes his point.

Most of the problems that the Chair of the International Development Committee mentioned require more work and more international development. I will briefly comment on five of them. The first is migration. British development policy is designed to build safer and more prosperous communities so that people do not feel the need to migrate. The problems of migration, which are well understood and disfigure our world, need a lot more work.

The second problem is pandemics. I think that Ebola has been mentioned, as well as the tremendous announcement that the Prime Minister made in Japan about the replenishment of the Global Fund. As the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has clearly demonstrated, pandemics threaten within the next few years.

The third aspect is protectionism. There has been a coming together across the House about the dangers of protectionism and the importance of free trade in lifting the economic wealth of rich and poor societies alike.

Fourthly, let us consider terror. DFID's work in Somalia and northern Nigeria directly contributes not only to the safety of people who live in jeopardy in those countries, but to safety on our streets in Britain.

Fifthly, on climate change, DFID leadership has made a huge direct contribution to tackling something that affects the poorest people in the world first and hardest. The British taxpayer has made a huge contribution through the international climate change mitigation funds. Britain is leading work on international development around the world, and that has a huge benefit.

Alec Shelbrooke: Does my right hon. Friend agree that we come back to the problem of public perception of international aid? When we tackle climate change, disease and terrorism, that has a direct benefit to this country. Although it may be thought that diseases are thousands of miles away, they are only one plane journey away. Does my right hon. Friend share my frustration that we do not do enough to explain how taking world-leading responsibility directly benefits the UK?

Mr Mitchell: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. I would argue that all taxpayers' money spent by DFID—all the overseas development aid budget—is in Britain's national interest. It helps to make other countries safer and more prosperous, which has a direct effect on making us safer and more prosperous.

What should our priorities be now? I want briefly to mention four. First, we should recognise the importance of tackling conflict. It is conflict above all that mires people in poverty. Britain has been a huge provider of humanitarian relief in Syria—it has provided more humanitarian relief to the poor suffering people of Syria, within its borders and without, than the whole of the rest of the European Union put together, as we try to absorb the humanitarian shock of the massive failure of policy that is the Syria conflict. I am a tremendous critic of the Government's shameful policy on Yemen. Nevertheless, humanitarian aid to Yemen is helping many tens of thousands of people who, without it, would starve. If we look across sub-Saharan Africa, stretching from northern Nigeria through the Central African Republic to Sudan, where the number of displaced people is so immense, and through to the horn of Africa and up into Yemen, we see a belt of misery that is destabilising for the world. This is where international development and Britain's commitment can make a real difference.

If the first key task is tackling conflict, the second is building prosperity. That is about building good governance and having a free media. I am very pleased that the Foreign Secretary is holding an international conference to espouse the importance of a free media. We keep politicians and powerful people on the straight and narrow through having a free media and the rule of law. The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby, the Chairman of the International Development Committee, made the point that the CDC has a huge impact on building prosperity. Its annual report, published today, makes clear two extraordinary statistics. First, in 2018 alone, CDC investments—CDC is the 100% British taxpayer-owned investor of pioneer and patient capital—led directly to the employment of 852,130 people. That is an enormous number of families who have a breadwinner and who are being fed. The investments made by CDC in the poor world have led to tax of \$3.2 billion being paid into the Exchequers of those countries over the past year. That is an extraordinary impact. That money may not always be well spent once it arrives in the Exchequers of those countries, but it shows that investment in enterprises in poor countries is not only employing people but yielding tax revenue.

The third priority is the absolutely prime importance of demonstrating to our hard-pressed taxpayers that their money is really well used. We should always strive to get more out of each taxpayer pound that is spent. We owe it to our constituents, who are stumping up the money, to show them that they really are getting in 100 pence of value for every pound we spend. We cannot do too much as politicians and Ministers—the Minister, I know, will agree—to make the case and explain why the money is so well spent.

Dr Cameron: The right hon. Gentleman is making a fantastic speech, and he has great knowledge and experience in the field of international development. Does he agree that in terms of value for money, one extremely good

project is the Small Charities Challenge Fund? Local churches and organisations in our constituencies can raise money and apply for match funding to make a difference across the world both through aid and by connecting our local people with people in developing countries—schoolchildren, churchgoers and so on—which facilitates positivity around the international development budget.

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Lady makes an extremely good point. When I had responsibility for these matters, I set up the impact fund, which was effectively designed to match-fund the donations and support that individual organisations could secure. It was a way for the taxpayer to get two for one as a result. The fund probably starts at too high a level to impact on some of the projects that she talks about, but she is right that this is a very important area of development, and we should do more about it.

I was making the point about demonstrating the effectiveness of spending. I have always thought that one of the most effective ways of doing this—I said it in the last Parliament, and I think it is true in this Parliament—is to look at the way in which Britain supports vaccinations, particularly of those under five years old around the world. The critical importance of that will be clear to all Members. We were able to say in the last Parliament that the British taxpayer was vaccinating a child in the poor world every two seconds and saving the life of a child in the poor world every two minutes. Those children were suffering from diseases that, thank goodness, none of our children in Britain and Europe die from today. That is a very visual, good example of just how important and effective this taxpayer spending is.

Let me turn to my final point. There was a report about money being spent by other Departments, there was the National Audit Office report, and we have the report from the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, which I set up in 2010 and which is the taxpayer's friend. It is there to act in the interests of the taxpayer to ensure that this money is really well spent. When we set it up, many people in the development world said, "You are handing over the assessment of development to accountants, who may not always understand how long a tail there is and what makes development effective." The truth is that those of us who are tied up in the development community have to hold ourselves to the highest possible standards and always be self-critical. We often take the plaudits when we are successful, but we must also be very self-critical when things go wrong, put up our hands and try to put it right. That is what the ICAI is designed to do.

It is of great importance that the ICAI reports to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby and not to Ministers, who can sweep inconvenient truths under the carpet. It reports to the International Development Committee, which tasks it to look at issues. That gives it independence—it reports to Parliament and the legislature, not the Executive and Ministers—and that is why it is so important and why its reports are, I believe, treated with such credibility by the Committee. The recent report showed that not all Departments spend money to the same very high standards as in DFID. Indeed, we have seen examples of some Foreign Office projects in far-off places—I am thinking of a particular one in Madagascar—on which, when the press found out about

it and went to the Foreign Office to ask it to justify the spending, it said, "It's no good talking to us. It is DFID money; go and speak to DFID." That is completely unacceptable. Other Departments that spend hard-pressed taxpayers' hard-earned development money must expose themselves to the same level of scrutiny that DFID does and stand up for the money that they are spending. All Departments must take that extremely seriously.

I will draw my remarks to a close, because others want to speak. Our generation has the opportunity to make such a difference to the extraordinary discrepancies in opportunity and wealth that I described earlier, and we are doing it. It is happening under British leadership, and it is currently one of the few examples of global Britain. I think that everyone, whatever their political view and whatever their standing, should take great pride in what Britain is doing. We are driving this agenda forward, admired and respected around the world for Britain's commitment. It is cross-party; it is a British policy—not Labour, Liberal or Conservative—and we should take pride in doing that and supporting it.

5.49 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), a former Secretary of State, as he always makes a worthwhile contribution to our deliberations on DFID matters, although the David Cameron development consensus is a relatively new concept that I am not sure will catch on—but good luck! I also congratulate the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) on securing the debate.

We wait ages for DFID Ministers to come to the Dispatch Box for debates and then suddenly three debates come along at once. In the whole time I was the SNP's DFID spokesperson, between 2015 and 2017, it would just be DFID questions every six weeks; we would be lucky to get the odd statement or debate in the Chamber—I know they are kept busy in Westminster Hall. After the SDGs debate two or three weeks ago, we are back again, which is very welcome, not least as Ministers are currently looking to secure legacies for themselves. Perhaps in discussing the Department's expenditure as part of the estimates process, we can consider how Ministers might achieve that.

There is a clearly demonstrated passion on both sides of the House for the work of DFID and the value it brings around the world. Like other Members, I have had the huge privilege of visiting projects both before my election and since: peace villages in Rwanda, food security and nutrition projects in Uganda, climate change projects in Malawi—all transforming people's lives on a daily basis thanks to the support of DFID.

That is because aid works. Despite the doubts in some people's minds and the political expediency of saying otherwise, the reality is, as we have heard from speeches so far and will no doubt continue to hear, aid makes a difference around the world, which is why the 0.7% target came into existence in the first place. It was calculated in the 1970s that if all the wealthy countries contributed that proportion of their national income it would be enough to end poverty and inequality elsewhere.

In the decades since, OECD countries have not reached the target. It is commendable therefore that the UK has achieved a cross-party consensus and that the target was finally legislated for under the coalition, with massive

[Patrick Grady]

public support and after years of campaigning. I do not have the exact statistic, but we worked out how many billions of pounds had not been spent in all the decades the UK was not meeting the 0.7% target, but it has been since 2013 and that ought to continue.

Alec Shelbrooke: I am enjoying the hon. Gentleman's speech, but I would like to pick him up on something he said, because it is very important. He said the target was brought in with massive public support, and it was, but only in certain areas. The House has a responsibility always to espouse the virtues of international aid because there are many people—they contact us on email and so on—who want to get rid of it. We have to address those concerns directly and say that it is important. I always say: let's get people selling it as if it was to be abolished tomorrow. That would soon raise people up again. There is a large body of people who do not support it because they do not understand what it does.

Patrick Grady: That is fair enough, although the campaigning had gone on for years. I think back to the jubilee debt campaign, the trade justice movement and the Make Poverty History campaign, which mobilised tens of thousands of people on to the streets of towns and cities across the United Kingdom. In many ways, the climate change protest—there was one here last Wednesday—is the successor to those movements. Now is the time to tackle climate change. If we do not, the progress towards the SDGs and MDGs is likely to go backwards, which is not in anybody's interest. Those movements mobilised churches, trade unions and different parts of civil society. That sentiment still exists, and although it is quiet now, the hon. Gentleman is right that if there was a serious threat, that noise would make itself heard, just as it did in the days of the Gleneagles summit and the years after.

We have discussed how the DFID estimate is not the entirety of the 0.7% target and how we need greater scrutiny of other Departments that spend money that is counted towards it. Incidentally, the UK Government conveniently count towards it the money that the Scottish Government spend on international development, even though it is additional. Taxpayers in Scotland pay for DFID through their taxes and the Scottish Government, with cross-party support dating back to the time of Jack McConnell, choose to use a very small amount of their own budget to provide additional and often very innovative support, particularly through the grassroots links with Malawi, which I will say a bit more about shortly.

Ministers are aware of concerns that I and other Members have about the occasional double counting of money towards two separate targets: the 0.7% target for aid and the 2% for military spending. Some money is counted towards both targets. Ministers stand up and say, "Well, we don't mark our own homework. It just so happens that the money is counted by the ODA and NATO and there's not much we can do about it", but if the money is being used to hit both targets, one of the budgets must be losing out. If they are committed to the targets, the Government should make an effort to meet them both independently. If they happen to spend a bit more, that's fine, since both targets are minimums, not maximums.

I hope the Minister will take this opportunity to reiterate her and her Department's support for the aid budget, under the current definition and amount, and for the Department remaining a stand-alone facility, because, despite what some Government Members have said about how they do not know where the talk is coming from, the talk is real. The outriders for the Tory leadership campaigns, particularly that of the former Foreign Secretary, have made it clear they think there is political capital to be made from undermining or changing the role of DFID and its budget.

Aid is not a tool of soft power to be used as some political lever. It should be dispensed on the basis of need and in pursuit of internationally agreed objectives, such as the SDGs and the Global Fund—and I join others in welcoming the announcement about the replenishment of that fund. When Government talk of aid working in the national interest, the question I always put back to them is: how is meeting the sustainable development goals not in the national interest? How is the national interest different from tackling global poverty and climate change? Even from a self-interested point of view, if we want to stop the migration of people, we need to give them reasons to stay in their home countries, and access to a good education and nutrition and not having to run away from major climate disasters are very good reasons—if that is the perspective we want to take.

I want to touch briefly on the importance of the Government learning from and engaging with civil society actors. I mentioned the Scotland Malawi Partnership. I declare an interest because it provides secretariat support for the all-party group on Malawi, which I chair, and which has issued an outstanding invitation to the Secretary of State, lasting as long as is left to him, to meet the group and member organisations of the Scotland Malawi Partnership.

The hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas), who is not here, at the last DFID questions raised the idea of DFID undertaking an exercise of mapping links between local civil society organisations and counterparts in developing countries to see the added value that civil society groups in the UK bring to development. That would be worth the Department pursuing in the near future. In Scotland, the Scotland-Malawi people-to-people model suggests that more than 208,000 Malawians and 109,000 Scots are actively involved in the links between the two countries, while a 2018 paper from the University of Glasgow reckoned that 45% of people in Scotland could name a friend or family member with a connection to Malawi.

Here is an opportunity for a ministerial legacy. What more could the Government do to connect formal Government efforts with those of civil society—not just the large NGOs we are familiar with, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) suggested, the thousands of churches, schools, hospitals, universities and community and diaspora groups involved in two-way partnerships—and not just engage with them, but fund them and encourage them to think innovatively?

The last piece of DFID legislation was the Commonwealth Development Corporation Act 2017. We recognise the important role that the CDC plays in leveraging private capital into development. I wonder what a civil society equivalent might look like.

I know that Mr Speaker has not selected the amendments, but I think that the fact that amendments were tabled to the motions is an interesting indication of the way in which the estimates process is beginning to evolve. We welcome that, because when the “English votes for English laws” system was introduced, SNP Members were told that it would be through estimates that we could continue to scrutinise Government expenditure, particularly when Barnett consequentialia were involved. I do not believe that they are involved in DFID funding—as I have said, Scottish Government international development funding is separate—but, nevertheless, this is our opportunity to engage in such scrutiny. Gone are the days when SNP Members were told to sit down because they were talking about estimates during an estimates debate.

The amendment tabled to this motion was intended to put pressure on the Government by asking them to clarify their position in relation to a no-deal Brexit, and to prevent that from happening without the full approval of the House. We know that Departments, including DFID, are being touched by Brexit preparations; we know that dozens of DFID staff are being sent to other Departments to help prepare for no deal. The destabilising effect that we are seeing across Government must be a matter of concern, and it is right for us to use debates such as this to raise it and to keep the Government on their toes.

Today’s debate has enabled us to highlight the importance of DFID, but it has also drawn our attention to the risk that the Department will be downgraded, the risk that Brexit preparations will weaken its capacity, and the risk that policy progress will be stalled because Brexit continues to dominate everything. I welcome our recent opportunities for scrutiny in the Chamber, but I wonder whether those opportunities are likely to continue beyond 24 July.

6.1 pm

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): It is a genuine pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady). I was glad that, towards the end of his speech, he referred to the amendment. I must say that when I saw it I was very disappointed that we would be playing with the question of whether this Department, in particular, was to have the budget that would enable it to proceed. I listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman said, and I think I understand a bit more clearly why the signatories include a member of his party, the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law). However, I am disappointed that such an amendment should have been tabled, on any of the estimates budgets but especially on this one, because—as many Members have pointed out today—the international aid budget is attacked on a regular basis, especially in the press and especially by those wanting to cause mischief by saying that we could be spending the money elsewhere.

It is dangerous to use the aid budget as a political football in relation to our own needs. The hon. Gentleman was right to say that it must be led by objectives laid down internationally to ensure that we are all pulling in the same direction, but it is also true that this country’s contribution is a real lever of the soft power we have in the world. That is at the heart of international development.

As the international chairman of the Conservative party, I go around the world—for instance, to southern Africa and South America—and see the difference that

has been made by work of various kinds, whether it has been done through the Westminster Foundation for Democracy or through direct international development projects. The impact of that work becomes clear when one talks to Governments in other countries, as I know the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) will have done. I have an enormous amount of respect and praise for the hon. Gentleman, who has done fantastic work as Chairman of the International Development Committee, but ours is clearly a strong power, and I was disappointed by the amendment because it seemed to suggest that if we ended up leaving with no deal on 31 October, we would not have an international aid budget. If amended, the motion would effectively say, “If you leave, we will cut that budget and you will not be able to spend it.” I do not want to get into a Brexit argument now—that is not what this debate is about—but I did think it odd that those who are worried about the influence that we may lose during Brexit should also want to end the funding for one of the biggest contributors of soft power.

At the heart of international development is the fact that it is morally right. I class myself as a Christian, and the second commandment is “Love thy neighbour as thyself”, and that is how we are in this country. Whether they are Christian, Muslim, Jewish or part of any other religion, most people want to “love thy neighbour as thyself”, and to look after one another. Ours is one of the richest economies in the world, and it is nonsense to suggest that 7p out of every tenner is too much and we cannot afford to spend it. However, we must ensure that it is spent in the right way. This is almost a nationalisation of people’s charity, and we must therefore make certain that every penny is used as efficiently as possible.

I have no problem with the scrutiny that is levelled at the Department, but I do have a problem with how it is abused to try and get cheap headlines and cheap stories. I do not blame constituents who write to me saying that they think we should get rid of international aid, because they are picking that up from certain quarters, but I write back to them and explain the impact that aid has. As I said earlier, it is all very well for a headline to say, “Your international development taxes did this in, for example, the Gaza Strip: we were funding terrorist organisations”. However, that was not a bilateral project. When it comes to multilateral projects, it is right for us to be part of world-governing bodies, because if we were not, what would happen to our soft power? What will happen to our influence in the world if we say, “I was not happy about one particular project, so I am cutting the funding for everything”?

Let me touch on some matters that have been touched on before. In 2016-17, humanitarian aid made up about 15% of the bilateral budget. I believe that an area the size of the United Kingdom was flooded in Pakistan, and millions of people were displaced—some of the poorest people on earth. We should stand up and be proud of the fact that this country was there, along with other countries, giving aid when it mattered. Let us be honest about what will happen if we stop giving that aid. That is how to breed the hatred and discontent that will end up back on our own shores if we walk away from these parts of the world, saying, “Not interested, your problem, don’t care.”

That leads me to the refugee crisis that has resulted directly from the Syrian conflict. I am immensely proud of the amount of money provided by this Government—

[Alec Shelbrooke]

well, let us say “this country”, because this is not a party political issue, but something of which we in the House should be proud. As was pointed out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), this country—from this House—has given more money than the rest of Europe put together. There are 6 million people in refugee camps; imagine what would happen in those countries if we were not able to provide that money.

Back in 2016, I went to Lebanon and saw the real hardship with which it was struggling in trying to absorb people. We are well aware of the millions taken in by Turkey, which is trying to help people on its borders. The Jordanians are doing incredible work, doubling school shifts and class sizes to ensure that a generation of children who have been displaced through a brutal war do not lose their childhoods and therefore their futures. Our aid money is supporting countries which would not be able to do that work without it. I challenge anyone to come up to me and say, “No, I would rather fix the potholes in my road.” There is really no question about it.

One of the most important aspects, which has already been touched on briefly, is the work that we do in connection with government and civic society. We take for granted the way in which our country operates, and the way in which the countries around us operate. We take it for granted that we can go and do business in another country that will have the rule of law and will understand about the civil service, about who can collect the taxes and about how they will be spent, but that does not apply to many of the countries that have emerged from dictatorships and are, in relative terms, young democracies. We lead much of the world in being able to provide the necessary expertise and training.

As a result, countries such as India have developed to an extent that we have massively reduced our aid. In fact, I think we are in the low millions now as we finish off a few international development projects. However, many people say to me “We give all that money to them but they have a space programme.” That is great; however, guess where they are buying the components—guess where the trade areas have developed. We should be proud that we have put a nation of over 1 billion people in a position where it can pursue these programmes. There is still a lot of work to do, and there is a lot of poverty in India, but, again, we have moved these things forward.

Health is a very important issue, but for too many people, especially when we talk about the African continent, it is an issue that seems to be thousands of miles away and is therefore not important. But as I said to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield earlier, these diseases are but one flight away. Our Scottish colleagues will know of the brave nurse who caught Ebola and is still suffering the consequences to this day. These diseases are but one plane journey away of just a few hours: these are not distant problems that we can just ignore and say, “Nothing to do with me, gov.” These are things that could have a massive impact on our health, and this comes back to the point that this is an investment in our own country as much as anywhere else.

I understand that people get concerned when the money is being spent, and we absolutely must make sure it is spent in the most efficient ways possible, but I would argue that DFID is one of the Government Departments which spends it in the most efficient way possible and has the closest scrutiny of all Departments. Again, I do not mean to be controversial when I say this, because I do not want to demean the debate today, but we all know that there are inefficiencies in the NHS, schools and elsewhere. We may argue about where those inefficiencies lie, but according to one estimate there were £2 billion of unnecessary X-rays in 2016. In Leeds alone, over £30 million is locked up in surpluses in schools through previous management and it is not being let out so we are making cuts. We do not stand up and say, “Get rid of the school budget because millions of pounds in surplus is locked up,” or “Forget about giving any more money to the NHS because it has not worked in the most efficient way.” Of course we do not say that, but international development money seems to be the first target. Critics come straight to it and say, “It wasn’t efficient here; get rid of it, and I would rather spend it on a revenue project outside my backyard.” This just goes to show how much we have to emphasise what this money does and what it moves forward.

I wonder if the Minister can develop the following point in summing up. At the climate change lobby on Wednesday, I was asked a question by some of my constituents and I did some research at the Library. The statement made is not actually correct, but I will come on to that. It was said that 90% of our development projects use fossil fuels. I went to the Library and asked some questions, and I will read out two sections from the reply, which I think the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby) might recognise:

“Research conducted jointly by CAFOD and ODI shows that, between 2010 and 2014, the UK disbursed around £6.13 billion for energy support in developing countries, including £4.201 billion of ODA. Of this ODA support, 22% went to fossil fuels.”

That was over a four-year period. The Library response goes on to say:

“In 2017/18, 96% of UKEF’s energy support to high income countries went to renewables and 4% to fossil fuel projects. By contrast, just 0.6% of UKEF’s energy support to low- and middle-income countries in 2017/18 went to renewables and 99.4% went to fossil fuel projects.”

I ask the Minister to go away and look at where we can perhaps shift the balance in the middle to lower income countries, because clearly we want to make a big impact on climate change. My hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) said that in trying to make a difference in the world we can reduce our carbon emissions but that that is a small drop in terms of what happens; however, we have the ability in the international development budget to have a far greater reach than to just those changes we do here in climate change. The Minister may not be able to answer that point from the Dispatch Box tonight, so I ask her to go away and see whether a balance can be struck to get more renewables into those projects and move away from fossil fuels, because ultimately that will give far more sustainability to the ongoing energy needs of those countries than just bringing in what is rapidly becoming a very old technology.

The one message I would like to send tonight is that this is not just about giving away our money to poor countries; this is an investment in our own country and

in the world, and therefore in the futures of our children and ongoing generations, and that it all adds to our bigger security picture, our bigger climate change picture and our bigger moral duty, which allows us to lead this world in a way that not many countries can.

6.15 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) and to have heard the many excellent speeches and interventions of right hon. and hon. Members. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on this issue in the Chamber because it is an issue of immense importance to me and my constituents.

I believe it is incumbent on us as global leaders in this country, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, to be seen to be helping other nations where possible, especially those nations with which we have historical colonial links. The hon. Gentleman referred to our duty to set the scene for those who come after, not just in this country but elsewhere in the world where we have influence. It is my belief that there is a duty on us to lead the way, but I am also aware that there is so much need on my own doorstep and subsequently the aid we give to other countries must be limited. We must also therefore be effective with the 0.7% that we give. We must make sure that that money goes where it is needed most.

Probably everyone in this House will be aware of the phrase, “Cut your cloth to suit your clothes.” That is what international aid must be—we must do it, but in a sensible way to make the most of the cloth that we have. We must make sure that the money set aside goes to where it needs to go and is as effective as it can be.

The UK spends 0.7% of its gross national income on aid and, in the 2017 general election, the major parties in this House committed themselves to maintaining spending at that target in their manifestos. I support that. However, it is clear that we need to be cautious about how it is distributed and make sure it is done right.

The Library briefing for today’s debate, supplied by the excellent Library staff, states that the Department for International Development spends a majority of the aid budget, which is provisionally estimated at £14.5 billion for 2018. Some parliamentary Committees and other organisations have raised concerns about how effectively Departments other than DFID can deliver aid. Aid spending can be broken down into a number of functional sectors and, in 2017, the two largest sectors by spending were social services infrastructure, at 42%, and humanitarian aid, at 17%.

Hon. Members have referred to the stories we have heard over the last year and a half of senior staff members of some charities—not all, thank goodness—having been involved in terrible activities that involved sexual abuse and taking advantage of young people, including parents and single women. We need an assurance—which I think we have had from the Minister, to be fair, in statements to the House—that that can never happen again. We want to make sure that that is the case.

On charitable giving, I know very well that my constituents are hearty givers. The 2016 individual giving survey undertaken by the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action found that a large proportion of

respondents donated money to charity—89% over the last 12 months. This figure is consistently higher than UK-wide levels, which stand at 62% on average. So my constituents, per head of the population, are 27% more generous when it comes to giving. It is always good to know that people are generous and it is good to know that the people of Strangford are especially generous.

We are generous people in this House—all of us—but we are also thrifty and careful in what we do and we like to ensure that money spent is well spent. That is where I question the Department—not on what we give, but on how we give it and making sure that it goes to the right place. DFID money and assistance go to countries that have an appalling record of human rights abuses, and I ask the Minister what has been done to ensure that the money that is given to those countries can focus its way through to ethnic groups and small religious minority groups to ensure that those people actually benefit from it. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on international freedom of religion or belief, this is something that is close to my heart, and to the hearts of all those who have spoken and who will speak after me.

Some Members have referred to climate change. Last Wednesday, we had the opportunity to attend a mass rally out on the green, in which Christian Aid was very much involved. It was a pleasure to be there and to meet some of my constituents and other people from Northern Ireland who were there to encourage us as politicians to ensure that action is taken. There is an onus on us to ensure that we do our bit here, so that we can help others elsewhere. The hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell mentioned ideas on renewables for countries where sunshine is plentiful, and that might be an appropriate method in those places. This is now a regular topic of conversation in my office and my advice centre, and I think it is probably the same in everybody else’s as well, because people are genuinely interested in this subject. They want to see the rest of the world address climate issues, including the problems elsewhere that we in the west have perhaps contributed to over the years.

It is my sincerely and deeply held opinion that more money should and must be given to relief projects that enable people to self-sustain. One of the missionary bodies in my constituency that I support is the Elim Mission Church. It not only gives men, women and children a meal but teaches them the skills to enable them to earn money themselves. We were looking at projects that can be of real benefit—those are the projects we should encourage. We need to look at the funding to see whether we are facilitating people’s lives in refugee camps instead of providing them with the things they need to get into a community where they can live, work, raise a family and earn a living, and thereby be self-sustainable. That is all any of us really want to do.

I particularly want to give credit to the important work being done by WaterAid. In Northern Ireland and probably some parts of Scotland, we have some of the highest levels of rainfall in the whole United Kingdom, and we have the luxury of water on tap whenever we want it. In other parts of the world where water is a scarce commodity, WaterAid—and other charities, to be fair—are working hard to ensure that clean water, hygiene and sewage disposal are available. These things that we take for granted are all important issues. They also include job sustainability.

[*Jim Shannon*]

We all have churches and missions in our constituencies, and we are all pleased to have them. People are compassionate and understanding; they have a conscience and want to help others. The Churches in Ards include the Presbyterian Church, the Church of Ireland, the Methodist Church, the Baptist Church and the Roman Catholic Church, and they are all helping with projects across the whole of Africa and the far east. They include projects in Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Those Churches are actively involved with marvellous projects to deliver education, health and water.

Last September, I had an opportunity to be in Pakistan with a delegation from the all-party group to meet some of the leaders in Pakistan and to discuss human rights issues with them. We also discussed some of the projects that we do. We also met representatives from DFID. There is a wonderful opportunity to be involved in education programmes through the different systems that DFID has in place. There are opportunities to work alongside the Churches, the non-governmental organisations and the missionary groups to deliver education. We should use those organisations as a conduit to make that happen, because that has not been done in the way that I would like to see it being done. For instance, the universities and schools in Pakistan want to have projects in which they can work with DFID and with groups in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to look at ways whereby they can develop those projects. That would create an opportunity for those of a minority religion or members of small ethnic groups to be educated so that they, too, can apply for jobs. It is not fair that some of the Christians in the small ethnic groups are given the menial jobs such as sweeping the streets. We need to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity and that is a way of doing that.

When we are funding infrastructure projects, we need to ascertain how much goes to worthwhile projects and how much is taken up in administration. I understand that this is a difficult job, but I believe that our ambassadors in our embassies are best placed to ensure that our funding is being appropriately used. Again, I must say that I support international aid and support the Government's commitment to it—I would perhaps like to say a bit more on that—totally and fully, but I believe we must make better use of those on the ground, including the local missionaries. How can DFID work better with some of the missionaries, Church groups and people who are well placed in countries across the world to try to ensure that aid gets through to those who do not normally get it? I refer to the embassies, to the NGOs and to those who are at the frontline of need and able to help. Every penny we can give must make a difference; otherwise, it is pointless to continue to give. I look forward to hearing how DFID and the Minister intend to ensure that we are as thrifty as we are generous.

6.26 pm

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) on securing the debate. As many people have said, this is not a party political subject, and I think that is a very important part of it. I also congratulate

the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), who chairs the International Development Committee, on which I sit. It is a very interesting Committee, and many people today have made excellent speeches about the value of international development from this country's point of view.

I would also like to compliment my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), who was a distinguished Secretary of State when we first came into power in 2010. He also championed Project Umubano in Rwanda for many years, and he saw at first hand—as many of us on this side of the House did—exactly what we needed to do and how we were able to contribute to development in Rwanda. That was a valuable lesson for me before I came here, and for many of the Members of Parliament who have supported the project, which has now been completed in Rwanda. It changed the lives of a lot of people there following the terrible genocide, and it was an important lesson for us all to learn.

There have been some really good speeches today, and I do not want to cover the same ground again, so I am going to keep my remarks fairly short. I want to compliment the Minister for Africa, my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin), and the Department for starting the conference last year following the Oxfam scandal and the problems with Save the Children and sexual exploitation and abuse. I think it was well received by the aid industry, which needed shaking up, and the then Secretary of State had some good ideas as to what should happen in future. Sadly, however, the abuse continues, and we have to act firmly to produce an ombudsman that people can go to if they have problems. We also have to support the whistleblowers who feel that nobody will listen to them. They often lose their jobs following their whistleblowing, yet they are the victims.

I have spoken to the Secretary of State about this, and I think we need to have a survey to see exactly how widespread the abuse is, because we do not have a baseline. We know that what we hear is probably just the tip of the iceberg, and we need to find out the actual impact this is having on the aid industry. We do not know how it is affecting the industry, and the perpetrators need to be brought to account. The victims also need to be supported, because there are so many victims out there, and, of course, the vast majority of them are women. We need not only to help those women come to terms with what has happened to them, but to stop people going from one NGO to another without anybody sanctioning them, because they can just leave—often with a reference. I think that the situation is getting better, but it was a big problem.

We should be proud to be a global leader in international development. We were at the forefront of negotiating the sustainable development goals because, of course, David Cameron was on the high-level panel that came up with them, and they followed on from the millennium development goals. Of course, there are far more goals this time, but every single one of them will have an impact on people in the world's poorest countries, and we need to be aware of how to help them. If we do not tackle climate change soon and at scale, people in developing countries will be forced to migrate, which will be in nobody's interest if they have to keep moving from country to country. We need to address that problem, and we need to address it now.

Mention has been made of the voluntary national review, which we will be submitting to the United Nations later this month. I am disappointed that ours is one of the later submissions. The 193 member states are expected to review their national progress towards the sustainable development goals at least once, and we have left things late, but it is better late than never. Having read the draft that was published last week, I am rather disappointed that a lot of what we are saying is about international development, because the voluntary national review is supposed to be about what we are doing in this country and how we are leaving nobody behind. I want more focus on what we are doing here. We are doing a good job abroad, we are helping developing countries, and we are helping some of the poorest people in the world, but this voluntary national review is about what we are doing here. There does not seem to be enough disaggregated data or evidence from civil society groups that cater for women only. We need equality both in this country and around the world, so we need to take more evidence from civil society groups that concentrate on women-only issues.

The UN has set five focus goals for us to report on, and I know that we will be covering them in more depth. They include goals on education, work and economic growth, and reducing inequality. Education is vital for every single person in the world and, as we heard earlier, people will not get out of poverty without work. As for reducing inequality, we still see that women experience more of an impact both in this country and around the world. We need to reduce the gender pay gap. We need to help women be more successful in their careers—if they choose to do that. I have already mentioned climate action, and we need to work really hard on that. Peace and justice is another of the UN's goals. All those issues have an impact on women, and there needs to be a focus on women when we report to the United Nations. As I said, I am disappointed that we have waited so long, but it is better late than never.

I would like to see much more emphasis on what we are doing in this country. It appears that DFID has been given the lead on this, which is great because it is a fantastic Department, but what about all the other Departments? I do not think that they have taken this as seriously as they should have done from early on. The report seems a little cobbled together, yet DFID will have to lead on it now, because it is too late to do anything else. However, I want to see more emphasis on what we are doing to improve the lives of women in this country, in addition to all the fantastic work that we do in other countries.

I do not believe that this country should allow girls as young as 16 to get married with parental consent, and I am passionate about trying to change the law. Girls under 18 can only get married with parental consent, so they are not adults; they are just girls. I am told that not many people are affected by the issue, but of course there is an impact on people from other ethnic groups who will often take girls out of this country for forced marriages, which are illegal here. However, if they come back when they are 16 and the parents say, "Oh, we agree to it," there is nothing we can do. Girls Not Brides is keen to raise the age to 18, which is something that we ask other countries to do to stop child marriage, but we allow something different here, so we should be working hard to change that anomaly in the law. I am passionate

about giving girls the opportunity to carry on studying and not lose out on joining the workforce and therefore end up in much poorer situations. I want the Government to do something about that as soon as possible. It is not an international development issue, because we tell other countries not to allow children to get married, but they can come back and say, "But why should we make girls not get married until they're 18 when you allow it at 16?"

My three main things to act on are climate change—that is absolutely critical—sexual exploitation and abuse, and the minimum age for marriage. We need to be doing far more to ensure that abuse cannot exist in the aid sector any more, and we need a study to find a baseline of where we are, so that we can make things better for girls. As for marriage, if someone has to be in education or training until they are 18, how on earth can they be married? That seems a nonsense to me, so I shall continue to campaign on that until the law has been changed.

I thank you for calling me to speak, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

6.36 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): It is a pleasure and a privilege to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham), who made an impassioned speech. The three points that she mentioned are well received by all of us who understand the importance and gravity that is attached to each of them.

This has been an incredibly interesting debate for me. I stand to speak not because I claim any particular insight, experience or technical knowledge around the subject, but because what we are doing as a country in relation to expenditure on international development—this is an estimates debate after all—is the right thing for us to be doing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) spoke extremely well in introducing the debate. I was educated by the wonderful speech of the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), so I am grateful to him for his contribution. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) once again shared his long-term expertise and experience with the Chamber. I also enjoyed the speech from the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), and I recognise and respect his experience in this area from long before he came to this place. He reminded us of the Pearson commission, which was quoted by the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby. The House of Commons Library briefing states—remember that this was in 1975—that the Pearson commission

"argued that if this target"—

0.7% of gross national income—

"was met by all rich countries and accompanied by appropriate policies, aid would be unnecessary by the end of the 20th Century."

Oh, if that were only the case. Imagine if we were now celebrating the ending of aid. However, it is needed now as much as it has ever been.

I am grateful to be able to take a few minutes to celebrate the fact that we have had a cross-party debate and that there is uniform support across the House for our commitment, as a United Kingdom, to the

[Stephen Kerr]

0.7% target. That this target is enshrined in law, and that we have kept the commitment since 2013, is an expression of our national and collective commitment to playing a full part in helping the poorest people on the planet to get out of the extreme poverty that too many of them still experience and on to a path that leads towards a more prosperous future. Ultimately, I believe that will be a path of enterprise and trade.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Like me, the hon. Gentleman took part in the net zero debate last week, and we need to bring that element to international development. If we utilise our spending on renewables to bring forward new technologies, not the old carbon technologies, surely that will result in a much better outcome for these countries, including in enterprise.

Stephen Kerr: Indeed, and I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's contribution. We have been discussing many aspects of the various goals that, as a Parliament, we are united in supporting, and climate change is part of that mix.

We have been reminded that the delivery of aid is not an end in itself; it is the means by which we commit to working in partnership with global and local organisations to eradicate the conditions that trap millions of people in extreme poverty. Aid should provide a ladder, and it should be the means by which we give our brothers and sisters in less fortunate circumstances a hand up, not just a handout.

Our objective should lead to actions that ultimately lead to a day when there is no requirement for international aid on the scale that is now needed. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke), who reminded us that the case for international aid needs to be made over and over again. It is an easy headline in certain newspapers to be critical of international development, but to assume that everyone agrees with that would be a grave political mistake. We should be deeply proud that the 0.7% budget speaks loudly to the kind of country we are.

We make and keep our commitments in this country, and we are a dependable partner. If our reputation and influence in the world is based on one thing, it is based on trust. That is why the UK is recognised as a global superpower in soft power. The UK has played a principal role in the post-war era in laying the foundations of the rules-based international order. Whatever disparity there may be between the words and actions of other nations, we in the United Kingdom must be true to our word and stand by the poorest people on the planet.

I do not have the expertise and experience of others who have spoken in this debate, but I am keen to add my voice, and I think the voice of the vast majority of my constituents in Stirling, to those in this place who advocate positively for our international aid budget. It is right that the United Kingdom takes deep pride in its contribution in these areas. UK aid has a momentous global impact, but it is also right that we continue to apply all the necessary scrutiny to how our aid budget is spent and what it is being spent on, because it should be evaluated in the context of the essential work it is charged to deliver. We must measure the aid budget in terms of value for money in reaching its strategic objectives.

In other words, although we may talk about how money is spent, it is vital that we measure outcomes.

These activities, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield alluded to, cannot be viewed in isolation. It is a fundamental problem of all Governments that Departments tend to work in silos, and the work of the Department for International Development needs to be seen in conjunction with the work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The Ministry of Defence has been mentioned, but the Department for International Trade has not. There is a vital interplay between aid and our diplomatic influence, between aid and trade, and between aid and global security issues.

I, for one, welcome the Secretary of State's introduction to the voluntary national review of the progress we are making towards the global goals, which was mentioned a few minutes ago. In that introduction, he pointed out that the UK played a key role in the creation of the global goals, which are aimed at making the world a fairer, healthier, safer and more prosperous place for everyone, everywhere by 2030, and that the Government are responsible for achieving the goals here in the UK, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire, and for contributing to the goals in developing countries.

In his introduction, the Secretary of State described the goals as neatly fitting into five Ps: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. He said those five Ps cover the most pressing issues of our time.

I am privileged to have seen some of the impact of the work being done with the money devoted to international development by this House. During a trip to Kenya last summer with Malaria No More, the hon. Members for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) and for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd), my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns) and I stood on the frontline in the global fight against malaria. We visited outlying hospitals that lack even what we might consider the most basic essentials, but what they did not lack was love and compassion.

We saw mothers nursing their very poorly small children, including babies. It was a moving scene that will stay with me for the rest of my life. It did not half give us a real-world perspective of the challenges that we face, and that we obsess about in this place. It is not possible to experience what we experienced in Kenya in that one trip without leaving with two overwhelming resolves: first, never to lose sight of our need always to count our blessings; and secondly, strongly linked to that, a firm determination to do everything in our power to make sure the fight against malaria, AIDS and tuberculosis is consistently brought back to the forefront of our collective consciousness whenever and however possible.

A child dies every two minutes from malaria, and the global fight against malaria has stalled. That was part of the case for the sixth replenishment of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, and the case for investment has never been more compelling. It was with no small sense of emotion that I heard the Government's announcement at the weekend that we have committed £1.4 billion to the Global Fund over the next three years to provide life-saving therapies and treatments to more than 3.3 million people with HIV, to provide TB treatment and care for 2.3 million people, to provide 120,000 people with treatment for multi-drug-resistant TB, to distribute 92 million mosquito nets to protect children

and families from malaria, and to strengthen health systems and promote global health security.

I feel grateful and proud to say that the UK has answered the call to action, by uplifting our commitment to the Global Fund by the 15% that was asked for. The richest nations on Earth should make the same commitment, and they should keep that commitment. Two million lives will be saved because of the UK Government's announcement.

Behind these statements and commitments, I can still clearly see the dedicated community health volunteers, doctors, nurses and families we met in Kenya—the real people we need to help. Seeing the impact that the UK has made on this challenge gives me a sense of pride. Not only are the teams of specialist medics, logisticians, geographers, academics and many more mostly comprised of British subjects, but the money committed by the UK is a major contributor to the accomplishment of this work. It is also a field in which innovation is happening because of the work of UK aid and its partners. Since 2002, the Global Fund has helped save more than 27 million lives and reduced deaths from the killer infectious diseases of AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria by more than a third in the countries in which it invests.

We must not be in any doubt about what other countries are doing in international development. China has its belt and road initiative—BRI—which is about much more than just building roads; it is about building all kinds of infrastructure around the world. China is doing this to gain essential access and influence in some of the countries that most need help. The Chinese model for international aid, the BRI, uses Chinese labour and Chinese finance for these projects, many of which are done on the basis of commercial or sub-commercial loans. UK aid works alongside local communities to develop aid projects and pursues proper development. I would hope that the Minister might add something in her wind-up on what we will do in response to the BRI and explain our strategy for meeting its challenge, particularly in Africa.

Jim Shannon: I share the hon. Gentleman's concerns about China's reasons for doing this. Many of us feel that China has an insatiable demand upon the resources of every country it is involved with and that its real reason for doing this is to get its hands on the assets of those countries, particularly the mineral assets, whereas we are not doing that—we are here to help.

Stephen Kerr: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that, as he makes the point I was coming to.

I would like to talk briefly about one value we share in this place, a fundamentally British value: religious tolerance. It must become a major goal intertwined with our aid programme. According to DFID's figures in 2013, 21 out of 35 armed conflicts around the world had a "religious element". Let us be clear that religion has a hugely positive effect in the world. It guards against extremism, runs schools and hospitals, fights against authoritarianism and gives people a spiritual life. But when faith becomes a tool for division and sectarianism, it becomes a destructive force and, like any other form of division, such as nationalism, racism or tribalism, is simply an expression of human bigotry which lays blame for our problems in the hands of those

who are different from ourselves. This is why religious tolerance must be our watchword in this area. Ensuring freedom of religion and belief is our duty as a country under article 18 of the universal declaration of human rights. Therefore, I ask the Minister to take the opportunity to update us on the status of UK aid in relation to guarantees that we should be seeking on this fundamental human right of freedom of religion or belief.

In conclusion, in sharing our values around the world, whether that be democracy, the role of women, religious tolerance or LGBT rights, we should be proud to use our aid programme to promote those values in every corner of the globe. That means having tough but honest conversations, but by doing this we will help to free the world from ignorance and bigotry, as well as poverty.

6.53 pm

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): Let me start by referring the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. When I heard last week that we were going to be debating the international development budget, I thought this would be the ideal opportunity to quiz the Minister on the Government's commitment to continuing our funding to the Global Fund. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister must have read my mind, as she beat me to it; as other Members have done, I welcome Saturday's announcement, which will be putting other countries on the spot to continue their commitment, too.

The Global Fund commitment means there will be an additional £1.4 billion spent over the next three years as the UK's contribution to this important fund. It has been estimated that this will benefit many millions of people globally. It will provide life-saving antiretroviral therapies for 3.3 million people suffering from HIV; it will provide TB treatment and care for 2.3 million people; and 120,000 people with drug-resistant TB will now get appropriate treatment. When I visited Ethiopia earlier this year, I saw the grassroots work being carried out on multi-drug-resistant TB. My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) has already outlined the importance of tackling malaria, and the provision of 92 million mosquito nets is a simple, low-cost solution that provides a huge benefit.

Some of my constituents see 7p in every £10 of the public purse as a lot of money, and, as other Members have indicated, we do receive emails objecting to this amount, but I hope to illustrate that this 7p is leveraged time and time again. I have seen for myself during my visits to Rwanda in 2007 and 2008, and my more recent visit to Ethiopia, just how important the voluntary sector is. It has brought international development to life. Seeing how the 0.7% is spent on the ground has been very valuable, so I wish to thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), who is no longer in his place, for his vision in setting up Project Umubano. So many of us, including my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), know the importance of international aid on the ground. It is about building capacity and providing practical solutions for some of the most vulnerable in a country, and so often it is about giving children and young people a chance in life. I hope that, in a tiny, tiny way, I have played my part in doing just that.

[Maggie Throup]

During my first visit to Rwanda in 2007, I learned that when children first started school they needed to take their own pen and the parents sacrificed everything to make that happen. But of course that pen ran out and parents then had a choice: did they fund another a pen or did they put food on the table? So often that second pen was not funded because the food was necessary. I therefore set up a project called Pen4Life, whose goal was to give more children pens, because giving a child a pen means giving the child an education, which provides opportunity and a better chance in life. This caught the imagination of many people—many of whom I have never met—not just locally but across the country. I estimated that in a three-year period I collected about half a million pens, which I managed to get out to Rwanda. Donations came from Rotary groups, roundtables, Soroptimists, churches and schools, and from all across the country. One pensioner who lived locally to me bought a pack of pens every time he went to Asda—people can buy pens from other supermarkets—and brought them to me. Everybody came together to give some of the poorest in society a chance in life, and I am sure some of those pens are still being used today. Voluntary projects such as that add to the DFID spending and make it even more effective.

I have described how I have played a very small part in ensuring that children get an education, but there is more happening and more does need to happen. That is why I was delighted recently to learn more about the “send my friend to school” campaign. It was inspiring to talk to young people about their work on this amazing project, where they were playing their part in creating a positive change globally. Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to see how international aid is delivered at the grassroots level in Ethiopia. There were similarities between Ethiopia and Rwanda, but there were also differences. Some of these things are such simple measures, such as the WASH—water, sanitation and hygiene—programme, which is effective in reducing so many transmissible diseases. I also saw solar technology that was developed in Bognor Regis and is now helping to ensure the effective delivery of vats as part of a vaccination programme. In the middle of what seemed like nowhere, I was amazed to see a solar-powered fridge that is being used to keep life-saving vaccines viable. We need to do more to ensure that technology developed in the UK is effectively transferred to the developing world, and we need more cross-departmental work to ensure that that happens.

In conclusion, I feel very positively about the Government’s commitment to continuing the 0.7%—or 7p in every £10—funding target, but it is vital that that spending is transparent, provides value for money, allows measurable outcomes and is open to scrutiny. I commend all those involved, whether from the Government, NGOs or charities, for all the work they carry out on behalf of some of the most vulnerable around the globe.

7 pm

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): I thank all those who have made such huge and valuable contributions today.

As we heard from the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), who is my esteemed colleague on the International Development Committee, from the

hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr), and not least from my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), who is not in his place at the moment, back in 1970 the UN General Assembly adopted the 0.7% GNI aid target for donor countries to contribute to overseas development assistance. The original proposal envisaged that the target would be met by 1980 at the latest, and that the need for such aid would no longer be required by the end of the century. Sadly, as we know, that was not to be the case: only a handful of countries have ever met and maintained that level of aid spending. The UK is one of those countries, having first endorsed the target in 1974, having met it for the first time in 2013, and having enshrined it in law in 2015. The UK has taken great strides ever since, as we have heard from many great examples, not least from the hon. Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup).

I reiterate the obvious: the Scottish National party’s support for the 0.7% spending commitment is absolutely resolute and clear. Although a number of questions have been asked today about how the money is spent, what concerns me the most is the legally binding commitment, which seems highly likely to come under threat. All Members present are here for one reason, which is to support 0.7% spending on aid, but that is not the case for every Member in this House, as I shall come to later. It is imperative that we use this opportunity to defend the 0.7% target vigorously; to highlight the need for the spending to be part of a focused strategy, aligned with Departments across Government to achieve the sustainable development goals; and to stress that we cannot allow the commitment to be put in jeopardy by the hard right of the Conservative party and to be compounded by the desire for a disastrous Brexit.

The SNP has always been clear that development spending must be focused on helping the poorest and most vulnerable, and on alleviating global poverty. In addition to maintaining the 0.7% ODA spending commitment, we want the entirety of that amount to be spent by the Department for International Development, not spread among other Departments. The proportion of aid spending in other Departments has been steadily increasing over recent years. Currently, some 27.5% of ODA funds is spent in other Departments, such as the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence—a 9.2% increase since 2016. This is worrying, because other Departments do not report their aid spending with the same level of detail and do not necessarily have poverty reduction as their main focus. A recent National Audit Office report concluded that aid spending outside DFID was not transparent enough.

Let me give just one example of how spending in other Departments brings the system into disrepute. The International Development Committee heard that in 2016 some £46.9 million of UK ODA allocated funds had been spent by the Foreign Office on diplomatic activities in China. That is absurd; such abuse of funds must end. Similarly, the Select Committee’s subsequent report found that aid delivered through the cross-Government prosperity fund was

“insufficiently focused on the poorest”.

This appears to be common in other instances of ODA funds being spread across several Departments. For example, just last month the Independent Commission for Aid Impact’s report on the current state of UK aid suggested that the UK needed

“a stronger strategic direction for its conflict-reduction work, and a more integrated approach across humanitarian, peacebuilding, development and international influencing efforts, especially in protracted crises.”

At the same time, the estimates show that DFID's allocation from the cross-Government conflict stability and security fund will see a reduction of 45% from last year. The current situation is clearly not working. How on earth can we expect to meet the objectives of strengthening peace, responding to crises and helping the world's most vulnerable when the Department that is meant to be responsible is not taking the lead and being held to account on ODA spending?

DFID's strategic ability to deliver on its aims is further threatened and undermined by the Brexit shambles that is unfolding. Public money has already been taken away from Departments and public services to prepare the country for the disastrous prospect of leaving the EU, and the Department for International Development has been unable to avoid this. DFID has already sent more than 50 staff to other Government Departments in preparation for a no-deal Brexit, and could deploy another 170, according to a letter to the International Development Committee from the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt), in March. It has since been reported that officials at DFID were told that up to 600 of just 3,000—that is, 20% of their numbers—may have to be redeployed to Departments that are suffering from staff shortages because of their Brexit workloads.

It is unacceptable that public money that is committed to vital priorities that the UK has subscribed to under international agreements is already being used to pay DFID staff to manage the chaos of a hard Tory Brexit. Let us not forget that this money saves people's lives and alleviates the worst aspects of poverty, vulnerability and chaos in some of the most hard-pressed countries in the world.

In two weeks, the UK will present its voluntary national review of the sustainable development goals to the UN at the high-level political forum on sustainable development. At a time when we should be using our aid funding and resources to ensure high-quality education around the world, reduce inequality and tackle the climate emergency, it beggars belief that the UK Government are wasting resources attempting to manage and mitigate the needless damage of Brexit. It is something we simply cannot allow to happen, so I am pleased to have added my name on behalf of the SNP in support of the amendment, tabled by the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) and the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), that would have stopped the mobilisation of departmental spending to facilitate a no-deal Brexit.

Worryingly, it is not just Brexit that threatens the UK's international development work. The commitment to 0.7% ODA spending is under threat from the right wing of the Tory party, which believes that aid spending should be slashed, and would heartlessly endanger the lives of hundreds of thousands of people around the world.

Stephen Kerr: The hon. Gentleman misjudges the whole debate with the speech he is delivering. How would it help the world's poorest people to block any further spending on international development, as that

amendment would suggest? Both candidates for the leadership of my party are committed to honouring the 0.7% target, so the hon. Gentleman is presenting a wholly spurious argument and ruining the tone of the debate.

Chris Law: The hon. Gentleman is misinformed: the amendment was not about blocking spending on development. Furthermore, I shall develop the point—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I should just say that the amendment was not selected, so we do not need to worry about it. That might help us.

Chris Law: As I further develop my argument, the House will find that one of the two Conservative party leadership candidates does not share the view of the hon. Member for Stirling, although he and I do share the same view on the 0.7% target.

Let me put this into perspective: that 0.7% is 7p in every £10, as we have heard several times, or 70p in every £100. That is our commitment. When I visit schools and ask children, who are a great litmus test of where society is, to disagree with that spending, none of them raise their hand; in fact, they often suggest that we should spend more. Why, then, do the leadership candidates for Prime Minister support such brutal and callous action? For example, the one-time leadership candidate the right hon. Member for Tatton (Ms McVey) said that the UK should halve its aid spending, and blamed the Government's failure to fund the police on their aid commitment.

Alec Shelbrooke: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Law: I would like to press on because I am coming to my key point.

We all know that what the right hon. Member for Tatton said is not the case. Although the right hon. Lady was quickly eliminated from the leadership race, the favourite to be next Prime Minister does not fare any better. The right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) has previously said that aid spending should be used in the UK's

“political, commercial and diplomatic interests”,

and has called for the Department's purpose to be changed from poverty reduction to furthering

“the nation's overall strategic goals”.

It could not be clearer. Those are not my words but those of the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip, who is currently leading the race to be Prime Minister. I hope that that answers some questions.

Our future Prime Minister has little clue about either the importance of or the necessity for protecting the most vulnerable in the world and fails to see that it is in our strategic interests to do so. The Tory right can absolutely not be trusted to protect ODA spending, with the likely future Prime Minister calling for DFID to be mothballed and brought back into the Foreign Office. That flies in the face of the advice from a former head of the Foreign Office, Peter Ricketts, who said that DFID

“has established a worldwide reputation which is good for Britain. It was not a happy time when aid was part of the FCO: too easy to have conflicts of interest and aid badly used for political projects”.

[Chris Law]

Indeed, the 2018 aid transparency index, the only independent measure of aid transparency among the world's major development agencies, rated DFID as very good, whereas the Foreign Office, which the lead prime ministerial candidate led as Foreign Secretary, was rated as "poor".

Let us be in no doubt that it is essential that the UK's ODA spend must contribute in a focused manner to sustainable development and the fight against poverty, injustice and inequality internationally. It is vital that it is never allowed to be viewed through the prism of national and commercial interests and as part of pet projects such as global Britain. The Department for International Development must remain dedicated to its core mission of helping the world's most vulnerable people. Anything less is not only a complete dereliction of duty, but an absence of humanity.

To conclude, I cast my mind back three weeks to the debate in this House on sustainable development goals, when we were in agreement on the importance of tackling the massive challenges that we as a planet will face in the coming years—whether it be disease, displacement, food security, poverty or climate change. We are already in a position to have a significant impact on tackling these challenges, but only if DFID is adequately resourced and funded. We cannot let other Departments, Brexit or future right-wing Tory Prime Ministers derail that and we must be resolute in our defence of international development and the 0.7% commitment.

7.11 pm

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): I have thoroughly enjoyed the last couple of hours. I think this has been a high-quality debate. Too often, when it comes to DFID, we talk about things in the deficit—whether it is about the 0.7%, the existence of the Department in and of itself, or a particular aid project that has not gone very well—so it is very nice to have had the chance to listen to hon. and right hon. colleagues talk about the positives in DFID and the reasons to be proud of it. I commend the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) for his leadership in that and for the way in which he set the tone. He started by saying that he feels lucky to be born in this country. I know that he, like me, loves his country and that he, like me, is a patriot, but he, like me, looks at the things that we have and wants that for others, too. That was the right tone to set. He talked about not only doing the right things ourselves, but the permission that it gives others when we do so. That was an important point to make.

The hon. Gentleman was followed by two towering figures in this field: my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) and the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell). My hon. Friend talked about those of us who are passionate about this having an added responsibility to justify value for money. Interestingly, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) made a similar point, but came at it in a different way. It shows that, across this place, we often start in different places, but arrive at similar conclusions. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield made an articulate defence of a separate but co-ordinated DFID, to which I am sure we will refer.

When the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) rose to speak, I hoped that he would reference Malawi and he did not disappoint. When I was in

Lilongwe last year, people locally spoke positively about that proud connection that they have with Scotland. My take-away phrase of the debate came in an intervention from the hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) when he said that we should sell the principle of aid—sell it like it could go tomorrow. That was a call to action, which, again, I will come back to.

My two near neighbours, the hon. Members for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) and for Erewash (Maggie Throup), made characteristically articulate points. The hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire made some points on whistleblowing and I liked what the hon. Member for Erewash said about the Global Fund. On Wednesday, I was at an event with the Minister of State, Department for International Development, the right hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), whom I shadow, talking about the need to make an early decision on the Global Fund. I have to say that it felt like it was more in hope than expectation, but he had a little twinkle in his eye and now we know why.

The hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) mentioned his strongly held view that enterprise and trade are the way forward for development and we agree with that, but what we would say, which is why we are so focused on public services, is that without decent education for boys and girls, without reliable healthcare, and without access to good nutrition, people will not be able to enter those jobs. Nevertheless, that was an important point to make.

We should be proud that the UK is one of the biggest aid donors in the world, and one of only five countries to have met the UN target of 0.7% of national income on overseas aid. In the two decades since the Labour Government established the Department for International Development as a stand-alone independent Government Department, DFID has become a global leader in its field. Every year, it spends UK aid in ways that make life-changing, material differences to people's lives across the world. DFID has helped some of the world's poorest people to access health and education services. It has provided humanitarian aid in times of crisis and led the way in putting gender equality at the heart of international development work. We know that spending money in this way is the right thing to do and that, as one of the world's wealthiest countries, we must play our part in creating a fairer world. We also know that, as a country that has sometimes contributed to some of the inequalities that we see today, that duty is made all the stronger. So it is right that we set aside a fraction of our wealth to help to bring about a world where humans are all granted basic dignities such as health, education and nutrition. The UK public should be proud of the important poverty reduction work that our money has supported in recent decades.

The tone of the debate was so positive that, in trying to measure my remarks, I thought that I had better be careful that I did not push my points too hard. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield was right in saying that it is important to be reflective and to be critical where necessary. So that is the spirit in which I go into the next section of my speech. We should be worried about, and act on the steady decline in the proportion of the ODA budget going to DFID. It is now at one quarter, as we have heard, which weakens the Department and weakens our ability to scrutinise it. We have heard that the front runner to be the next

Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), has been on record about dismantling the Department altogether; it is not beyond the pale—far from it. Instead of maintaining an independent DFID, he has suggested repurposing the aid budget so that it would no longer be directed towards poverty reduction; the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) referred to that. Members should not take this just from me. Just last week, the Secretary of State told the Select Committee that there will be, at the very least, a reorganisation in which there would remain a Department and a Secretary of State, but with more influence perhaps exercised by the Foreign Secretary. That is what is to come, but there are challenges now on which we should reflect. I will be interested to hear the Minister's views on that.

In the past, we have had Members leading the Department who do not actually believe in it themselves. The former Secretary of State for International Development was reported as saying that the aid budget is unsustainable—the hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) drove a coach and horses through that idea very effectively indeed. Her predecessor was on record as saying that she did not believe in an independent DFID. It does feel slightly strange sometimes to defend from the Opposition Benches Government Departments from Government Ministers. That seems a little tangled up. There have been lots of ten-minute rule Bills from Government Members on the issue of folding the Department or cutting and repurposing the aid budget. Clearly, those are disastrous ideas. Folding DFID into the FCO or any other Department would be catastrophic for our country's aid programme because it is only DFID that has that explicit sole purpose of achieving poverty reduction overseas. To care about that is to care about an independent DFID. Any such merger would undermine that.

The International Development Committee, under my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby, insisted that all ODA must be directed primarily at reducing poverty, rather than

“being used as a slush fund to pay for developing the UK's diplomatic, trade or national security interests”.

It goes further, recommending that the Secretary of State should have the ultimate oversight of the UK's ODA and that the Department should have the final sign-off. Let me take this opportunity to state clearly on the record that Labour will oppose any attempts to merge, shut down or dissolve the Department for International Development. Furthermore, we believe there should be a freeze on the proportion of ODA being spent outside DFID and we of course stand by the commitment to maintain 0.7% of GNI as a minimum spend for our aid programme.

That is not to say that, within that, there is not scope for making changes. Too often, aid is still prioritising helping UK companies to enter overseas markets, or security projects that have actually endangered people and undermined human rights. There is an increasing and worrying trend of aid being spent in ways that are not about poverty reduction—we heard that from a number of hon. Members. This is a downward spiral—the opposite of a virtuous circle—because these are the discreditable projects on which the media pick up, which further undermines confidence in the budget.

It is clear that anyone who wants this country to play its part in international development must stand ready to defend the Department and the budget, as if they could go tomorrow—that is a good way to think about it—and I am ready to do that. I am proud that Labour is an internationalist party that believes in global solidarity. We must never turn our backs on problems, especially when sometimes we have helped to make them. We must step up and take action to make the world a fairer place. The least we can do is spend a fraction—less than a penny in each pound—of the country's income on this.

Of course, aid alone will not solve the world's problems, as many hon. Members have said. There are many other things we can do on the international stage to help to address global poverty fully. The Opposition's approach is to commit to dealing with the root causes of poverty, and to be prepared to rewrite trade policies, put an end to debt burdens and clamp down on corporate tax avoidance, all of which are vital for creating a more global economy.

I will finish with four questions for the Minister, on which I hope she can give some guarantees. First, does she agree that, now that we are being told by former Foreign Secretaries and Tory leadership contenders that there is £26 billion of so-called headroom, there is no possible excuse for abandoning our commitment to 0.7%? Secondly, will she commit to standing up to any attempt to undermine our country's commitment to that target, wherever such attacks come from, including her own Benches? Thirdly, does she agree that the best way to manage this spending is through a dedicated Department for International Development standing on an independent footing? Finally, will she commit to ending the misuse of aid as a slush fund for other Departments' priorities and as a means of expanding commercial interests overseas, and instead commit to focusing all aid spending on its core objective of poverty reduction?

This has been an excellent debate. We should all be very proud of the work that we have talked about. We must now come together to make it even better.

7.21 pm

The Minister for Africa (Harriett Baldwin): May I start by saying what an absolute privilege it is to respond to the debate, and to have had an extended period of time for scrutinising the Department for International Development's spending? I therefore sincerely congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson), my constituency neighbour, on securing the debate. We have heard a range of really excellent contributions. I also salute my hon. Friend for his sterling work—it is not often noticed in this Chamber—as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Ethiopia and Djibouti. It is interesting to note how many times Ethiopia has been mentioned in the debate.

While listening to the contributions, I was struck by the consensus that emerged on the importance of the 0.7% commitment, and our pride, as British citizens, that the UK was the first major country to put that into statute, which has gained us remarkable recognition around the world. I am very happy to be part of the Government who put that into statute. I also want to make the point right at the beginning of my speech that at the last general election all major parties made a commitment to that figure in their manifestos.

[*Harriett Baldwin*]

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) suggested that this is no longer a political issue, but I submit that it is, because although all parties elected to this Parliament stood on manifestos that included the 0.7% commitment, the party that has recently been topping the polls has announced that it would halve international development spending. I therefore think that this relates to the important political commitment that we have made democratically to deliver Brexit on behalf of the people of the United Kingdom. If we do not, we stand to lose seats to a party that does not believe in the 0.7% commitment. That is where I diverge from the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law), who I do not believe has ever seen a referendum result that he wanted to respect. It is really important that we, as democrats, respect referendum outcomes.

I can reassure colleagues that I do not think there are any more than a few voices in my party who believe that 0.7% is an inappropriate target; I do not believe that in this Parliament there is any chance of it being at risk. I also happily support having an independent voice at the Cabinet table for development spending, which has been very important for delivering on the spending commitment.

We have had an excellent debate, with first-class contributions from my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury, the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), who for so long provided the Department with such great leadership, and the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady). My hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke), in a really excellent speech, brought us back to the powerful moral arguments for development assistance. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) spoke of his exceptionally generous constituents, who also want us to be thrifty.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire continued a valuable campaign that she has been involved in for many years, focusing on the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse, and the need for the UK to show leadership in combating it. She will be pleased to read in *Hansard* tomorrow that, following the most recent story about Oxfam in the newspapers over the weekend, we have checked and do not believe that any DFID funding is involved. As the House will know, we hold our suppliers to account.

My hon. Friends the Members for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) and for Erewash (Maggie Throup) paid tribute, as did other hon. Members, to the important work of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. We were so proud to announce at the G20 over the weekend that we are increasing our contribution to the Global Fund, because literally millions of lives will be saved by that important contribution.

I want to tackle some of the common themes that emerged during the debate. First, everyone agrees that transparency is a good thing, that there is a lot of transparency in overseas development assistance spending, and that it is important that we focus 50% of our spending, as we do, on the most fragile and conflict-affected states. In the next spending review we aim to keep 75% of overseas development assistance spending within the Department for International Development—I put that down from the Dispatch Box this evening. We can follow that with interest as we go into the spending review.

It is early days for the prosperity fund, but we have seen some very good outcomes in the multilateral agreement that was delivered by the fund to return stolen assets to countries such as Nigeria—\$321 million will return to Nigeria through our small amount of spending in the prosperity fund. There have been very good examples of spending from the conflict, stability and security fund. For example, through anti-human trafficking work in Kenya, 90 victims of trafficking and sexual abuse have been rescued. There have been some really good examples from the Newton Fund, which is spent by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, on the feasibility of creating a vaccine for the Zika virus. There are some really good examples, and these funds publish their annual reports on spending. I think that we can all agree that transparency is very valuable.

Points were made consistently about the value of small charities and civil society organisations. We have done a lot to try to make it easier—for example, through the small charities fund and Aid Match for specific programmes—to ensure that some of those fantastic smaller charities get the chance to deliver projects with overseas development assistance. The Independent Commission for Aid Impact and the importance of its work were cited a few times. It has done some very good scrutiny of our multilateral spending, and I think we have all been able, through multilateral initiatives such as the Global Fund, to see the value of spending through such organisations. We try to publish as much as we can on our own website as well, as through those multilateral organisations, to show how that money is spent.

Jim Shannon: One of the things that many of us spoke about, and which I spoke particularly about, was education. Through DFID we will be able to increase levels of education, achievement and attainment, and thereby opportunity, particularly for young girls and young women.

Harriett Baldwin: Indeed. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of—and, I am sure, champions in Strangford—the opportunities that come through Connecting Classrooms. We will all have been lobbied by the wonderful “send my friend to school” campaign, which my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash mentioned. I love that campaign, and I wish I were in a position to announce more than the fact that we will continue our championing of the important work that is being done on education in difficult areas and refugee camps.

Another theme that came up was the importance of our being able to help with tax revenues. Experts within Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs have been able, via spending through another Government Department, to deliver huge increases in tax revenues in some countries. That is proving to be one of the very best ways in which we can spend the overseas development budget. In addition, there is the work that we have done through funding posts within the International Trade Department and the National Crime Agency. We are seeing some real benefits, with money going back to developing countries for them to spend on their priorities. Some really valuable contributions are being made.

A number of Members mentioned the CDC and the amazing number of jobs that it has created. It is important to point out that it has not invested in any new coal

projects since 2012, although it does have some investments in fossil fuels. When it is making its policy, it examines whether that is the right thing to do going forward. Obviously, it will make that decision independently. We need to recognise that a lot of the developing world lacks access to energy, which is sometimes an important part of their being able to develop.

We heard about the Scotland Malawi Partnership. I always love paying tribute to that, because it is such a rich partnership. The hon. Member for Glasgow North made a sensible point about trying to map the range of different ways in which civil society links with the developing world.

My hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell made a moral point about development. He mentioned UK Export Finance and some of its support for fossil fuel. He may want to raise that with the Department for International Trade with regard to some projects.

I can tell the House—I do not think this got anywhere near the media coverage that the Global Fund announcement got—that the Prime Minister also announced at the G20 that in future all our overseas development assistance will be deployed in line with our Paris commitments. That is a really big announcement that did not get much coverage, so I am pleased to be able to mention it from the Dispatch Box.

A range of other important points were made today. We heard about malaria and work against AIDS, and the number of people whose lives will be saved. My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling mentioned the Chinese belt and road initiative. We do take a different approach to development—there is no question about it—but we find that there are some occasions when our development priorities may overlap, and we are open to looking at those occasions when they arise. We spend a lot of time encouraging the deployment of development assistance from China in the same kind of way that we would deploy it, for example, to multilaterals such as the Global Fund—specifically, at the moment, with the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo, it would be wonderful to see a bigger contribution to the World Health Organisation from Chinese development assistance.

If I may, I will take just a couple more minutes, Mr Deputy Speaker, but you are giving me that look, so—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Just to help the Minister, we all agreed to 10 minutes each. I have no problem with that, but the list for the education debate has just been added to, and that is what I am bothered about. I am just trying to make sure that we get equal time.

Harriett Baldwin: In that case, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will be very brief in summing up.

Our annual report is going to be published next week, on 11 July. That will be a very good way in which we can summarise all the different ways in which the 0.7% commitment is saving lives, making a difference to our world, and giving our children and our grandchildren a brighter future. We do this very proudly as the UK, with deep expertise and a real commitment not only morally but in statute to continue to lead in this important area.

Question deferred (Standing Order No. 54(4)).

Department for Education

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2020, for expenditure by the Department for Education:

(1) further resources, not exceeding £35,024,055,000 be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 2154 of Session 2017–19,

(2) further resources, not exceeding £15,813,820,000 be authorised for use for capital purposes as so set out, and

(3) a further sum, not exceeding £48,195,607,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.—(*Iain Stewart.*)

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): I must indicate that the Speaker has stated that he has not selected either of the amendments.

7.35 pm

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I am delighted that the amendments have not been selected, because that would mean money not being able to be spent on our schools and our colleges. That is not the way to conduct the debate over Brexit.

It is a great pleasure to open this debate on the spending of the Department for Education in my capacity as the Chair of the Education Committee. I am pleased to be here with my Committee colleagues, my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) and the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy). The DFE is one of the largest domestic spending Departments, with a wide-ranging portfolio spanning early years, children's social care, schools, colleges, and much more besides. How the Department spends its money has a huge impact on millions of people across the nation, with consequences that will be felt for generations to come. That is why it is so important that we get education spending right.

I want to focus on the Department's expenditure on schools and colleges. According to the House of Commons Library, most of the DFE's spending goes on grants to schools, which in 2019–20 makes up three quarters of day-to-day spending, at about £52 billion. The Library says that this is a cash increase of 4% compared with 2018–19, which I strongly welcome. However, the Department's planned further education budget this year is about £4.8 billion—a cash decrease of 3% compared with 2018–19. I am sure that all Members of this House have been delighted to see the issue of school and college funding feature so prominently throughout the Conservative leadership contest. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) says that he is going to increase education spending by £4.6 billion.

My Committee will soon be publishing a report on this area with a view to helping the DFE to make the strongest possible case to the Treasury for the upcoming spending review.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): Does the right hon. Gentleman share my concern—I am sure he will as the Chair of the Select Committee—that school and college funding would not be so prominent on the candidates' agendas if we were not seeing such a crisis in our schools and colleges?

Robert Halfon: I am going to talk about the funding issues for schools and colleges in a bit, but I think we should welcome the fact that all the candidates—the last two and the ones who have been knocked out—have talked strongly about increasing education spending. I greatly welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip said yesterday on the Sky show with Sophy Ridge that he would be spending over £4.6 billion. It is very good news that education has featured as a priority for the potential new Prime Ministers.

As I said, my Committee will be publishing a report on school and college funding with a view to helping the DFE to make the strongest possible case for the upcoming spending review. The Government have not been idle, to be fair. The national funding formula has been a highly welcome first step towards overcoming the postcode lottery of school and college funding.

The Department has announced almost £900 million to fund teachers' pension contributions, and the introduction of T-levels promises to make a substantial difference to the provision of technical education across the country. I am glad that total funding for high needs will reach £6.3 billion this year—a £1.3 billion increase from 2013. I pay tribute to the work of the Minister for School Standards, and particularly the work he has done to improve literacy in our schools, which will be remembered for years to come and will have a huge influence on the life chances of thousands of children across our country.

However, as our inquiry has shown only too clearly, the education funding landscape for schools and colleges is still bleak. Expanding student populations, education reforms and increasingly complex special needs requirements have put a significant strain on the education sector. Costs have increased across a wide range of areas, and funding has not kept pace. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, total school spending per pupil has fallen by 8% in real terms between 2009-10 and 2017-18.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I visited three rural primary schools in my constituency on Friday, and a common feature was the £6,000 initial cost of an education, health and care plan. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that one thing the Government could do immediately is abolish that? It is so counterproductive. It puts schools in an enormously difficult position, with parents against them, and if children do not get an EHCP, schools are blamed every which way. Does he agree that that could happen straight away?

Robert Halfon: As my Education Committee colleagues who are here today will know, we are doing an inquiry into funding for children with special educational needs and the implementation of the Children and Families Act 2014. The Act is very good, but there are significant problems with implementation, funding and many other areas. We will hopefully publish a report by September, and I think the hon. Gentleman will be particularly interested in what we say.

I would like to draw particular attention to the plight of further education funding, which is close to my heart. For too long, this area of education has been considered the Cinderella sector. Participation in full-time further education has more than doubled since the 1980s, yet across 16-to-19 education, funding per student has fallen by a full 16% in real terms between 2010-11

and 2018-19. That is twice as much as the 8% school funding fall over a similar period and, as I mentioned, it is decreasing again this year. This dip in 16-to-19 education makes no sense, given the importance of further education and sixth-form colleges in providing a gateway to success in later life. Those who call it the Cinderella sector should remember that Cinderella became a princess, and we should banish the two ugly sisters of snobbery and underfunding.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend, on behalf of all of us, on the excellent work he does as Chairman of the Select Committee. Talking of princesses, will he pause for a moment and join me in thanking the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills, my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Anne Milton), for her incredible support for the reopening of the sixth-form college in Haywards Heath? The college was closed under an earlier Administration, having run up an enormous amount of debt, and this is an incredibly important step for Mid Sussex—one of the fastest growing bits of the United Kingdom. Without the support and energy of the Department for Education, the Minister and her excellent officials, that simply would not have happened. In the middle of what is a very difficult period indeed for finance in the Department, the Minister deserves particular praise and consideration for what she has so brilliantly done.

Robert Halfon: I am delighted that my right hon. Friend's college has reopened—that is excellent news—and I pay tribute to the Minister. She has passion and enthusiasm for further education, skills and apprenticeships. She said in a recent interview in *Schools Week* that hers is the best job in Government. I absolutely agree, and that shows her commitment to further education.

The debate around school and college funding has become deeply polarised. On the one hand, there are those on the Government Benches who say that more money than ever is going into the system. On the other hand, we hear that the funding system is nearing breaking point because pupil numbers are rising, and education institutions are having to provide an increasing variety of services. I hope we can move beyond that divide by focusing more closely on providing what schools and colleges actually need, rather than how we choose to interpret statistics.

That brings me on to the most important point in this debate on the DFE's estimates: what is the Department trying to achieve with its spending? The Department is certainly not short of ideas for policy initiatives and announcements. However, my Committee has become increasingly concerned about the lack of clear long-term thinking and strategic prioritisation. It is partly driven by the politicised nature of the funding system and the short-term thinking that is encouraged by the three to four-year spending review process.

There are serious issues that we need to address. We should start focusing a lot more on tackling the gap between education and employment. The troubling state of social justice in this country will only get worse with future changes to the labour market and the march of the robots unless we take a more strategic and decisive approach to funding vocational and skills-based education routes. High-needs funding, which was mentioned by

the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew), is threatening to spiral out of control unless we can get to grips with the underlying drivers more effectively.

I am not confident that those big issues can be addressed within the current funding framework. The Department must recognise that education is a strategic national priority and should not be used as a political football that gets kicked around every few years during election periods or the spending review. Our school and college funding system is under severe financial strain. Simply securing a moderate top-up in the spending review will be little more than a sticking plaster.

That is why we need a 10-year plan for education, backed up with a multi-billion-pound funding settlement. The Health Secretary made a statement in the House today, setting out the NHS 10-year plan. If the Health Secretary can come to the House with a 10-year plan and an extra £20 billion-a-year funding settlement, which Members on both sides of the House welcome, why can the Secretary of State for Education not come to the House with a 10-year plan and a minimum five-year funding settlement for the education system, with the funds that it needs? Why does the Department for Education—our schools, colleges, universities, apprenticeships and skills system—not also have a 10-year plan?

The plan would need to take a long, hard look at what schools and colleges are needing to deliver and what it costs. Taking the politics out of funding with a 10-year plan would mean that we can have a properly financed education system that is characterised by strategic investments rather than reactive adjustments. Only then will we ensure that children and young people receive the high-quality education and support that they deserve, and our education system will be confident that it has the plan and the funds that enable it to plan properly for many years ahead. We must build a sturdy education ladder of opportunity fit for the 21st century, so that everyone, no matter what their background, can climb it to achieve jobs, security and prosperity.

7.48 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the Chair of the Education Committee. He speaks with tremendous authority on these matters, and his expertise is well recognised around the House and beyond. I cannot match that expertise in this policy area, but I want to raise a number of issues that I see in schools and colleges in my constituency and, indeed, in wider support for children. In particular, in the context of this estimates day debate, when we look at the spending and policies of one Department, I want to make the point that many of the issues that I would like to talk about cannot be dealt with in a siloed, single departmental context. We need to look at how to bring different Departments and agendas together to ensure that everyone can use their learning opportunities to make the most of their potential.

I would like to start, as I think we all probably would, by saying a little bit about school funding. I was able to participate in a very valuable debate in Westminster Hall on 4 June on this subject. Since that debate, I have been contacted by the Trafford headteachers standing conference, which wanted to express its deep concern at the pressures schools are under in relation to not just the funding for schools themselves, but, as was referred to in the Westminster Hall debate, the fact that schools operate in a wider and very pressured social context.

My headteachers are committed to continuing with early help for vulnerable pupils, but they point to the pressures on a range of support and social welfare services that support families and the children whom they educate. There is a particular worry about children who are not officially defined as in need or who do not meet the threshold for child protection, but who are still in need of significant support and who will fall under the radar in relation to getting it. Their view is that we need to look holistically at the needs of these children and to look holistically at the different departmental and Government strands, both local and national, that support them. That includes adequate funding for local government services in the round and for mental health provision, about which I will say a little more in a moment, as well as support for families, and indeed for family incomes, because currently schools are picking up the pieces of the wider austerity agenda.

As I say, mental health is a particular concern, with parents and children in my constituency experiencing very long waits for referrals and appointments. It was really good to hear the Secretary of State for Health earlier this afternoon committing to a four-week waiting time for children and young people, and to a programme of work with schools and health professionals together. That is really important, but in my constituency I see mental health pressures at every stage of a student's life, particularly at the points of transition during the teen years and at exam time.

May I say that, in common with other colleagues, I have concerns about the mental health of university students, given we have seen some very alarming reports of student suicide? I very much welcome the work by Universities UK and Public Health England on the #stepchange programme and the university mental health charter, but it would be really helpful if the Minister could update us on how that work is panning out in practice.

May I raise a very particular issue? I know it is not the direct responsibility of this Minister, but perhaps he can speak to his colleagues. In the case of a student suicide at university, no redress is available to the family if they have concerns about the welfare support that the student received. If a student is dissatisfied, he or she can go to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, but their family members or parents do not have that access; nor will the Office for Students look at individual cases. May I ask the Minister to use his good offices to talk to colleagues about how we can ensure there is support for family members who have concerns about the care of their children? In particular, when there has tragically been a suicide, how can the family, after the death, continue to have access to redress?

Parents in my constituency report that both exams and school admissions decisions have very adverse effects on children's wellbeing, and cause them considerable stress and anxiety. Last week, during business questions, I raised my concerns about exam paper security, in that exams are not always kept confidential until the point at which students are taking them. For example, I have been made aware of the same examination being made available on two different days in two different locations, and that cannot be fair to the students who take it on the first day if the children taking it on a subsequent day are able to have any advance notice of what is in the papers. Again, could the Minister, with his colleagues,

[Kate Green]

look at what more we can do to ensure, when public examinations are taken, that all students take them on a level playing field?

The pressure on school places, and therefore the difficulties that parents in my constituency can find in accessing the school they choose for their child, is another concern that causes considerable stress both to the children and to their parents. In my borough, this is exacerbated by our selective secondary system. Clearly, what we need is a strategy, and this is where the Chair of the Select Committee is absolutely right. It needs to be a long-term strategy to ensure we match the supply of places to where those places are going to be needed.

May I say—I know the Minister has heard me say this before, but I will say it again—that I do think the funding that has been set aside for grammar school expansion is particularly perverse in that context? I am seeing non-selective secondary schools in my constituency under huge funding pressure. They educate the vast bulk of children overall, the vast bulk of children on pupil premium and the vast bulk of children with special educational needs and disabilities, yet they see the funding going to a very small number of grammar schools to expand by a very small number of places for a very small proportion of children.

I agree with the Chair of the Select Committee about the importance of post-16 and further education. I am particularly concerned that, even in these days of near full employment, we still have 50,000 NEET young people—those not in education, employment or training—in England. According to the Learning and Work Institute's Youth Commission, of which I have been very lucky to be a member, progress in the number of 19-year-olds gaining level 2 and level 3 qualifications has stalled and fewer young people are doing apprenticeships. In particular, the youngest and least well qualified are losing out because employers are preferring to fund higher level apprenticeships, and only 15,000 of those on benefits move into work via an apprenticeship.

With 3 million benefit claimants, it seems to me there is a huge missed opportunity there for the Department to be working with the Department for Work and Pensions and with the devolved Administrations. I do not mean just the nations, but the devolved administrations such as my own in Greater Manchester, where there would be a real opportunity now for the Department to look at how it could link post-16 study, employment prospects, skills and the region's industrial and regeneration strategies.

Finally, and on a slightly different tack, I would like to raise a very particular issue in relation to EU national looked-after children who may now be eligible for the Home Office settled status scheme or, indeed, for British citizenship. It is for the local authority, as the corporate parent of those children, to apply for settled status for them, but the social workers who support those families may lack the expertise and knowledge to do so. Indeed, I think it is highly likely that social workers will not have that knowledge. Moreover, for looked-after children where the local authority has not assumed parental responsibility, the only arrangements in position are in the form of guidance simply to signpost children to make their own application, which is even weaker protection for those I think we can all

accept are quite vulnerable children. May I ask the Minister to say now, or perhaps to speak to colleagues and respond to me in more detail in due course, what work his Department is doing with the Home Office to ensure that we protect the best interests of those children in relation to their status?

I wanted briefly to highlight policy challenges where the DFE remit needs to be aligned with the policies and spending of a number of other Government Departments, nationally but also regionally and locally. Lifelong learning, which I think we can all agree is a very worthwhile aspiration, requires lifelong and holistic support for learners to make the most of their potential. Our obligation to our children's future encompasses their learning, of course, but also their health, material security, happiness and wellbeing across the widest range of social policy. As I say, today's debate obviously focuses on the role and expenditure of one Department, but I hope the House will agree that this is a challenge for the whole of Government.

7.58 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), a fellow member of the Home Affairs Committee. May I endorse her last point about children coming from Europe and assessments? However, there is a bigger issue about asylum-seeking children, who often have family connections over here. Certainly from my experience—having visited Greece, in particular, along with my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan)—a delay is often caused by social worker assessments for the fitness of whatever accommodation those children may be coming to in the UK taking quite a long time to undertake. In the meantime, they are kept in refugee camps and in unsuitable conditions overseas. That is just another aspect of social workers, who do of course come under the Department for Education, being problematic.

School funding is the most important issue in my constituency, and in the constituencies of all hon. Members who represent West Sussex and other counties like ours that have been historically poorly funded. We are seeing the cumulative effects of many years of underfunding, to the extent that, as I have said in every debate in which I have spoken over the years, the tank is now empty. The capacity to make further savings or cuts elsewhere simply does not exist. All those savings—all that fat—went a long time ago.

We were obviously grateful for the additional £28 million that West Sussex was given, but we went from being the worst funded shire authority for schools to about the seventh worst, which means that we are still in the bottom decile. The Minister for School Standards will know from his own West Sussex constituency that the new fair funding formula is only a work in progress.

Last week's Department for Education report referred to the fact that children in schools in coastal areas achieve several grades lower than other children, certainly at GCSE level. My constituents therefore suffer from the double whammy of being in one of the lowest funded local authorities for schools, and the serious challenge to schools in pockets of deprivation, often in coastal areas, of which there are many on the south coast as well as in other parts of the country.

I therefore ask the Minister to look again at the suggestion that I made last year—I wrote it again in my letter of 12 September to the Secretary of State—to consider a coastal schools challenge fund to examine plugging that gap in the outcomes for children in coastal constituencies. The London Challenge, which the Labour Government set up in 2003, went a long way towards plugging the gap between outcomes in London and in other parts of the country. However, it is now a problem that there is such a large gap between schools in London and those in West Sussex and other shire counties.

Sir Nicholas Soames: My hon. Friend has been a fantastic champion for West Sussex schools. I endorse his suggestion for a challenge fund. It is an extremely good idea and I hope that it makes some progress. He and I have sat in endless meetings with the Secretary of State and others, and he knows that the funding situation is not confined to the coastal district and that it is just as serious further inland.

Tim Loughton: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right that the situation is not just confined to coastal areas. However, the problem is that there tend to be more deprived communities in coastal areas around the country. Seemingly affluent shire counties such as West Sussex disguise pockets of deprivation. We have high special educational needs in many of our schools and we need to focus more on bringing the funding up to at least the average in the rest of the country to give those children a better chance.

I have spoken in numerous debates on the problems that schools in my constituency face. I wrote my notorious eight-page letter to the Secretary of State last year after I had summoned all the heads of all the schools in my constituency and all the chairs of governors and asked them to tell me not what they thought might happen and their fears, but what was actually happening now. That included the reduction in teaching assistants and the fact that, with 90% of school budgets in many cases being spent on staffing, any cut means that non-staffing expenditure on, for example, maintenance and buying new computers, does not happen, and real reductions mean fewer staff, or, as happens in many cases, less qualified staff being taken on to replace experienced staff who have left to take others job, retired or gone on maternity leave.

I was particularly concerned about the cuts to counselling services in schools. As the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston said, we need a much more joined-up approach to that. I welcome the Prime Minister's commitment to additional funding to deal with mental health needs in schools, with mental health first aiders and training for teachers and others, but we need to do so much more before children get to school. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on conception to age 2 and the 1001 critical days campaign—I should also declare my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests—I stress that the biggest impact on a child's brain happens in the first 1,000 days between conception and age two. That is when a child forms attachments to a parent and the brain grows exponentially. If there is not a good attachment with a parent—if the parent does not have good mental health—that child will be at a disadvantage when they get to school. It is a truism, but if we consider a 15 or 16-year-old who suffers from

depression, as is now common in our schools, there is a 99% likelihood that their mother suffered from some form of mental illness during pregnancy or soon afterwards. We need to do so much more preventively earlier so that fewer children experience the mental health pressures to which too many succumb in our schools, with all the challenges that they face.

I want everything I have said in previous debates on schools funding to be taken as read. However, today's debate is on education estimates and we neglect the fact that education funding includes provision for children's social care. Although more than three quarters of the Department's budget goes on day-to-day school funding, this year, some £9.1 billion will go into children's social care through local authorities.

Children's social care is in a state of crisis. I want to spend a few minutes dealing with that subject. Before doing so, I endorse the comments of the Chairman of the Education Committee on the problems that face further education. I know about that from colleges in my constituency and I endorse his frequent calls for a 10-year education plan to allow teachers and lecturers to plan ahead in the same way as the national health service.

There have been so many reports in recent months. The all-party parliamentary group on children, which I chair, produced "Storing Up Trouble", which gave an alarming account of huge variations in the experiences of children coming into the care system, or not reaching the threshold for coming into the care system. In Blackpool, 166 in 10,000 children are likely in to end up in care, whereas the figure for Richmond is only 28 in every 10,000. There are differences in deprivation between Blackpool and Richmond, but by a factor of seven? The Department is not properly assimilating that sort of information and data, which our report revealed. That is one ask from our report.

There have been several reports, for example, by Action for Children, the Children's Society and the Education Policy Institute. The Children's Commissioner for England recently found that England now spends nearly half of its entire children's services budget on the 75,000 children in the care system, leaving the other half for the remaining 11.7 million. The Children's Commissioner will produce a further report at the end of this week, identifying the percentage of children in need, constituency by constituency, and asking why we are not doing more to focus on those children at an early, preventive stage.

The evidence is there. Local authorities say that they face a shortfall of at least £2 billion by 2020 in children's social care. We have a recent record of the number of children in care at the moment. There are other issues around the funded 30-hour childcare entitlement, of which I am a big supporter. However, many of my independent providers tell me that the remuneration they get is not nearly enough to cover the cost. There is a danger of losing places, and the least well off, who most need them, will not be able to access places for their children.

I have concerns about social worker recruitment. Despite the Munro report and everything we did for the social work profession some eight or nine years ago, too many social workers are being driven out of the profession early. I also make a plea for the troubled families programme, which has its origins partly in the Department for Education. It was one of the Cameron Government's

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most successful initiatives. It was about joining up the different Departments because, in a family with problems, the problems are not limited to mental health, physical health or school truancy. It is usually a combination of those and they need to be dealt with holistically. When the funding comes to an end in 2020, it is absolutely essential that the project is continued. I would like to see a pre-troubled families programme to deal with families much earlier on—from, as I said, perinatal mental illness stage onwards—so that they are less likely to express those symptoms, which then cost us so much as a society. Child neglect in this country costs £15 billion a year. Perinatal mental health problems cost some £8.1 billion a year. We are spending £23.1 billion a year on getting it wrong and dealing with the problem. That money could be used much more effectively earlier on.

My final point is to ask what has happened to the inter-departmental ministerial group, which was being chaired by the former Leader of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom). That was a great initiative which brought together Ministers from six different Departments, including the Children's Minister from the Department for Education and the Chief Secretary to Treasury, who will be conducting the comprehensive spending review. It is all about having a joined-up approach and pooling funding to make sure we put investment in to support families where they need it early on to see them through those challenging early years. That work is groundbreaking and it is absolutely essential that it continues. Perhaps the Minister can update us on where it has got to. It is essential that it is a major component of the comprehensive spending review, so that we stop wasting money dealing with the symptoms of failure and start investing upstream to prevent the huge social problems that bring about huge financial problems. If we get that right, it will be better for all our children and young people.

We need more money for our schools. I am glad that all the leadership candidates and the Prime Minister recognise that, but please do not forget children's social care. If we do, the problems of dealing with children with problems when they arrive at school will be far higher and far more challenging than if we sorted them out before they are even born.

8.11 pm

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I begin by saying thank you to the hard-working teachers and support staff both in County Durham, which I represent, and throughout the country. I would also like to pay tribute to the parents, guardians and school governors who give up their time, which is not usually recognised, to help and support the education of our nation's children.

Education is a basic and fundamental right. We take it for granted in this country, but we should cherish it and we should all be entitled to it. It changes people's lives and is one of the ingredients of the glue that holds our society together. Many of our schools are at the centre of our local communities. My hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) rightly pointed out that they are also a magnet for a lot of problems in society that have nothing to do with education. I know from my own constituency that many schools

and teachers deal with problems that are less to do with education than with the austerity agenda of the past nine years.

People do not think that mental health is an issue for schools, but unfortunately they have to deal with it on a daily basis. I welcome what the Government have done in announcing funding for counsellors and so on in schools, but that is only part of the solution. The real issue is addressing the mental health of young people and children outside school. Many individuals who present with very serious mental health problems do not actually attend school in the first place.

I take the view that education is an investment in our economy not just for now, but for the future. Every successful economy in the world puts investment in education at the centre of its economic policy and this will become more important in the coming years. With rapid technological change, people will not be in the same job for 20 or 30 years. They will need upskilling and training throughout their lives. Investment in education will have to be not just in schools but throughout people's lives if we are to achieve individual fulfilment from education as well as the economic benefits.

It is important that we realise that education, as the Chair of the Education Committee, the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), said, has to be joined up with other Government Departments. Over the past nine years, that has not happened. Education has not been free from the austerity axe. I was interested to hear what the Chair of the Select Committee said about taking politics out of education. I think a lot of teachers would agree with him on that, but the Government have had an ideological obsession with education. Free schools have diverted attention and resources from what is really needed. In County Durham in the early years of the coalition Government, we wasted over £4 million—almost £5 million—on a free school that was not needed. That was done for ideological reasons. Scarce resources that could have been put into the local education community were just wasted on an ideological initiative.

Ministers always say that we spend more on education now than we did in 2010. Of course we spend more: there are nearly 700,000 more pupils in primary and secondary schools, and we cannot educate them without putting more money in. If we actually look at the figures, however, there has been a reduction in real-terms spending on our schools and colleges from £95.5 billion in 2011-12 to £87.8 billion last year. That is a reduction in the amount we spend on education as a percentage of GDP from 5.69% to 4.27%. Are we taking on board the idea that there should be investment in education? No, we are not.

There are other pressures facing our schools—certainly the ones in Durham that I speak to. I have already mentioned that there are 700,000 more pupils than there were in 2010. Teachers have rightly been awarded a 3.5% pay increase. The sting in the tail was that that would not be wholly financed by central Government, with 1% falling on schools' budgets. Schools are already in a very tight fiscal situation in balancing their budgets. The Government are purporting to put more money in, but by sleight of hand they are putting more pressure on the system. The Chair of the Select Committee argued the case for longer-term funding over a 10-year period. I agree with him. If we want education in this country to be an investment in our knowledge, the

wellbeing of individual citizens and the economy, a long-term plan is needed. Schools are also feeling the pressure from contributions to teachers' pensions. The Government said that would be met with one-off funding of £40 million for one year, but we need to make the case for future years. Again, we have to be careful that the costs do not fall on individual schools, because as it stands future contributions will have to come out of their budgets.

We only have to look at the number of schools, especially local authority schools, that are running budget deficits to realise there is a problem. In 2017-18, about 10% of all local authority maintained schools were running budget deficits. It is okay for Ministers to keep saying that more money is going in, but Government initiatives—for example the apprenticeship levy, which everyone supports—are putting the costs on schools. The Government are giving with one hand but taking away with the other. We can add to that such things as the GCSE changes. Putting aside the practical implications for teachers, there are costs involved for schools, and all these things add to the pressure on individual schools' budgets.

Let me turn to special educational needs. County Durham is no different from any other area: it is struggling to meet the requirement to provide education support for the most vulnerable pupils. Last year its budget was overspent by £4.7 million, and this year it is forecast to be £5.1 million overspent. It has asked to take money out of the dedicated schools grant, which would direct money away from others into this vital area. We need to ask: why? As has been referred to, such things as the Children and Families Act were well meaning, but there has been a knock-on effect on individual budgets. For example, identifying those with SEN in the early years is very important, but it brings increased pressures. In County Durham, the number of children who have direct support in the early years has gone from 90 in 2014-15 to 287 in 2017-18, so there has been a huge increase in support. I am not saying that children do not need that support, but it has highlighted the issue.

Another issue is young people needing statements in mainstream education. In County Durham—this is the same elsewhere—there has been a decrease in the number of children needing statements who are accessing their education in the mainstream sector. It has dropped from 1,008 to 818 this year, because they are now being provided for in the private sector. That is not just down to the individual choice of parents, but because the provision that those individuals need cannot be provided. On average, it costs about a third more—if not more—to offer that type of provision in the mainstream sector, which puts pressure on the system.

On students in further education with special educational needs and disability, there is huge pressure on Durham County Council to support young people from 19 to 25. In 2015 there were 166 such individuals, and now there are 833. That requires not just support for those individuals, but adaptations that need to be made.

We can add to that the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston made about exclusions: there has been a 20% increase in exclusions from mainstream schools. On average, that costs Durham County Council £21,000 a year, and that does not include transport for those individuals. We have the system of ratcheting, with league tables and other issues, which means that

many schools—both those in the maintained sector and academies—are excluding some of those children, but they have to go somewhere.

Olwyn Gunn, the cabinet member responsible for education at Durham County Council, wrote to the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), to ask him to come and look at the issues in County Durham. She wrote on 22 November and got a reply in January saying that, unfortunately, the Minister's diary is overcommitted. May I invite him again, through his colleague the Minister for School Standards, to come to County Durham and meet the professionals on the ground?

Finally, I turn to capital. In my constituency, since 2010, there has not been one single new capital build project that was not already agreed under the last Labour Government. Under that Government, I had a new academy and secondary school, a new school at Pelton, a new school at Catchgate, Greenland juniors, and the refurbishment of St Joseph's. Not one single new capital project has since been put forward in County Durham, despite the county council recognising that across County Durham, there is a backlog of repairs and capital funding of £125 million. To add insult to injury, the council was told in 2010 that it would not be getting any funding to meet its basic capital funding needs. Sometimes I look at some of the figures, including, for example, for my favourite council, Wokingham. Its basic needs funding allocation per head is £309.43, whereas Durham gets £37.46. That cannot be right. I do not want to go on much longer, but I could name a few more such examples.

In conclusion, education is in crisis in this country and it is no good hiding from that. No matter how many times the Prime Minister says that austerity is finished, at the chalkface in classrooms, teachers and headteachers are struggling to manage budgets. I accept what people are saying about the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson); he has discovered the magic money tree, which we were told did not exist—actually, if we look at all his commitments, we see that he has discovered an entire equatorial rainforest of money trees. I come back to where I started: education is a fundamental right for individuals in this country. We all benefit from it and, if we want a strong society and a prosperous economy, we need to invest in it.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. We have plenty of time for this debate, and I thought that we would not need a time limit, but there have been some rather long speeches. I am still hoping that I will not have to impose a time limit if hon. Members take between eight and nine minutes each, which is a very long time. Stop and think about it: if you cannot say it in eight minutes, is it really worth saying?

8.27 pm

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): I will do my best to take that advice, Madam Deputy Speaker—I do like to hear the sound of my own voice, though, as many of us in this Chamber do.

It is a pleasure to speak in this debate on education as a member of the Education Committee, and I hope to be able to contribute something of use. With an ongoing

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leadership election and a forthcoming spending review, there is a great opportunity to make progress not only to continue some of the great work that is happening, but to change things. Education is a broad and varied subject, so forgive me if I hop about a bit.

The most prominent education issue, as we have discussed across the House in this debate, is school funding. To put it bluntly, there is not enough of it. I absolutely welcome the Government's steps to increase support through the national funding formula, ensuring that every school gets a rise and gets above a set minimum level of funding. That benefits schools in constituencies such as Mansfield, which have been historically underfunded. It is a positive step, but the truth is that we are also making it harder in some areas. It is positive that the Government have protected the state sector from pension contribution rises next year, for example, but at some point that will hit schools in the wallet. At the same time, the apprenticeship levy inadvertently affects schools' core budgets—for example, we have not protected the independent school sector from the pension contributions in the same way. Some people will say, "Why should we?", but if it impacts the independent sector to the extent that some suggest, we could see closures in that sector, and if that happened, state schools would have to pick up the pieces, which is not in our interests either.

There are significant challenges with special educational needs provision. The Select Committee, which is to report on this later in the year, has received reams of evidence from across the sector. SEND provision, too, impacts on schools' core budgets, as was mentioned earlier by an Opposition Member, as schools are expected to find the first £6,000 for pupils with SEND, which stacks up, particularly if a school has a reputation for delivering excellent and inclusive education for those pupils. A good reputation attracts more children with SEND to that school, and this success creates budgetary problems as more and more of its funding is spent on SEND. Without extra support, that is not sustainable. We should reward good practice. These issues, whether school places or school funding, are increasingly visible in my constituency surgeries, and I hear the same from colleagues across the House.

I am a Tory MP—I am a conservative with a big C and a small c—and I believe in people taking personal responsibility for their lives. I believe a person's success is down to them, their hard work and their talents, and that government exists to ensure that everyone has the basic things they need to take the opportunities out there, including a basic education that gives people the skills they need to get on in life. How far they get beyond that is up to them. I am not one for excessive government intervention in near enough anything else, and even in education we should be clear that parents are responsible for raising their children, but many children need us from early years all the way through the system if they are to have a chance in life. Put bluntly, if we want people to take personal responsibility for their lives and to ask as adults what they can do for themselves, rather than what government can do for them, we have to equip them properly when they are children through education.

The education system is the best chance the state has to fulfil its duty to ensure that everybody can succeed on their own merits, regardless of background, upbringing

and barriers in early life. It is also an opportunity to deal with issues early on and so save the taxpayer money later. We have to ensure that parents take their responsibilities seriously and that we support them when they need it, but we should also do more to give children in the most deprived communities and from the most challenging backgrounds the basic tools they need for life. Visiting schools in Mansfield, a former coalfields constituency with significant social challenges, I have come to realise that schools are the only place some kids have that are warm, safe and welcoming and where they can find people they trust—I would make the same case for youth clubs and other youth and children's services. If we are asking schools to properly support those children, they will need significantly more money.

Schools funded to be flexible and inclusive of all but the most challenging students benefit the community and in the long run the taxpayer. I have been genuinely delighted to hear so many positive pledges for school funding throughout the leadership contest, and I look forward to them being taken forward as soon as possible. We should also look at the opportunities that technology brings to reduce teacher workload, to manage data, to enable personalised lessons and assessment and generally to take the strain off teachers and allow them to focus on supporting their students. We have 25% of the world's edtech businesses here in the United Kingdom, but no clear route, as far as I can see, by which to roll out and test that technology in our schools. I have a great proposal for a pilot project that I am recommending to the Minister—I can recommend a good constituency for him to try it in as well—but perhaps we could also take it forward in the Select Committee. I have raised it there too.

Despite the many challenges, there are some excellent schools delivering incredible education and opportunities to young people. Very few weeks go by in the academic year when I do not visit a school or college in Mansfield. Just last week, I visited Bruns Academy to see what it was up to for school sports week, which is an excellent initiative that needs more promotion. I met Miss Lockwood and pupils to hear about the extra-curricular opportunities and the great work they do to go above and beyond for their pupils. Such work is always fantastic to see and a great credit to the many schools and teachers who do a great job. As a way to boost facilities and capital spending, I have suggested that we build new school buildings and relocate existing schools to these great new facilities and that we cover some of the cost by developing the old sites. I would love to chat about that with Ministers. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) said of his constituency, this has become the biggest issue in my constituency and in my inbox. It needs a resolution.

Another challenge in this sector, and an appropriate one for an estimates debate—I could go through the whole system and come up with a ream of different ideas and suggestions, but I will stick to Government spending—is further education funding. Those who look at the detail will see that FE is the part of the sector that gets the least support, which is incredibly frustrating. Colleges are in a constant state of reform, realignment and merger, which makes it incredibly difficult for them to focus on what they are there for. My local

college, which has long been a beacon of aspiration in our community, has its own problems. Some were created by the previous local leadership, which has now moved on, and the college is having to rebuild, restructure and refocus on the local provision that matters. It is doing a grand job actually and is getting back on track, which is fantastic.

I know that Education Ministers are staunch advocates of college funding. We must make colleges places that are getting young people ready for work. We are rolling out T-levels, which are a step in the right direction in balancing the equation between academic and technical education. We should value technical skills and qualifications as much as other routes. I hope the Government can make a success of that. We are often guilty of talking about aspiration and social mobility in terms of how many people go to university, but university is not the right choice for everybody. I would be so bold as to say that too many people go to university, chasing promised outcomes that do not exist, when they would be better off taking alternative routes.

For many people, college is the direct route into work at 18. Often vocational and technical courses are more expensive to run and need specialist equipment, while the additional pressure of unfunded requirements for pupils with SEN—up to 25 now—is another challenge. For these pupils, the support they get at college can determine whether they are ever likely to get into work. Not only does extensive, rounded support help them with their additional needs, but it helps us all as taxpayers, because if they can find meaningful work and support themselves, it saves us all money later on.

The recurring theme in schools and further education—and in, for instance, early years, children's and youth provision services—is that these are not costs but investments, and that evidence shows that they lead to great savings further down the line. Early spending in the education system reduces the number of exclusions, behavioural problems, social care needs, the cost of adult support services, and the number of young people who end up in prison, and saves the state money in countless other ways. The Government's own figures show that: the 2018 health profile for England states that educational attainment is “strongly linked” with lower instances of long-term disease and mental health conditions.

Investing money at an early stage in health visitors, early years and primary schools means saving it in our NHS later. Similarly, investment in schools and colleges, helping young people into work, and helping adults to retrain and change careers or achieve basic skills will save money in the welfare system, boost productivity, and produce a happier and healthier population. FE funding needs to increase, and again, I welcome the pledges that have been made throughout the leadership contest.

Part of the college and FE system includes apprenticeships. Apprenticeship spending has gone through the roof, and I welcome that, although the levy is still a work in progress. I echo what has been said about the Minister for School Standards, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Nick Gibb), who takes his job incredibly seriously and seems to enjoy it along the way. However, I should like to see increased flexibility to ensure that the money is used. I have suggested that part of the levy pot should be used to plan training and development, that there should be

a plan for how the rest of the levy should be spent, and that employers should have an opportunity to realise the potential benefits. That might help to ensure that more businesses make use of the cash that is available. There should also be more flexibility when it comes to how the cash can be used. For instance, recruitment firms could be allowed to spend their levy pots on upskilling jobseekers and helping people to prepare for work, which would, in turn, boost overall productivity. I should be happy to discuss those ideas further.

The Augar review provides an opportunity for big changes to be made throughout further and higher education to meet some of the challenges. Although not all its ideas are good, it certainly shows some positive ways in which reform could benefit the whole sector.

I am flying through this now, Madam Deputy Speaker, so I am close to the time that you specified. I am nearly there. However, you have got me on my favourite subject, so I am going to get it all out! Let me end my speech by raising some fairly disparate points about other areas of education.

I massively welcome the children's social care innovation programme. The Government have invested £200 million in up to 98 projects for local authorities to develop, test and scale new approaches to supporting vulnerable children in our care system. However, we need to find answers to a great many questions about children's services, not least the question of how we can take a more proactive and preventive approach that will mean taking fewer children into care. Learning in that regard is hugely important—as is the extra 1 billion quid in the next year's budget, which is very positive. I have spoken about the amount that front-loaded education spending will save in the long run; the same is true of spending on children's services, and perhaps even more true of spending on young people who are often very vulnerable.

I also welcome the additional funds to support maintained nurseries in the period preceding the spending review, which were greatly needed. We should consider how we can best utilise early years funding to support those who need it most. As I have said before in the Select Committee, while I am personally very excited about my youngest turning three next month and about how much that will save me in childcare, I am not convinced that my family is among those most in need of that financial help. It is brilliant to be able to reduce people's childcare costs and help people to take on more hours or go to work, but perhaps we could revisit the thresholds. Perhaps we could put some of that money to more effective use, or look again at the funding for nurseries for the delivery of those free hours to ensure that it is sustainable. Better career paths, training and staff development in nurseries would help to reduce staff turnover and offer better support for children, just as such opportunities for teachers would do in schools.

Needless to say, I am a passionate advocate of delivering for our young people. I think that if there is any sector in which Government money should be spent, it is education and children's services, which should be a key priority. The statistics on ever-improving school standards and attainment are massively welcome—more children are meeting basic standards in literacy and numeracy, there are more good and outstanding schools, and there has been some excellent progress of which we should be proud—but there is much more to do, particularly for

[Ben Bradley]

the most vulnerable. I hope that that will be the No. 1 domestic priority for the next Prime Minister later this summer.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his efforts. I am sure it is not his rhetoric that is lacking; it may be merely his arithmetic. Let us now look on this as a test in primary school arithmetic: let us try adding eight and then stopping. Otherwise, I will impose a time limit.

8.39 pm

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): I will try to be the swot here today, Madam Deputy Speaker, and it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley).

I regularly meet headteachers, governors, teachers, teaching assistants, families and pupils, and without exception there are huge levels of concern regarding many different aspects of our education system. As a former teacher and the mother of two young children, I wholeheartedly share their worries. One headteacher said to me recently, "Laura, the difference between the year 7 children I now have and those who are leaving this year is huge. The range of needs that they have is dramatically different but, Laura, we have to remember this is now a generation that has known nothing but austerity." This comment really struck me: there are children now who have never known anything but cuts and starved public services and the damage that this political choice has made.

Let me be clear about what that looks like in towns such as mine. It means children who are not being fed adequately. It means kids moving house countless times and living in properties that are completely unfit. It means children who see the insecurity of their parents regularly being out of work or in low-income jobs. It means not enough food in their bellies, coming to school with no underwear on, rolling loo roll in their knickers to deal with their periods. They see and experience mental health problems and the reality of no money to pay the bills. And these are not scare stories; this is reality—a shameful reality that needs to change.

There are so many different aspects of school funding that I could focus my remarks on today. However, a recent survey that I sent to local schools in Crewe and Nantwich concurred that top of the list of urgent problems that need addressing is special educational needs provision. I know as one of the vice-chairs of the parliamentary f40 group that this is something we appear to agree on across the House; indeed, a huge number of f40 MPs have recently written to the Chancellor asking for an urgent injection of £1.4 billion to be put into the system to deal with the high needs crisis across the country. The stark truth is that even though there is a statutory obligation, schools and councils are struggling to make this a reality.

This is where we seem to go around in a continual circle: schools report the difficulties they face; local authorities report the difficulties they face; and the Government respond by saying that there is more money than ever before. Meanwhile, we all know that there is a significant problem with children not receiving the education they are entitled to receive, and the evidence points overwhelmingly to the fact that there simply is not

enough money in the system to meet children's needs. It is not just about how the Department for Education divides up its money and the new funding formula; it is also about the fact that the Treasury has not recognised the required amount to make it fair.

This ultimately results in headteachers making difficult decisions that can bring them into conflict with parents. Some schools compromise on the kind of support they provide while others have no choice but to encourage parents to educate their children at home instead, and none of this is what they want to be doing. Shockingly, I now know that there are schools in my constituency that have not taken children with education, health and care plans into their schools because they do not have the teaching capacity, the resources or the money to be able to meet their needs. I also know that there are more children being excluded or off-rolled than ever before.

How is it happening that children with needs are starting to be cleansed from our mainstream schools? I have spoken to countless parents who are unable to get their child's needs met in mainstream; they are also unable to, or do not wish to, enrol their children in special needs schools. This then can result in parents withdrawing their child from school and trying to meet their needs themselves in their own home. I do not have time to go into detail about the problems that arise from that, but this is simply not the path that parents should be left with.

A report by the think-tank IPPR North revealed that the north had been worst affected, with cuts of 22% per pupil, and research has found that Government spending on support for children and young people with the most complex special educational needs and disabilities has failed to keep pace with rising demand, resulting in a reduction in funds available per pupil. The report also found that the cuts to education and local government budgets had led to a dramatic reduction in support for children with less complex needs and had increased demand for more intensive support.

Many I speak to in the profession have explained that this affects not just those with, or in the process of trying to get, an EHCP; they now have what would be considered more children with moderate needs in their classroom who are also not having their educational needs met. The fact is that everyone seems to be being let down by our education system: pupils, families and the staff working in our schools. We know that cuts to budgets have meant that support in schools and local authorities has been drastically reduced, leaving the most vulnerable students without the full support and care that they need. Parents and carers will not forgive a Government who do not believe that a fully funded and resourced education system is a priority.

Heartbreakingly, the picture facing schools supporting children with special educational needs is bleak. School budgets are at breaking point, and there have been severe cuts to health and social care provision. Schools and local authorities are left struggling to meet the needs of pupils. Without sufficient funding and a more coherent approach, the SEN code of practice is nothing more than an empty promise from Government to parents and children. The fact is that most children with SEN do not have any additional funding afforded to them. That means that the financial burden of additional support penalises those mainstream schools that are the most inclusive. That is unsustainable. Schools are seriously

struggling to fund SEN support in the face of crippling budget pressures that force them to cut critical support staff. We urgently need the Government to recognise the scale of the problem and to secure an immediate increase in funding from the Treasury.

Quite simply, it is make or break time for our school funding. It is absolutely essential that schools have the support of specialist services to meet children's needs, and the Government must provide more funding for health and social care services as well as for education. This is why the comment from my headteacher—that her children have known nothing but austerity—is so pertinent. The whole system is starved. I urge the Chancellor to meet the asks that the f40 group made to him recently and to provide the funds needed so that all children, wherever they live and whatever their needs, receive the education that they deserve. Do not tell me that there is not enough money in this country. Maybe those who have been gorging on the cake for so long should now consider sharing it as a matter of absolute urgency.

8.47 pm

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): I would like to take the Chamber on a tour around some of the schools in my constituency. It will be a very positive tour, as I have some great schools in my constituency with some great education being delivered in them. I apologise in advance to those schools that I do not mention tonight, but that does not mean to say that they are any different from the ones I am going to talk about.

I shall start in Long Eaton, at Wilsthorpe School, where last September the students were able to walk through the doors of a newly rebuilt school, which was absolutely fantastic. I was delighted to take the Secretary of State there to do the official opening. The students now seem to walk around the school with a spring in their step and really enjoy their new environment.

Still in Long Eaton, last week I was delighted to host eight students from Long Eaton School. They attend the enhanced resource centre there, which supports students with a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder. All eight students were a true credit to the school and a delight to be with. They came to London because they are learning about transport, so they walked from their school to the train station in Long Eaton and got a train to London. They then got on the tube and had that experience. They came to Parliament and then did some walking sightseeing, going to Buckingham Palace and Trafalgar Square before getting a bus back to the station to go back home. I know, just from the first part of their day, that the rest of the day will have been fantastic for them.

I was also delighted to host the Minister for School Standards at Cotmanhay Junior School in Ilkeston, in one of my most deprived wards. We went to the school on the same day as an unannounced Ofsted visit, which was probably not the best time, but I am delighted to report that the school has been rated as good, so the visit from the Minister and me did not affect that. The Minister described the school as a happy school, and I went back a few weeks later to the infant school at Cotmanhay to find that it is just as happy.

Not far from Cotmanhay Junior School is Chaucer Junior School, where the pupils share my passion for gardening. I pay credit to Kerry Wheatley, who has run the school's gardening club for 17 years, and I am sure that the pupils will be busy harvesting their vegetables and fruits as we speak. The school has entered the Keep

Britain Tidy competition and was a regional winner last year, and the pupils just love litter picking. They understand the importance of not dropping litter and the cost to the taxpayer of picking it up.

Going back to Long Eaton, Dovedale Primary School took part in Long Eaton's carnival just a couple of Saturdays ago. The fancy dress was inspired by "101 Dalmatians", but there were so many of them that it seemed more like 1,001 Dalmatians, with students, teachers and parents taking part. Everyone really enjoyed the day, and the school won the walking parade competition.

Moving on to Sandiacre, I had the pleasure of going along to the opening of an astroturf pitch a couple of weeks ago at Friesland School. The pitch is not just for the school but for the whole community, and it is now a community asset. A tremendous amount of fundraising was done by the school, by the Football Association and by the community as a whole, and I was pleased to learn that funding was also secured from the sugary drinks levy. While on the subject of school sports, I have a question for the Minister about the school sports premium. It has been a real positive for many primary schools across Erewash, but several schools have shared their concerns about the provision of the funding and their fear that it is about to cease, so will the Minister clarify the situation when he responds?

Schools do a lot to improve not just their facilities but the whole teaching environment, and they often think outside the box. Historically, Derbyshire is recognised as an area of below average funding, but the situation is improving. I hope that the schools I have highlighted on my whistle-stop tour demonstrate that this is not just about the amount of funding that a school receives, but about how that money is spent. This is about the dedication of our teachers and teaching assistants and the involvement of parents and volunteers. This is about everyone working together to ensure that our children, who are the future of our country, get a great start in life and a great education.

8.52 pm

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): When talking about education, it is important to recognise its position within the wider national context. Some of my colleagues have already talked about this, but I will focus my remarks on the most vulnerable children who go to our schools. I recently read a fascinating report written by LKMco and others for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. It is a couple of years old, but it talks about a few interesting things, including inter-generational disability and the likelihood of a child with SEND having had parents who also have special needs and disabilities.

The report focused on the link between SEND and poverty, and some of its conclusions were quite stark. It said that

"children with special educational needs and disability...are more likely to experience poverty than others."

It also stated that SEND

"can be a result of poverty as well as a cause of poverty."

It highlighted that 28.7% of children with free school meals have SEND and that

"more than half of children with behavioural difficulties or physical difficulties were living in poverty at the age of 9 months". The study went through all the years of the children. The report also found that

"the families of children with SEND are more likely to move into poverty".

[Emma Hardy]

When I looked into all that, I thought, “Why would that happen? Why is it that a child with special needs is more likely to live in poverty?” The report said that there was an increased risk of family breakdown as a result of a stress on the family, and that the chances of both parents being able to work are less likely if they are caring for a child with special needs and disabilities; childcare is near impossible to find and can end up being more expensive, and time away from work to care for a child with SEND means that someone is less likely to advance or pursue their own career. All these things need to be taken into account when we talk about funding for children with special needs and disabilities. The report also says that it is not just that children with special needs and disabilities do not achieve as well. The report looked at the interconnecting factors—including the area where a family live, whether they live in poverty and whether they have special needs and disabilities—and how those factors combine to give these vulnerable children the worst possible chance and the least likelihood of progressing and achieving. When we talk about cuts and a lack of funding for SEND, we have to place it in the reality that these children are already at a significant disadvantage and are likely to come from poorer backgrounds.

Last year, Hull headteachers wrote to the Secretary of State asking for extra money to help these children, and they have failed to receive that money. The support, although targeted through the education, health and care plans, is still more readily available to parents on higher incomes. We saw that at the Education Committee, where parents described having to fight all the time to get a plan, having to go into battle and having to enter tribunals. I have absolute respect for each and every parent who has done that, but I am fully aware that so many parents out there do not understand how to fight the system or, for various reasons, are unable to do so. Even after getting an EHC plan, over 4,000 children are awaiting provision.

I was lobbied the other week by Sense, which talked about parents whose children have been awarded a placement only to find that they have not been awarded the transport to get there, so they are unable to take up that place. The charity told me this is happening throughout the country. I have tabled nearly 20 parliamentary questions on this issue, so we will see all the facts when we get the answers back from the Department.

I have had examples from Elizabeth, who spent over £5,000 on independent assessments, and from Sharon, who spent £7,500 on individual private assessments. I totally understand that. Would not any parent here do the same for their children? We have the financial advantage to do that, but not all parents of children with special needs do.

Children with special needs and disabilities are less likely to report themselves as happy, which I find really sad. They are more likely to report that they feel bullied, and they are more likely to report that they do not feel they have friends at school. I ask the Minister to look at redesigning the whole way in which special educational needs and disabilities are funded, because the high-needs block, based on historical data and information, does not work, and nor does the notional £6,000. A fundamental rethink is needed.

We also need a fundamental rethink of how we support these children in our schools, because it is not just about money—I agree with the point made by the hon. Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley). It is about support, it is about designing the curriculum, and it is about recognising that these children come to school from a different position and often face more disadvantages than many of the other pupils.

I finish by saying that it is far easier to build strong children than to repair broken adults.

8.58 pm

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): It is a real pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) and to have listened to her elegant speech.

Being a Member of Parliament is a great privilege, and one of the greatest privileges is going to schools in my constituency to speak to the young people. In the past month alone, I have had the pleasure of speaking to young people at Saint John’s Church of England Primary School, St James’ Church of England Primary School, St Mark’s Church of England Junior School and Lakeside Primary School.

The children from Lakeside Primary School came to the Parliamentary Education Centre. They might think they got the opportunity of asking me questions here, but it is actually me, as a Member of Parliament, who derives the greatest benefit. I find it hugely valuable and stimulating to hear from young people about their aspirations and what matters to them.

This debate has focused a great deal on funding, and I will come to that, but we ought to pause and take a moment to recognise so much of the good and positive work taking place in our schools, which is certainly the case in my Cheltenham constituency. One example, in particular, is critical to underscore: literacy improvements in our schools are astonishing. The phonics screening check has led to an enormous increase in the percentage of six-year-olds who are on track to become fluent readers, from a figure at or around 50% to well over 80%. That is a stunning increase. It is also the case that a full 85% of children are in good or outstanding schools, which compares with 66% in 2010. These are not just glib statistics; these are thousands of pupils getting a better education, setting themselves up for a better life. We should recognise that and celebrate it, and I wish to pay tribute to the teachers in my constituency, who are working phenomenally hard to deliver those excellent education outcomes.

Other exciting initiatives are taking place in the educational sector in Cheltenham, one of which is a formal partnership that has been set up between All Saints’ Academy and Cheltenham College. That is working to provide richer extra-curricular provision, shared knowledge and expertise in learning techniques, and improved career professional development opportunities. The partnership is working well and we should support it.

In addition, Balcarras is spearheading the GLOW maths hub, which provides additional teaching resources to schools, not just in Gloucestershire, but beyond. That is being headed up by Steve Lomax, who is doing a tremendous job, again raising standards and aspirations in mathematics across my constituency and beyond.

Some additional funding is also coming to Cheltenham, in the form of more than £20 million for a new school that Balcarras will be running in the south of Cheltenham. So this is additional funding going into my constituency. Although I am talking about funding, it is right to say that not every problem in our schools can be solved by finance but it does remain an issue, and I make no apology for referring to it. True it is that the Government have supported schools with additional funding—in particular, the planned increase in employer contribution rates is going to be met by the Government and the increase in pay grants—but schools have been shouldering additional pressures in national insurance and pension contributions.

The point I really want to focus on in the time left available to me is the issue of special needs funding. The budget for special needs is about £6.3 billion, which is a significant sum. To put it in context, the entire prisons budget is about £4 billion. Although the Government have continued to put money into this important sector, the need has grown, if not exponentially, certainly very dramatically. That was brought home to me when I went to a special school in Cheltenham, where I met a teacher who had been teaching for some 20 years or so. He said that when he began teaching in a special school in Cheltenham, the pupil to teacher ratio could be about 15:1; these were children who needed a bit of additional support, with which they would have been able to enter the workplace successfully and go on to lead a full and fulfilling life. The reality now, however, is that such is the level of complexity that 15:1 is manifestly inadequate. Schools that are nominally intended to be catering for children with moderate learning difficulties are increasingly dealing with children with severe learning difficulties, and schools that are supposed to be dealing with children with severe learning difficulties are addressing the needs of children far beyond what was ever anticipated, even as recently as 10 years ago.

In my constituency, we have the Battledown children's centre, which is providing specialist assessment, as well as Belmont School, Bettridge School and The Ridge Academy. The common theme we see when we visit any of these schools is that the level of complexity has gone up. We have precious little understanding of why that is. Some people say to me that it is to do with social breakdown. Others say that there is the role of social media. Others say, in an observation that perhaps causes us some concern and is difficult to articulate but may be true none the less, that there are children surviving childbirth who might very well not have done 20 years ago. That is a matter for great celebration but it potentially has a knock-on impact. I wish to make it clear that I do not know whether that is a cause, but it has been raised with me. The point is that these needs are there. With some modest additional support, the schools can keep functioning, but if they do not get that additional support soon, I fear that some of them will be placed under intolerable strain.

I wish also to reiterate a point that has been made by others, including the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew), who is no longer in his place. He made the point that mainstream schools often absorb and address some of the need within mainstream provision, but increasingly they are disincentivised from doing so because they are required to cover the first £6,000, which needs to be paid from within their existing budgets. As a matter of fact, that rule was set at a time when we could understand

the logic for it—because otherwise there was a risk of creating a perverse incentive; schools would wish to mischaracterise and over-diagnose SEND to ensure that funding was provided—but that was in an era when the level of demand was nothing like what it is now.

We have to support responsible schools, including in my constituency Balcarras School, which does a fantastic job for pupils with SEND but needs to be encouraged to continue to do so, because if the school cannot provide that support, those children will go out into the schools that cater for children with moderate learning difficulties, and in turn that will shunt children with severe learning difficulties out of their schools and so on. Ultimately, if they cannot be educated in that system, they will move into alternative provision, which is fantastically more expensive and drains the high-needs budget fast.

I invite the Government, who are making really important strides to support the SEND budget—the high-needs block—to consider two things in particular. The first is the £6,000 issue to which I just referred. The second thing is that the common message coming out from special schools in my constituency is that, when they have to deal with episodes of mental health crisis, which they do increasingly regularly, they find it difficult to know what to do. Should they deal with it in-house with teachers who, truth be told, are not expert in this area, or should they take the children down for a long wait in A&E, which is unlikely to be the best place for them? If we could have specific support, no doubt commissioned by the clinical commissioning group, to provide on-tap mental health support for those schools, that would make an enormous difference and free up resources to allow teachers to do what they want to carry on doing: teaching some of the most vulnerable students in my constituency.

9.7 pm

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), who spoke so well and in such an informed manner, particularly about the demands and challenges of special educational needs. I thank all the great teachers and headteachers, the leadership teams, the teaching assistants, and all the governors who provide their time voluntarily to some great schools, of which I am proud to have so many throughout the constituency of Warwick and Leamington.

As far as I am concerned, education is probably the greatest gift from one generation to the next, and it always has been. But all that is changing, and it is changing incredibly quickly. From the wholesale closure of children's centres to the pressures on higher education, every facet and every sector of education is in or potentially faces a funding crisis, but for the purposes of this debate, I wish to focus primarily on our schools and colleges.

In recent weeks I have had the privilege of visiting many primary schools, including Woodloes, Westgate, Telford, St Margaret's, Bishop's Tachbrook and Clapham Terrace. Just 37 days ago I visited a great little school—perhaps not so little—and met the children, who were all highly motivated. I took questions from years 5 and 6, and they asked about climate change and plastics in our environment, and there were even questions on Brexit and its impact on exchange rates. I thought it was pretty tough. I got talking to the headteacher, who

[*Matt Western*]

confided that sometime that day he was going to have to find £50,000 to meet a budget cut. He introduced me to a pupil with special needs. The child needs one-to-one support, but the school cannot afford it, so the headteacher is left trying to square a difficult circle. Since 2015, the school has lost more than £340 per pupil. Of course, the school is not alone in that. In fact, that sum of money is pretty typical across our primary schools.

Thirty-two days ago, I went to a special educational needs picnic in the constituency. It was brilliantly organised by some wonderful parents—Cassie, Ellie, Froo, Helen and Emma. The event brought together parents from across Warwickshire and gave them a voice, enabling them to speak about the crisis that we are facing in special educational needs and disability funding. The parents are desperate. As we have heard from Members across the House, their children are being squeezed out of mainstream education by schools that cannot afford to teach them. Some schools can provide only a limited number of hours a day or week, so the children spend much of their time at home. Some of the most vulnerable children in our society are being denied a full education. It all sounds faintly Victorian, but I do not blame schools and nor do the parents—but they do blame the Government.

Eleven days ago, I hosted a meeting for parents at a local secondary school. Some 60 people attended. They feel anger and frustration. Just nine months ago, only days before the start of the academic year, the headteacher was suspended, the board of governors dissolved, and an interim executive board introduced. Months later, the sixth form faces closure and the school faces significant cuts. The pupils and parents are being left in limbo; their choice is limited. They are having to look around for alternative sixth-form provision—as if that is going to be easy.

Earlier in the week, I was talking, by chance, to a sixth-form student at another secondary school who had just finished her A-levels. Her story well illustrates the destruction of the provision and choice available to this next generation. Like several of her friends, she wanted to study politics, but there were too few of them—just six—so the choice was withdrawn. She took German instead, but the teaching staff had to be cut, so she ended up teaching herself for her final year. What chance is there for her?

Ten days ago, I visited another primary school—again in Warwick. I met the school council. The headteacher talked me through the financial crash that the school has faced. It has lost £97,000 since 2015-16—that is £511 per pupil. It has lost two teaching assistants, and the school has just 200 pupils. The headteacher has to cover special educational needs and disabilities in the absence of sufficient special educational needs co-ordinators. As a result, it is typical for the school to have up to 3% of pupils excluded at any one time. As if that were not enough, the future appears even bleaker: there will be a £35,000 deficit next year followed by a £140,000 deficit the year after. This school is, of course, not alone.

All our primary schools across the area are facing a crisis. One in south Leamington has lost almost £650 per pupil. Similarly, a school in north Leamington has had to cut £570 per pupil and six teaching assistants. In Whitnash, one school has lost £540 per pupil. These are huge sums for schools to have to face up to.

It is not just primary schools facing massive financial pressures, but our superb nursery schools, such as Warwick and Whitnash. Since 2013, we have seen the dismantling of our precious children's centres. In Warwickshire, the Government's funding cuts, together with the failure to raise sufficient money by claiming zero council tax increases, have seen the wholesale closure of the children's centres, with 26 of 39 being closed.

As the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) rightly observed, the first 1,000 days are critical for both child and parent, yet we are seeing the withdrawal of these services for many in our community. Across Warwickshire, the bigger picture is pretty bleak. Schools have lost £50 million in total since 2015—that is an average of £244 per child. It is not as if Warwickshire already had very high per-pupil funding; it comes 120th out of 140.

It is easy to talk about these cuts in the abstract. They are extremely damaging to our children, their parents and the teaching staff, but they are also damaging, as we have heard elsewhere, to our society and to our communities, as schools are so often at the very centre of them—they are the very heartbeat of them. The cuts are also damaging to our cultural wealth and our economy, as my right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) illustrated so well earlier on.

How can it be that we have cut music, arts and design and languages from so many schools' provision and choices? Those sorts of subjects are increasingly the preserve of private schools. It has to be a concern that so many in our society are being denied that choice.

I am afraid to say it, but I think that what the parents of Warwick and Leamington appreciate so well is that the Government are failing the next generation. It cannot be right that so many young people are being denied the education that they deserve and that would ultimately serve this country well. But they are also being failed in the protections they need, whether safeguarding or mental health provision in our schools.

In conclusion, I agree with the notion of a 10-year education plan, as mentioned by the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon). He is right that we need long-term planning—schools are crying out for it—but that means nothing without the massive increase in investment that we need in our education system. I urge the Minister to fight hard for that in the spending review. However, that would benefit only those born today. As it stands, this Government have failed the next generation, and the young people let down by an ideology born of austerity will never forget it.

9.15 pm

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for adding me to your list of speakers. I begin by declaring my interests, as the husband of a higher-level teaching assistant currently working in a west midlands primary school, as the father of two young children who attend primary school in Dudley, and as somebody who, like many Members across the House, simply would not be here without the benefit of excellent state schools and the support of parents who placed a huge value on good education, despite—or perhaps because of—not having any formal qualifications themselves. It is hard to imagine any area of policy that is more vital to our society, our economy and

our communities than education. Education lies at the heart of opportunity, it drives social mobility, it reinforces inclusion and it strengthens community cohesion.

Schools in Dudley face many challenges. The debate around school funding is often framed in terms of inner-city schools or remote, rural village schools, but schools in industrial towns face their own challenges: in educating many children, often with multiple indices of deprivation; in bringing together and educating children from many diverse backgrounds and cultures, often with first languages other than English; and in educating in a post-industrial age, with changing work patterns and a move away from children following their parents into traditional industries, with the impact that has on aspirations and educational expectations.

However, Dudley also has many excellent schools, and many outstanding teachers and other staff who are doing amazing work to give our children the best possible start in life, regardless of their background. Like other Members, I regularly visit schools in my constituency—I have now visited almost all of them three times in the four years since being elected. In the past two weeks I have seen the outstanding work being done on sports and physical education at Glynne Primary School, which I visited ahead of sports week to see how it is using the school sports premium to support greater participation and love for sports among children at all levels of physical activity. I have visited Dingle Community Primary School and St Mark's Church of England Primary School in Pensnett—two schools that arguably had not been meeting their full potential or delivering what they perhaps should have been for local children—where new headteachers who have started in the past few months are already making a real and visible difference.

I have revisited Pens Meadow School, a special school where I formally opened a post-16 unit three years ago, to see the incredible work it is doing with children across the age range, many of whom have very complex special needs—the headteacher told me that, although it is a small school, typically it loses at least one pupil each year because of serious health conditions. Each of these schools and many others are delivering exceptional results against very tight budgetary constraints. The additional £1.3 billion being invested last year and this year, over and above what was set out in the 2015 public spending review, is important, as is the Government's decision to meet the costs of schools' increased employer contributions. That issue was raised by many school headteachers who were concerned that their existing budgets simply could not cope with this additional cost.

This debate is about the estimates, but it would clearly be impossible to separate that from the forthcoming spending review, which is the context in which they must be considered. Reassuringly, at all the meetings with Treasury Ministers that I have been to with Conservative colleagues, it has become clear that while we are very pleased to see the large increases in funding for the NHS announced last year as more money becomes available for this spending review, our schools, colleges and maintained nurseries must, alongside policing, be the priority for additional investment.

Nowhere is that money more desperately needed than in special schools. We see in these estimates increased funding for high needs, but going forward we need more. We need significantly more capacity for special educational needs, particularly in special schools. In Dudley,

all our special schools are assessed as either good or outstanding. Unusually, parents, when given the choice, would rather their child went to a special school than be educated at one of the mainstream schools. However, too many pupils who need a place at a special school this autumn are being told that no places are available. Incredibly, 40 children who have been assessed as band E or higher—so with very, very severe learning disabilities or complex special needs—are without a place at a special school this September. This needs to be addressed, and that can only be done with significant capital funding to increase capacity.

Of course, education is not only about our schools. At either end of the state education spectrum, our colleges and state nurseries are disproportionately underfunded. I welcome the £24 million of additional supplementary funding that has been provided for state nurseries, which will make a big difference, but there is clearly a need to provide greater certainty further into the future. As the headteacher of Netherton Park Nursery School, the only maintained nursery school in Dudley, has written to me to say, unless this funding can be put on a sustainable footing going into the future, it will probably mean cuts to staffing and services or even the closure of her school. She writes:

“We do not know what places we can provide after Summer 2020. We are making decisions that could be detrimental to the future of our schools because we have no clear direction from the government about our funding.”

We need to provide that clear direction. It is essential that that is done in the weeks—at most, in the couple of months—that lie ahead, so that schools can plan for 2020-21, nurseries can provide people with the best start in life, and we can deliver the state educational system that all our communities deserve.

9.24 pm

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for letting me speak in the debate, which it has been a great pleasure to listen to. I concur with almost everything that has been said by Members on both sides of the House.

Education is in a state of crisis. In Derbyshire, I live in one of the f40 areas. Our schools have some of the lowest funding, and they are struggling. House of Commons Library research shows that the 50 schools in my constituency have lost more than £2 million over the last five years. They are having to lose teachers—in particular, teaching assistants—which is having an impact on pupils. It is also having an impact on the governors, who have to make some incredibly tough decisions, and on the school leadership, the support staff, the tutors, the parents and the children themselves.

I pay tribute to the incredible dedication and support that is given across the education sector, particularly by those who work in it and do hours over and above the call of duty, but also by the parents, who contribute; by governors, who give up their time; and often by the children themselves, who bake cakes for fundraising days, have school councils and contribute where they can.

The impact of our crisis in education is felt most sharply by our children. My hon. Friends the Members for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) and for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) spoke

[*Ruth George*]

movingly about the impact of austerity on children in their constituencies, which I concur with. Our schools are having to deal with children who turn up hungry, who do not have school uniform, who are struggling for housing and who simply cannot do homework because they do not have the resources—for example, access to the internet—or support, or even somewhere quiet at home to do their homework. Schools are also suffering from the mental health crisis, as we have heard, and from county lines, drug pushers and knives. Increasingly, our schools are having to deal with problems that we would usually ask youth services or the police to deal with. So much more is being placed upon their shoulders, with fewer resources to do it.

I would like to concentrate my speech on the early years, which we have heard little about today but which is facing at least as much of a crisis as any other part of the education system. The hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) spoke about maintained nurseries, but there is only one of those in his constituency, and there are only three in mine. Around 3% of children are educated in maintained nurseries. Everywhere is struggling. We have seen over 10% of nursery provision close in the last two years alone. This is a crisis.

I regularly meet people who work in nurseries across my constituency, and they tell me the struggle involved in making the 30 hours' funding stretch. It is based on costings from six years ago. Since then, they have seen rises in the minimum wage, pension provision, rent, rates and all the other costs they face, and it simply does not cover them. We had a meeting this afternoon with the Minister and nurseries from across the country, to launch a report by the all-party parliamentary group on childcare and early education, which it has been my pleasure to temporarily chair. There is incredible anger across the nursery sector that they are essentially working for nothing. They are having to employ people with the great skills, dedication and qualifications to deliver the Ofsted results for early years education that are required of them, but they cannot pay more than the minimum wage on the amount they get from the 30 hours' funding. It is an absolute scandal. They are having to work longer hours, with more bureaucracy—monthly payments mean monthly assessments for children—and it is difficult to offer contracts.

That has an impact on the best providers. Nurseries that seek to employ qualified staff and support them, to do more for their children and to have low ratios are the ones that suffer most from a lack of funding, as well as nurseries that take children with special educational needs—many nurseries do not because they simply cannot afford to; they do not get the support they need to do that. So many of the special needs problems we are seeing in our schools, which have been very passionately spoken about by Members from across this House, could be addressed by investment in the early years—in speech and language development for children, or in support with their social issues at a very early age—before they get to school, where they have to be assessed all over again and where those special needs become even more of a problem. On behalf of the whole nursery sector, may I make a plea to the Minister to look at this across the country? The f40 group, which has been fighting just for schools, has realised that we are on the brink of a crisis in nursery education. We have seen

10% of nursery provision close. We will end up at a stage where we do not have enough nursery places for our children, and the best providers will suffer most.

The other issue that is raised so often in my constituency is further education and sixth-form provision. We have seen New Mills sixth form have to close after 21% cuts to the funding for school sixth forms. That means we have provision of just two sixth forms left in my entire constituency, out of 50 schools. Buxton Community School is left offering just 10 A-levels. Hundreds of young people simply do not have the choice to be able to do the courses they want to do or aspire to doing. They often have to travel an hour each way to access the colleges that do offer A-levels in particular, but also the vocational courses they want to do. And it costs: they get no support from 16 with the funding for that, not even a youth rate of bus travel. That means young people from deprived backgrounds, whose parents do not have the income to pay the often £1,000 a year in bus fares, cannot afford to go on to that provision. They cannot afford to have the aspirations we would want any of our children to be able to achieve. That is absolutely devastating for those young people, for their life chances and for our communities, where young people cannot achieve all that they want.

I spoke to year 9s in one of our local secondary schools last week. I spent the whole day there, and the headteacher joked that an innovative way to cover the cuts was to get the MP in to teach some of his pupils. I asked those 13 and 14-year-olds what they wanted from me and what they wanted from the Government to see what they could aspire to. Do you know what they asked for? They wanted a covered bench in the park because they get wet when it rains. That I am afraid, after a decade of austerity, is what our young people are aspiring to: they just want to stay dry. I think that is an absolute indictment of our society and of our system. Young people have had their aspirations limited by what opportunities there are for them in youth provision out of school, but also within school, in spite of the very best efforts of the fantastic teaching staff and support staff in all our schools. It is here in this House that we are failing our schools, our children, the parents who are fighting day and night for special educational needs provision for their children, and the staff that go over and above to provide it. We here need to do our part and support those schools, nurseries and colleges so that our young people have the aspirations and the achievement they deserve.

9.33 pm

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): It is a real pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Ruth George). Far from being wet, I noticed it was 30° heat at the carnival in Tideswell on Saturday, as I paraded around with my pipe band. Far from needing shelter, I have to say it was more like a Tuscany hill town.

Ruth George: It does rain occasionally.

Mike Kane: It is true that it does rain occasionally in the Peak district.

We have had a good debate. May I congratulate right hon. and hon. Members from across the House on their contributions, and obviously the Chair of the Education

Committee, the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), on his articulate opening? I also congratulate him on how well he chairs that Select Committee.

When I last spoke in this Chamber about education cuts, I was positively surprised about how many Members from the Conservative party were in open dissent, and it has been no different really tonight.

I will pick out a few contributions. My hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) said that education was the greatest gift that we could pass from one generation to the next. That is true, but we have heard the bleak reality today. The Chair of the Education Committee said that funding was “bleak”—several Members used that adjective—and that there is little long-term thinking about education and its budgets compared with the Department of Health and Social Care.

The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) talked about the double whammy that some coastal towns suffer in terms of education standards and attracting the calibre of people needed to our education establishments. He said that the tank was now empty. That was the best metaphor of the evening. He went on to say that there was a crisis in children's social care on this Government's watch.

The debate reinforces the unity in this legislature that things must change. Members who criticised the Government on education funding did so bravely and well. As they vie for the leadership of their party and the country, the right hon. Members for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) and for South West Surrey (Mr Hunt) have pledged new funding for education. Whether they fulfil their promise—I suspect that they will not—the pledge is an implicit criticism of their Government's neglect of education.

The hon. Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) spoke well. He spoke for many of us when he said that his constituency surgeries were often rammed with parents who are desperate to get SEND provision for their children. Many Members will recognise that situation.

The hon. Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) spoke passionately about the schools in her constituency. She mentioned the good work that the Long Eaton School is doing, despite suffering a £385,000 cut since 2015.

The hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) spoke well and passionately about the schools on his patch, but Gloucestershire has suffered a £41.7 million cut to its funding since 2015.

Alex Chalk: The hon. Gentleman will know that one of the issues that Gloucestershire has had to face is inheriting an unfair funding formula. Will he take his share of the responsibility for bequeathing to the Government a funding formula that disadvantaged rural authorities in favour of urban authorities?

Mike Kane: I remind the hon. Gentleman that, as a representative of the Trafford authority, I, too, am from one of the £40 authorities, so I know what underfunding looks like. We know that the fair funding formula is making no difference because it does not level up all schools as required.

We also know about the frustration in the Department. After all, the Secretary of State said that he had heard the concerns about education funding “loud and clear”.

Last year, it was reported that he was trying to squeeze more money out of the Treasury. He also told us that every school would see

“at least a small cash increase”—[*Official Report*, 29 January 2018; Vol. 635, c. 536.]

However, we have seen nothing substantial—nothing that will wind back the years of austerity that No. 11 has waged against Sure Start centres, schools, colleges and universities and all those who work in them.

Instead, all the Chancellor offered in the last Budget was “a few little extras”. It is worth unpacking what he meant by that. When he was pressed, he said it could be for “a couple of whiteboards, or some laptop computers, or something”. It is no wonder that the Secretary of State was said to have cringed. That is another example of how isolated the Chancellor is from everyday reality. That “little extra” does not match the £3.5 billion that the Government took out of capital expenditure in the last Budget. It will not address the link between poverty and special needs, as my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) articulated brilliantly.

The Opposition know that the massive cut, along with the impact of the public sector pay freeze, has engendered an unprecedented crisis in teacher recruitment and retention. New teachers are less likely to stay in our schools now than at any time in the past 20 years. This week alone, the statistics are getting worse. That is happening at a time when there are some 45,000 more pupils in supersized classrooms, according to the Department's figures, which were released last week. Schools have more pupils, but fewer teachers, fewer teaching assistants and fewer support and auxiliary staff. The latest OECD international survey ratings confirmed that England has the eighth biggest problem in the world for secondary school teacher shortages and the third highest level shortages in Europe.

At the advent of a new Tory Prime Minister, it is perhaps of little worth inquiring whether we will see the money the Secretary of State said he was trying to squeeze out of the Treasury. I wonder if the Secretary of State has made representations to the leadership candidates. The right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock) said that there would be a pay rise for public sector staff, but that seemed to be rolled back almost immediately the other day. Again, I suspect that that promise will not be fulfilled, but I hope the Secretary of State has informed both candidates of what teachers and pupils are going through. In fact, can the Minister even tell us if the School Teachers' Review Body will publish its annual report before the summer recess, or will a new Prime Minister just kick that down the road?

The recent report by the UN special rapporteur found that children are showing up at school with empty stomachs, and that schools are collecting food and sending it home because teachers know that students will otherwise go hungry. The rapporteur also found that teachers are not equipped to ensure that students have clean clothes and food to eat, especially as teachers may be relying on food banks themselves. It is worth noting that the Chancellor rejected the report, dismissing it as nonsense. It is no wonder that the Secretary of State has not been able to get anything out of him.

The early years are the most important in anyone's life. We have had some excellent contributions. My colleague in Trafford, my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), said that schools

[Mike Kane]

are picking up the pieces of the wider austerity agenda, particularly when it comes to mental health. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) in a passionate speech said that this generation of children are the austerity generation—a shameful reality, she said. The hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) spoke with passion about campaigning for the maintained nursery in his school, but his authority, Dudley, has suffered £27 million cuts since 2015. My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak said that 10% of nursery provision has been closed in the past two years.

My hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State has spoken about her local Sure Start and how it changed her life. She speaks for many. The policy area is equally important, and yet since 2010 over 1,000 Sure Start centres have closed. We cannot quantify how many people will have missed out because of that and it is a false economy. The latest Institute for Fiscal Studies report showed that Sure Start saved the NHS millions by reducing the hospitalisation of children, a point made by a number of hon. Members across the House. Is the Minister aware that right now there are 1,500 children with special educational needs and disabilities without a school place? What is his Department doing to help them?

There is one area that has suffered the deepest cuts and there is no reason to believe that a new Prime Minister will reverse the damage. Further and adult education has suffered funding cuts every year since the Conservative party came into office. The cuts stand at £3 billion. The Chair of the Education Committee said that FE has suffered twice the amount of cuts of other sectors. If the candidates to be Prime Minister want to make a real difference, they should look at ending devastating cuts to further education. In higher education, we have seen students loaded with more and more debt just for seeking an education, but it is adult and part-time learners who have lost out the most. The Sutton Trust found that the number of adult learners fell by more than half since 2015. Will the Minister admit at long last that his Government's policies have driven part-time learners out of education? Do we expect a future Tory Prime Minister to implement the recommendations of the Augar review?

Lastly, I would like to repeat the point many Members have made today and finish by paying tribute to all the educators in our country. My right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) summed it up brilliantly. As my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak said, governors have had to make intolerable decisions. I wish to praise them as well. They do a fantastic and vital job to educate the next generation and to feed our economy with the skills we require. For the last nine years, however, they have suffered a heavy burden as the Government have needlessly made their lives harder.

9.44 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), the Chair of the Education Committee, for the way that he opened this debate on education estimates, for his kind comments about my work on literacy, and for his praise for my right hon. Friend the

Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills. He is right to emphasise, as he so often does, the importance of education as preparation for the world of work.

To address one or two points raised by the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane), he should know that there are 40,000 more teaching assistants today than there were in 2010 and there are 10,000 more teachers. He mentioned Cheltenham; there is no more assiduous champion for school funding and schools in Cheltenham than my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk). That is one reason why £49.9 million has been spent on schools in Cheltenham in this financial year, which is a 5.3% increase on 2017-18.

There were good speeches from the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy), the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) and the hon. Members for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith), for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) and for High Peak (Ruth George). My hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) demonstrated her passion for education with her whistle-stop tour of schools in her constituency, including Cotmanhay Junior School, which I enjoyed visiting with her recently—I feel so sorry for the headteacher who had the appalling double whammy of having the Schools Minister and an Ofsted inspector there on the same day. My hon. Friend the Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) was equally passionate about the schools in his constituency, not just because his wife is a high-level teaching assistant.

The hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) raised the important issue of mental health, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham. Mental health is a priority for this Government, who are working closely with Universities UK on embedding the #stepchange programme, which calls on higher education to adopt mental health as a strategic priority. The university mental health charter, announced in June last year, is backed by the Government and led by the sector, and it will drive up standards in promoting student and staff mental health and wellbeing. The charter will reward institutions that deliver improved student mental health outcomes.

The hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston also raised the tragic issue of young suicide. Following a conference in spring last year on understanding suicide in the student population, Universities UK worked with a range of experts to develop guidance on measures to help to prevent suicide. The Government have also published the first cross-Government suicide prevention plan for wider society. The plan, led by the Department of Health and Social Care, sets out actions for local government, the NHS, the criminal justice system and the universities sector.

The Government are determined to create a world-class education system that offers opportunity to everyone, no matter what their circumstances or where they live. That is why we are investing in our education system to make sure that schools, colleges and universities have the resources that they need to make this happen. In 2019, the Department for Education resource budget is around £68.5 billion, which we are debating today. Of that, £54 billion is for estimate lines relating to early years and schools, £14 billion is for estimate lines relating primarily to post-16 and skills, and £0.4 billion is for social care, mobility and disadvantage.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow also raised the issue of the long-term plan for funding education. Given the strategic national importance of education, I share that view. At the spending review, we will be considering our funding of education in the round and looking to set out a multi-year plan. This will look at the right level of funding as well as how we can use that funding.

Since 2010, we have been reforming our education system to ensure that every child, regardless of background, is able to achieve their full potential, and to close the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged, which is also a priority for my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) and my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham. Thanks in part to those reforms, the proportion of pupils in good and outstanding schools has increased from 66% in 2010 to 85% in 2018. In primary schools, our more rigorous curriculum, on a par with the highest performing in the world, has been taught since September 2014, and the proportion of primary school pupils reaching the expected standard in the maths test rose from 70% in 2016, when the new curriculum was first tested, to 76% in 2018, and in reading it rose from 66% to 75%. Moreover, this country has risen from joint 10th to joint eighth in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study—PIRLS—survey of the reading ability of nine and 10-year-olds.

In secondary schools, our more rigorous academic curriculum and qualifications support social mobility by ensuring disadvantaged children have the same opportunities for a knowledge-rich curriculum and the same career and life opportunities as their peers. The attainment gap in primary schools between the most disadvantaged pupils and their peers, measured by the disadvantage gap index, has narrowed by 13.2% since 2011.

Our vision is for a school-led system that recognises headteachers as being best placed to run their schools and to drive improvement based on what they know works best. The reforms of the last nine years show that autonomy and freedom allow the best heads and teachers to make the right decisions for their pupils to enable them to reach their full potential. Over half a million pupils now study in good or outstanding academies, which typically replaced underperforming local authority maintained schools. There are more than 2,000 sponsored academies—schools taken out of local authority control because of performance concerns—and seven out of 10 are good or outstanding, despite their having replaced the most underperforming schools. Some 50% of pupils are now taught in academies.

To support these improvements, we have prioritised and protected education spending while having to take difficult public spending decisions in other areas. We have been able to do that because of our balanced approach to the public finances and our stewardship of the economy, which has reduced the annual deficit from an unsustainable 10% of GDP in 2010—some £150 billion a year—to 2% in 2018. The economic stability that has provided has resulted in employment rising to record levels and unemployment being at its lowest level since the 1970s. This has given young people leaving school more opportunities to have jobs and start their careers.

This balanced approach allows us to invest in public services and education. Core funding for schools and high needs has risen from almost £41 billion in 2017-18

to £43.5 billion this year. That includes the extra £1.3 billion for schools and high needs that we announced in 2017 and invested across 2018-19 and 2019-20 over and above plans set out in 2015.

Mr Kevan Jones: I am not sure what colour the sky is in the Minister's world, but it is certainly not the same colour as it is for many teachers I speak to in my constituency. He has obviously visited many Conservative constituencies at the behest of his colleagues. Can I challenge him to come to Durham to speak to the local authority and SEN teachers, who are under huge pressure because of the policies he is pursuing?

Nick Gibb: I am aware of the pressures that schools are under, and I am very happy to come to Durham. I went to university there and would be happy to make a nostalgic trip back. I meet two or three times a week with groups of headteachers brought here by Government Members as well as Opposition Members to discuss these issues. I am fully aware of the pressures that schools are under as a result of the increased costs they face from national insurance and other issues. We take these issues seriously and will take forward a well-configured spending review as we enter the next spending review period.

We are committed to directing this school funding where it is needed most. This is why, since April last year, we have started to distribute funding to schools through the new national funding formula. The formula is a fairer way to distribute school funding because each area's allocation takes into account the individual needs and characteristics of its schools and pupils, not accidents of geography or history—not, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow put it, on the basis of a postcode lottery.

Schools are already benefiting from the gains delivered by the national funding formula, which provides every local authority with more money for every pupil in every school, while allocating the biggest increases to the schools that have been most underfunded. This year, the most historically underfunded schools will attract increases of up to 6% compared with 2017-18. My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) raised concerns about the historical unfairness of funding in West Sussex, of which, of course, I am well aware. As he will know, the new national funding formula has sought to address that unfairness. That is why it was introduced, why schools in his constituency are attracting 5.5% more per-pupil funding in 2019 than they did in 2017-18, and why West Sussex as a whole has received a £33.5 million increase since that period.

Tim Loughton: As I said earlier, the extra funding is welcome, but it takes us from the bottom of the last decile to the top. A moment ago, my right hon. Friend mentioned a balanced approach. Will he at least make some mention of children's social care? So far he has not mentioned it once, although it is the issue on which I focused most of my speech.

Nick Gibb: I hope to deal with that issue in due course. However, when we are putting together a league table of local authorities, if we ensure that the funding system is fair, the funding will reflect the level of prosperity

[Nick Gibb]

of a particular local authority area. Someone has to be at the top and someone has to be at the bottom of a league table showing funding per authority. However, our national funding formula system is fair, because it allocates three quarters of the funds on the basis of the same figure for every pupil and the rest on the basis of the needs of those pupils, which I think is absolutely right. The principles of the formula attracted widespread support when we consulted on it.

Our commitment to helping all children to reach their full potential applies just as strongly to children with special educational needs and disabilities, and we know that schools share that commitment. We have therefore reformed the funding system to take particular account of children and young people with additional needs. We recognise the concerns that have been expressed about the costs of high-needs provision, an issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham. We have increased overall funding allocations to local authorities year on year, and high-needs funding will be £6.3 billion this year, up from £5 billion in 2013. That includes the £250 million that we announced in December 2018 for high-needs funding. However, we understand the real, systemic increase in pressure, and it will be a priority for us in the forthcoming spending review.

We also want to ensure that the funding system for those children and young people works effectively, so that money reaches the right places at the right time. That was raised by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle. In May we launched a call for evidence to gather the information necessary to make improvements where they are needed, so that the financial arrangements help headteachers to provide for pupils with special educational needs. We have paid particular attention to the operation and use of mainstream schools' notional special educational needs budget of up to £6,000, which was an issue of concern to my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham, a former children's Minister, raised the issue of children's social care. I said that I would come to it, and this is the point at which I have done so. All children, no matter where they live, should have access to the support that they need to keep them safe, provide them with a stable and nurturing home, and enable them to overcome challenges to achieve their potential. The Government are committed to improving outcomes for children who need help and protection. Our children's social care reform programme is working to deliver a highly capable, highly skilled social workforce, high-performing services everywhere, and a national system of excellent and innovative practice. We recognise that local authorities are delivering children's services in a challenging environment, and are having to take on those challenges.

We are making big steps in relation to our schoolteacher workforce. We have provided more than half a billion pounds through a new teachers' pay grant of £187 million last year and £321 million this year, and we remain committed to attracting even more world-class teachers. We also continue to focus rigorously on the curriculum to ensure that children are prepared for adult life. We have reformed GCSEs and have introduced the EBacc, which encourages the uptake of subjects that provide a sound basis for a variety of careers for those over 16. Since our reforms began in 2010, entry levels for EBacc science have increased dramatically, from 63% in 2010 to 95% in 2018.

The Government have achieved a huge amount since 2010. There are 1.9 million more children in good or outstanding schools, the attainment gap between rich and poor pupils has shrunk by 10%, a record proportion of disadvantaged students are going to university, and we are developing a truly world-class technical education system through T-levels and high-quality apprenticeships. However, there is still much work to be done, and as we look to future funding settlements beyond 2020, we must ensure that the momentum does not slip.

Question deferred (Standing Order No. 54(4)).

Children's Palliative Care

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Mike Freer.)

10 pm

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The subject of tonight's debate is not an easy one to talk about, but it is very important. This evening, I am going to talk about the 49,000 children throughout the UK who have life-limiting conditions.

As a consultant paediatrician, I have looked after quite a number of these children over the years. I have been the person who has made that diagnosis, who has given that devastating news to families, who has looked after these families during various different points of the journey and, indeed, who has been there in those final minutes and hours. Through that time, I have watched as some of these families have just about managed, but others have really struggled to cope at all and have gone from crisis to crisis. For me as a paediatrician, the opportunity to be a politician gives me the chance to stand here and advocate for those families and for those children and to use this platform—this House—as a vehicle for change, and to make these treatments and the care that these children receive much better.

Children's palliative care is not, as it is often misrepresented to be, only about the care that someone receives at the very end of their life: it is about improving the quality of their life while they are living with that life-limiting condition from the point of diagnosis. I shall take as an example a child with Batten disease. A child with Batten disease may present as apparently healthy, but they have a gene that will ultimately cause neuro-degeneration. So they will lose the skills that they had—the walking, the talking. Their skills will go backwards, until they become increasingly dependent on their families. Often, they die of chest infection.

The care for those families involves helping the child, the family and the siblings to understand the diagnosis and prognosis, providing support such as physiotherapy to keep the child mobile for as long as possible, providing home adaptations to train their parents in how to use things such as Mic-Key buttons, to provide tube-feeds and to use wheelchairs and hoists in the care of their children, and helping them with medical things such as seizure management, giving medication and speech therapy, as well as with how to navigate the benefits system, applications for a blue badge, education and when to move from mainstream into more specialist provision.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady for bringing this matter to the House. There will not be a single elected representative who is not aware of someone who has been through this. Is she aware that the money that each children's hospice has to spend each year to meet the needs of seriously ill children and their families has grown to an average of £3,681, which is a 4.5% increase between 2016-17 and 2018-19, faster than the rate of inflation, yet the funding has been cut or frozen for each of the last three years, leaving children's hospices struggling to make ends meet? Does she share that concern, which we all have?

Dr Johnson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I do indeed share his concern and will come to some of those figures in a moment.

To return to the care that is provided during the palliative care process, finally, the care will indeed be about end of life care and bereavement counselling. Children's hospices throughout the United Kingdom provide some of this fantastic care. They have specialist medical, nursing and other professional staff and volunteers, and I pay tribute to them, as I know other Members do, for their dedication and the fantastic work they do.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): My hon. Friend is a great ambassador on this very important subject. I pay tribute to the Chestnut Tree House hospice, which does such a fantastic job in West Sussex. Does she acknowledge that, because of medical technological advances, many of these children will live for much longer than was anticipated many years ago, and for many of them this is about not care in a hospice but outreach care outside the hospice? It is therefore important that we have good support packages for the parents, including respite and care over a longer term, and that we are more imaginative in the way we build houses, so that children with life-limiting conditions can live in houses—perhaps new social house build—that reflect the increasing physical demands that they will have, so they can stay in their homes to be cared for appropriately?

Dr Johnson: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. He is indeed right. The demand for children's hospice care is rising because there has been an increase in the number of children with life-limiting conditions and because those children are living longer and therefore require care for a longer period. The cost of providing that care is also increasing at a rate faster than inflation and faster than the money that the sector receives, which means that in some areas the money received has fallen in real terms.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): The hon. Lady and I work together closely on this issue as co-chairs of the all-party parliamentary group for children who need palliative care, and we hosted an incredibly moving discussion during Children's Hospice Week at which we heard really powerful stories from parents who had recently lost children. I am sure she appreciates my concern that the hospice care that children receive is often needed not just at the end of their lives but throughout their lives in order to give them the best life possible in the time that they have, and that it is not funded on a sustainable footing. Children's hospices must not be left to rely on the ability of local areas to fundraise for them. They must be put on a sustainable financial footing to give the children and their families the support that they need.

Dr Johnson: The hon. Lady is right. In fact, NHS and local authority funding represents just 21% nationally of the money that children's hospices need. The rest is raised by charities, but for some hospices in less affluent areas, raising the additional money that is required can be very challenging.

I welcome the fact that the Government have made their end of life care choice commitment, which is really clear about the care support choices that children should have. In our roles as co-chairs of the all-party parliamentary group for children who need palliative care, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine

[Dr Caroline Johnson]

McKinnell) and I carried out an inquiry last year to find out the extent to which this commitment was being met. We found that Ministers were at risk of failing to meet that commitment because of funding, as described, and because the quality of palliative care that children and families can receive is variable, depending on the area in which the child lives.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way, and I pay tribute to her expertise on this issue. Does she recognise that north of the border, in Scotland, the Scottish Government have recognised the need for parity of funding between adult care and children's care, and that that is not the case in England? Will she join me in calling on the UK Government to look at the model in Scotland to see what a difference we have made and what has been delivered by, for example, CHAS—Children's Hospices Across Scotland?

Dr Johnson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I am not familiar with the details of how hospices are funded in Scotland, but one of our report's recommendations was that the grant for children's hospices should be increased to £25 million. That is something that I repeat this evening.

On 27 December last year, we received a late Christmas present when Simon Stevens, the chief executive of NHS England, announced that £7 million of funding over the next five years would be available to children's hospices each year in addition to the £11 million children's hospice grant, if the clinical commissioning groups could provide match funding. I understand the benefits of match funding because it increases the engagement of the CCGs locally, but where CCGs are not providing the funding, it can lead to services not being provided properly in that area. Also, later, when the long-term plan was produced, the detail showed that this funding was not only for children's hospices but for other palliative care services. This was recognised as useful for providing services for children in areas currently not covered by a hospice, but it could equally mean that the money might be diluted into other causes and not reach the children who need it.

Two weeks ago, as the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North said, we joined our secretariat, the excellent charity Together for Short Lives, which does much work in advocating for these children and their families, and we met parents and representatives from several hospice charities to discuss these issues further. One real concern to us at that time was that one of the charities, Acorns, which receives the most Government funding, was struggling to raise charitable donations in its area to cover costs and was consulting on closing one of its children's hospices, in Walsall, meaning that families would have to travel much further for the care and support they needed. I know that that is something that no one in this House would want to see happen. Indeed, I have raised the issue with my hon. Friend the Minister for Care and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, both privately and in the House. I ask the Minister to raise the children's hospice grant to £25 million a year and to ring-fence that money. It is a small amount within the NHS budget as a whole, but it would make a huge difference to children receiving hospice care and their families.

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Lady is being generous with her time and is making an excellent speech. While she rightly makes the case for children's hospices, does she agree that they are not the only vital care support that children and their families need? They also need care at home, which is often provided by charities such as the Rainbow Trust. It is a hugely important service, but CCGs and local authorities are too often not commissioning it, and one can only assume that that is due to funding restraints. Does she agree that local authorities and CCGs should be incentivised and supported to fund and make such services available?

Dr Johnson: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention.

Turning to those who do not receive valuable hospice care, as a doctor I have seen too many families in crisis, struggling to cope with patchy provision or the lack of hospice or home care or respite. As children's hospices are frequently set up by charities, their locations across the country have not been planned, so some families find themselves too far away from services to be able to use them. I want NHS England to review the provision of services to ensure that care is no longer patchy and no longer dependent on where a child lives. The hospices that I have spoken to have asked me to make the Minister and NHS England aware of how the funding cake is split. Hospices—both the well funded and the less well funded—feel that funding should be disbursed more fairly based on clinical need, so an examination of that situation would be helpful.

Another area on which I would be grateful for the Minister's response is respite care or short breaks. For most people, an evening out requires a quick call to a friend or relative. If Mr Johnson and I want to go out for dinner, I just need to ask someone to come to our house for a few hours. I do not need to spend weeks planning to take the children away for several nights or a week at a time. I can pop out for a curry for two hours. For families whose children have many complex medical and physical needs, things are much more difficult. Short break provision is often patchy and inflexible. I might want a babysitter so that I can attend my brother's wedding, but for someone whose child has complex needs, if the weekend on which respite care is available is not the same weekend, that may not be much help. Sadly, having got all the plans in place, respite care is all too often cancelled at short notice. In my time as a doctor, I have seen families pitch up at the hospital with their child, who has remained in an acute hospital bed for the weekend simply because, where else can they go?

I would like an army of help for families, not a patchwork system. I want each family to have the guarantee of short breaks and the opportunity to access trained care assistants who can be booked to come to the family home, like any other family can have if they want to go out for a meal or attend a sibling's school play—Mr Speaker, you mentioned that your daughter Jemima was in a play recently, and I am sure that it went extremely well. Children with complex needs may have siblings, and the parents will want to be able to attend their plays. The Government should provide such a service through the NHS, and there should be a set amount of guaranteed free home respite care time per year, perhaps with additional subsidised capacity above that amount.

I know the Minister understands how important children's palliative care is to children and families, and I know how hard she has worked and pushed for this issue in her Department. I know she understands the need for the Department to work with NHS England to review this provision and how it is spread across the country, and I hope she will be able to assist with the provision of respite care breaks so that these very vulnerable families find it easier to have short breaks and access to childcare, like any other family and any of us would want. Most importantly, I ask the Government to make sure that NHS England now honours the original announcement by recommitting to protecting the children's hospice grant for the long term and by increasing it to the £25 million a year that is needed.

10.15 pm

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenage): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson) on securing a debate on this important matter. I particularly thank her for the fantastic work she does both as a medical professional—a paediatrician—and in her role as co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group for children who need palliative care, on which she has been a tenacious, passionate and very effective campaigner.

The APPG produced a report last year on children's palliative care, to which the Government responded in full, and today we have an opportunity to pay tribute to the incredible work offered by children's palliative care providers, many of which are hospices, in supporting some of our most poorly children and their families.

Children's Hospice Week took place last month, and this year's theme was "moments that matter." As MPs, we are all very aware of the crucial role played by hospices in supporting and caring for our communities at a time of great need. I first became aware of that many years ago, when my mum was involved in fundraising to build the Naomi House children's hospice near Winchester. In fact, she embroiled my whole family in a series of embarrassing fundraising activities to further her ends.

Since then, I have been privileged to visit Naomi House and, later, Jacksplace, a facility for young adults collocated on the site, to see for myself the incredible care and support they offer to very poorly children and their parents, both on site and more broadly in the community.

In my role as Minister for Care, I see how crucial palliative and end of life care services are for families in need. We know that many areas across the country are delivering excellent support and palliative care for children, but there is no room for any kind of geographical inconsistency, which is why it is crucial that more is done to challenge and support areas that are not providing it. That is why we have made children's palliative and end of life care a priority in the NHS long-term plan, particularly in supporting children's hospices.

NHS England's hospices programme currently provides £12 million a year for children's hospices, helping to provide care and support to children with life-limiting conditions and their families. I am delighted to announce, and my hon. Friend and other members of the all-party parliamentary group will be very pleased to hear, that NHS England has committed to increase the funding to £25 million by 2023-24. That will guarantee the additional

£13 million for the children's hospice grant. Clinical commissioning groups had been asked to provide match funding, but NHS England has now taken the decision to guarantee the investment after concerns were raised. As my hon. Friend said, match funding would not necessarily achieve the full investment anticipated.

I care very deeply for the hospice movement, and I hope this funding will provide it with full reassurance of the Government's commitment to and support for its incredible work.

Dr Caroline Johnson: I thank the Minister for this fantastic announcement, and I know the money will make a phenomenal difference to the lives of the poorest children in this country.

Caroline Dinenage: I thank my hon. Friend for that. She must take some of the credit, because it is her work, along with that of her co-chair of the all-party group, that has helped to secure these strong commitments from NHS England, so I wish to pay tribute to them this evening. But there is more. We know that children's hospices are not evenly spaced throughout the country, so NHS England has also committed to undertake a needs assessment to understand whether additional investment, nationally or from clinical commissioning groups, is required where palliative care is provided by means other than hospices.

Catherine McKinnell: I, too, thank the Minister for this announcement, which is very welcome, but I cannot pass up this opportunity to intervene, when NHS England is in the mode of looking to fund these services. The hon. Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson) gave as an example of children with life-limiting conditions those with Batten disease. A family in my constituency have two daughters with Batten disease. It has progressed in one, but the other is receiving totally innovative enzyme treatment that has stemmed any development of the disease. Yet at the moment NHS England is unwilling to fund this treatment for 13 children in England. So I just want to put on record that this is about not only supporting children with life-limiting conditions, but giving them access to the treatment that will prevent them from going down that road if we can.

Caroline Dinenage: The hon. Lady has powerfully put her sentiments on the record, and I absolutely with them. In parallel with the announcements that NHS England has made on the much-welcomed investment, it is working to develop commissioning models specifically for children and young people with palliative care needs, to support CCGs. We know it can be difficult for some commissioners to meet the needs of this vulnerable group, and these models will help them overcome the challenge of delivering services for small and geographically spread groups of patients, whose conditions can fluctuate over the course of their lives. Together for Short Lives is involved in this important work, and I also wish to put on record my thanks to it for its continued support.

My hon. Friend mentioned Acorns hospices, which is currently consulting its staff on the closure of one of its children's hospices at Walsall. I have been made aware that there is a financial aspect to this consultation, but there are other aspects to it, such as a reduction in the number of bed days used by in-patients. As I say, this is

[*Caroline Dinenage*]

a consultation at this stage and I am hoping that the announcement of this money will help to make a difference to its decision.

In “Our Commitment to you for end of life care”, we set out what everyone should expect from their care at the end of life, and the actions being taking to make high quality and personalisation a reality for all in end of life care. The choice commitment is our strategy for end of life care, which, through the NHS mandate, NHS England is responsible for delivering through its national end of life care programme board, with all key system partners and stakeholders, including Together for Short Lives. This presents the best opportunity to continue to deliver the progress we all want to see and make the choice commitment a reality for both adults and children.

Looking to the future, the NHS long-term plan has set out a range of actions to drive improvement in end of life care and deliver the choice commitment. In addition to the £25 million of investment in children's hospices announced today, the NHS long-term plan has made a number of commitments that will improve palliative and end of life care for children.

Dr Caroline Johnson: Along with the all-party group and Together for Short Lives, we have asked the Minister for three things this evening, and we appear to have received two of them—the extra money and the NHS England review. We will keep pushing for the third—respite care and an army of babysitters—but as Meat Loaf said, “Two out of three ain't bad”.

Caroline Dinenage: As I said at the beginning, my hon. Friend is nothing if not utterly tenacious and passionate in her pursuit of this. I will talk about the short breaks now. She is absolutely right on this; I do not think families are necessarily looking for big long holidays, they just need short breaks, but for those need to be reliable and consistent. People need not to be let down at the last minute. That is the message I am getting loud and clear. Local authorities have a legal duty to commission short breaks, as established by the Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011. Although the NHS role is not statutory and is a matter for NHS commissioners, the NHS may provide the clinical aspects of care to support such services, if appropriate.

According to the 2018 Together for Short Lives report, 84% of CCGs reported that they commissioned short breaks for children who need palliative care. That is an increase on the support in 2017, when it was 77%, but I recognise that we have much further to go. Parents desperately need short moments of respite and to know that their children will be well cared for at such times. The breaks also need to be reliable, and we will continue to work on that.

Catherine McKinnell: I just want to make sure of something. The needs of the child who requires care and support in order for there to be that respite are often too great, meaning that local authorities feel it is not within their remit, yet the clinical needs do not necessarily meet the NHS thresholds, so many families just fall through the cracks in the requirements. That often results in really difficult family situations and sometimes in family breakdown, which is not in anyone's interest at all. If the Minister can do anything to consider this issue holistically, across the local authority and the health service, to try to bring things together and close the gaps, that will change the lives of so many families up and down the country.

Caroline Dinenage: The hon. Lady makes an excellent point with her customary insight. I care deeply about this matter, totally understand what she says and very much recognise the point that she is trying to get across. The problem is that local commissioners are best at designing the local services that best meet the needs of their local populations, but occasionally we find that families fall between the gaps between children's social care and local health commissioning. I would be happy to continue to meet both co-chairs of the all-party group and Together for Short Lives to look at ways in which the Department of Health and Social Care can help to address the gaps so that people do not fall through them.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham for securing this debate. I hope she has been reassured by the commitments made on ensuring the future of palliative and end of life care services for children.

Question put and agreed to.

10.27 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 1 July 2019

[MR CHARLES WALKER *in the Chair*]

Online Homophobia

4.30 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 239444 relating to online homophobia.

I will begin by outlining the case put by Bobby Norris, who started this petition and is in the Public Gallery. It was an honour and a joy to meet him earlier this afternoon, and to get a real sense of his excitement that Parliament has responded by scheduling this debate to discuss Bobby's Bill. Strictly speaking, we are some way off a Bill, but I am sure the Minister will be listening closely. The main thing I took from our conversation—apart from being slightly star-struck on meeting him—was how real, hurtful and profoundly unpleasant is the abuse that he and others receive. We should all be determined to stamp it out wherever it occurs.

Bobby's petition, entitled "Make online homophobia a specific criminal offence", reads:

"As a gay man I find it devastating how members of the LGBT community are still subjected to homophobic abuse online. Just because I am on TV I don't think that makes it acceptable to be sent homophobic messages/comments on social media platforms. Nobody should have to receive these comments. I won't go into detail as to the various names I have been called, but this should not be acceptable and can have an impact on people's mental health and has certainly helped in making my anxiety and low self-esteem worse by receiving them."

It has been signed by more than 152,000 people, so it has immense public support, arising from the fantastic publicity campaign by Bobby, "The Only Way is Essex" and my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), who has worked with Bobby and spoke passionately, eloquently and powerfully on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights last week in a debate in the Chamber. We were all moved by her speech, and as a long-term admirer and friend, I am proud that she is here to contribute to our debate.

There is an extraordinary division between how we treat homophobic abuse online and in what we still call the real world. I am thankful that homophobic verbal or physical attacks that happen on the streets still make headlines, awful though they are. Online abuse does not attract the same outrage, but it contributes to an atmosphere of fear and has a divisive, hateful effect. There are too many examples of that. I will leave it to others to talk more about the injustices of homophobic abuse. There are people in the Chamber today with powerful personal experiences to share. We all agree that it has no place in our society and must be stamped out.

Online anti-LGBT+ hate crime is defined as any crime taking place online that is targeted at a person because of hostility or prejudice based on their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. That could include abuse or even outing someone without their consent. That injustice is not going away. Stonewall statistics tell us

that the number of lesbian, gay and bisexual people who have experienced a hate crime or incident in the past year because of their sexual orientation has risen by 78%, from 9% in 2013 to 16% in 2017. One in 10 LGBT people—10%—have experienced homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse online directed towards them personally in the last month. People are understandably shocked by that appalling figure and by the fact that no specific offence is being committed, outside the very fragmented and complicated laws that are used in the offline world.

Ged Killen (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): I warmly congratulate those who set up this petition and everyone who signed it. I do not know how I would have coped as a young man coming out and dealing with my sexuality in a world in which social media existed. It is much worse for people going through that now. Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the main issues is that people can send online abuse anonymously? If we are to make this an offence—I think we should—do we not have to deal with that first? People using social media platforms must be identifiable if we are to take action.

Daniel Zeichner: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. I will come on to that point, but I absolutely agree with him.

When I was researching this speech, I thought it would be useful to seek some local advice. I spoke to Anglia Ruskin University's LGBT+ society, which said:

"As a society, and an LGBT+ community at ARU, we were shocked to learn online homophobia isn't considered a specific offence. British society often praises itself for its support of LGBT+ people which, while often fair, comes with the assumption that the fight for LGBT+ rights has been won. However, those congratulations are hollow if we aren't being protected properly by the laws of this society. The LGBT+ society at ARU works hard to offer safe spaces for LGBT+ students across campus, but we feel powerless to help students when we know they can be subject to online homophobia, something we can't necessarily help with. We need legislation to ensure LGBT+ people are protected in all walks of life, in all activities of life."

The society put it very well.

Online homophobia and other kinds of online abuse are a relatively new phenomenon, with the rise of omnipresent tech and the fact that most of us communicate digitally—in some cases almost constantly. Social media allows us to speak to people we know and people we have never met at the click of a button. Regulation of the online space is a contentious issue, and we have not got to grips with it. Some tech giants are struggling to find ways of monitoring their users' behaviour. The number of moderators working for some is both impressive and alarming. Can we ever really check everything that is said? Frankly, do we want to? That is the conundrum that we face.

The laws governing hate speech and online abuse are drawn from various pieces of legislation, much of which was written before the widespread internet use and online communications that we enjoy today. Hate speech, including homophobia, is outlawed under five or more Acts. The Malicious Communications Act 1988 dictates that it is an offence to send an electronic communication in any form that is indecent or grossly offensive, conveys a threat, or is false, with intent to cause distress or anxiety to the recipient. The Communications Act 2003 updates that slightly, confirming that it is an offence to use any

[Daniel Zeichner]

public electronic communications network, such as Twitter or Facebook, to send messages that are grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character. The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 contains a number of other offences such as harassment, and harassment when someone fears violence. However, the quantity of legislation means that it is sometimes unclear to victims where they stand. It is based on a communications environment that no longer exists, as some of it dates back some 30 years. Although it references online communication, it does not anticipate the all-encompassing nature of the digital world that we live in today, and thus the impact that online abuse can have as part of an online environment in which many people spend much of their lives, rather than simply the email inboxes of the 1990s.

Galop, the LGBT+ anti-violence charity, explained:

“Online life is so enmeshed in our day-to-day lives that increasingly the online and offline world are not separate. Sometimes online hate speech is a part of wider pattern of harassment and abuse that is happening in other areas of our life, for example a neighbour that is targeting you in your home and online”.

That is particularly damaging, because for some people—school students for example—it can all too easily feel that there is no escape from abuse if it is happening on the streets or in the playground, and online too.

The Government’s response to the petition highlighted their request to the Law Commission to review the current law on abusive and offensive online communications. The Law Commission produced its scoping report in November 2018, which concluded that abusive online communications are theoretically criminalised to the same or even a greater extent than equivalent offline offending. However, there is considerable scope for reform. It said that many of the applicable offences do not adequately reflect the nature of some of the offending behaviour in the online environment, and the degree of harm it can cause.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend recognise that the Law Commission itself pointed out that only 3% of malicious communication offences are ever prosecuted, so there is a lot of impunity and a weakness of enforcement that must also be taken into account when we are thinking about how we can counter this issue?

Daniel Zeichner: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her intervention. She is of course absolutely right. Enforcement, which I will come on to, is a key issue.

The Law Commission also said that

“practical and cultural barriers mean that not all harmful online conduct is pursued in terms of criminal law enforcement to the same extent that it might be in an offline context.”

It said that, more generally, criminal offences could be improved so that they are clearer and target serious harm and criminality more effectively. It recognises that the large number of overlapping offences can cause confusion. It says that ambiguous terms such as “gross offensiveness”, “obscenity” and “indecent” do not provide the required clarity for prosecutors. The commission calls for reforms such as reform and consolidation of existing criminal laws dealing with offensive and abusive communications online; a specific review considering how the law can more effectively protect victims who are subject to a campaign of online harassment; and a review of how

effectively the criminal law protects personal privacy online. Such reforms could serve to clarify victims’ rights and make prosecutions more likely to succeed.

Campaign groups have also made recommendations. Stonewall recommends that online platforms should communicate clearly to all online users that anti-LGBT abuse is unacceptable, and advertise clear privacy, safety and reporting mechanisms; should deal with all incidents of anti-LGBT abuse seriously and swiftly and keep people informed about the progress and outcome in respect of reported incidents, including what actions have been taken and why; and should work with the police and the Crown Prosecution Service to develop more effective responses to anti-LGBT hate online, in consultation with LGBT people and organisations.

The Government are currently consulting on their “Online Harms” White Paper, and I look forward to the roundtable hosted by the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport this Wednesday, because this is an important issue that cannot be left while the Government prevaricate on our place in Europe. The White Paper confirms:

“For illegal harms, it is also important to make sure that criminal law applies online in the same way as it applies offline.”

These are big questions and they raise big challenges about how social media platforms in general should be regulated, about anonymity and about enforcement. The bullies should be unmasked, and the tech platforms should be doing that themselves, not waiting to be forced. Unmasking will also allow more effective enforcement. In my view, the White Paper does not look sufficiently at ways to tackle enforcement. That is a wider issue—it seems to me, from my brief time in Parliament, that it comes up so often. We spend hours legislating and considering policy but then do not provide the resources or systems for implementation and enforcement, so too often, laws are observed by the law-abiding but are largely ignored by those who are not—a pointless and frustrating situation.

There is an even bigger question as we begin to understand the age of surveillance capitalism. You do not have to read far through Shoshana Zuboff’s astonishing work on this subject to get a distinct feeling of unease. The White Paper fails to acknowledge that online abuse exists within a system that is run by capital-building algorithms, which push controversial or divisive content for increased clicks, and has a business model based on personal advertising but also maximum engagement regardless of content. That means that, too often, commercial online platforms are content to allow toxic environments, as the content that is pushed hardest is that which is divisive because it provokes extremely strong reactions.

In an excellent article in *The Guardian* last February entitled “Fiction is outperforming reality”, Paul Lewis exposed the way in which algorithms promote fake news on YouTube. The promotion of this kind of content contributes to an environment in which problematic language and ideas are completely normalised, meaning that there is a degree of desensitisation. We must row back from that and take online homophobia for what it is—hate speech that must not be accepted.

I have strayed a little from the specifics of this petition into the wider debate; I will conclude by returning to the narrower subject. As chair of the all-party parliamentary

group on data analytics, I meet many people who are rightly enthused by the potential of big data to be a power for good, but the sheer pace of change, often out of public sight, means that we have a responsibility also to ask serious questions about how the new technologies are being used and what effect, unintended or not, they may be having on individuals and on our society. We do not need to develop new ways for people to be unpleasant to one another—we have enough of that already.

I am not one who instinctively wants to ban or regulate; I would rather that people behaved well and decently to one another. There will always be differences of opinion, and that is a good thing. My plea, as we move towards Bobby's law, is for people just to be nicer to one another. Is it really that hard? But for those who cannot do that, we need laws to protect ourselves from them, and my very simple message to the tech companies and the Minister is that we now need to move swiftly to make it clear that online homophobia, like all other hate, has no place in a civilised society. The one difference between the online and the offline worlds is that, offline, we do not terminate people's accounts, but in the online world, we should. The message should be, "If you can't behave, you're out," and in my view, we will be all the better for it.

4.46 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker.

I may not be gay, but I have an intense feeling of sympathy with the human rights of individuals, and what this petition does is strike a blow for the human rights of individuals. We have heard the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) describe the enormous scale of this problem, and we have heard about some of the areas in which it occurs. I thank him for exposing the full extent of this activity.

The petition suggests that there should be a separate offence for homophobia, and I can see the logic of that and why people might want it, but this is part of a much bigger picture, and we need to see it in the context of that bigger picture to be able to decide what to do about it.

There have been references already to the work of the Law Commission in looking at this matter, and I think we are expecting a report from the Law Commission in 2020 on hate crime and how it has developed. I have a lot of time for the work of the Law Commission; it is generally very thorough and very detailed, and we should take account of exactly what it says. However, I think that the distinction that is being made between online and offline, when it comes to dealing with the sexual orientation of individuals, is in some ways a bit misleading. It is absolutely essential that we stamp out the rigidity in how people look at the sexual orientation of individuals, and we do that both offline and online.

There is something special, though, about online abuse—it is so utterly cowardly. It is so utterly cowardly that the people who perpetrate it do not need to disclose, half the time, who they are or what their views are. We can see the point that they want to make, and it is exactly the same point that we see in other areas where hate crime is endemic—examples include Islamophobia and antisemitism. I have spent quite a bit of my career looking at what is happening in those two areas.

I, for one, welcome the creation of the national online hate crime hub, because it has the potential to bring in specialist police officers who can be used to really root this problem out. The problem with online activities is that we need specialists in order to be able to get to the bottom of it. Bringing in specialist police officers and staff is a good way to take this forward.

The hon. Member for Cambridge mentioned the important aspect of the mental health effect of all of this on those who suffer from hate crimes. That is a very serious problem, and unless we focus on the experience of those who suffer these things, we will miss a great point about what we should aim to achieve.

I have said many times in this Chamber that, given my interest in human rights, I am proud to be a member of the Council of Europe. It will be no surprise to hon. Members that the Council is fully supportive of the actions we want to take. It stands up for the human rights of every individual. It is important to make that point this week, because, only last week, the Council made the fundamental mistake of readmitting Russia. If we look at the way that gay people have been treated in Chechnya, we see the hatred with which they have been singled out in that part of the country. At the Council, we tabled 230 amendments, which may have been a bit excessive, but it made our point forcefully. I was pleased that one of our amendments called for an apology for what has gone on in Chechnya and for a cessation of those activities.

The Council has also taken on board how to deal with this problem more generally. It has a questionnaire on existing measures and is highlighting examples of good practice—if anyone is interested, they can see it online. I suppose it is ironic that the internet can facilitate the good practice that exposes the bad practice, but that is the nature of things.

We are dealing with challenges to individual's privacy, including whether they want to come out or not. That is a decision for them to make. The more we can do to promote a good check on online activities, to focus on this issue, to ensure that all of us understand what is happening and to take action against it, the healthier we will be.

I have taken the time that you allotted me at the start of the debate, Mr Walker. I am pleased to have done so, because this is an important subject, not only for gay people but for all of us, and discussing it allows us to show our common humanity with others and our support for the protection of their human rights.

4.53 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker, which does not happen very often. I look forward to the rest of this timely debate. I pay tribute to Bobby Norris, whose petition to make online homophobia a specific criminal offence we are debating today. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) for the thoughtful, sensitive and effective way in which he introduced our deliberations. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response. We have high hopes that the Government will listen and take rapid action to deal with these issues.

Bobby Norris came to see me to talk about the level of hate that he perceived LGBT+ people were receiving on social media. He felt rightly that this was detrimental

[*Ms Angela Eagle*]

to their health and wellbeing and that not enough was being done to stem the tide of homophobic hatred being generated online. He asked me what might be done to bring the Government's attention to this growing problem and to take effective action to stop it. I suggested that he launch this petition as a first step towards highlighting this serious issue.

The petition has attracted over 152,000 signatures, which is why we are having this timely debate. That demonstrates that our petition system is working well. It is a relatively new part of our old Parliament, but it connects us to the modern world and demonstrates that Parliament can be responsive to the issues that people worry about outside of our Westminster debates.

Bobby has now found himself the target of turbo-charged online hate—a sign of the angry and hate-filled times that we live in—for daring to put his head above the parapet and take a public stand against this damaging growth in online homophobic abuse. He is strong enough to deal with it, but the point is that he should not have to, and nor should anyone else. The unwritten threat that someone who sticks their head above the parapet or who has an opinion about something will be dealt with online in the way Bobby Norris is being now does not cast a good light on the health of our democracy.

Those who argue that one should be able, in the interest of freedom of speech, to say anything online somehow miss the bad effect that this abuse, which is lurking and ready to be uncurled and thrown at somebody, has on our democracy. The fact that this is happening shows that, although the development of social media has many benefits, which we can all name, it has also brought significant downsides. Social media has unleashed a level of hatred and harassment that shames our society and threatens to undermine and dampen our democracy.

Hatred and abuse generated on social media are doing real damage to the mental health and wellbeing of hundreds of thousands of people who are targeted by trolls. Undoubtedly, hatred and abuse spill out from the virtual world into the real world. If we are to call ourselves a civilised and good society, these things must not be allowed to flourish online or offline with impunity. We need to change our laws to protect against these new harms much more effectively. I look forward to the Minister's response. I am looking for urgent action from the Government to try to get a grip on this worrying situation. I am sure she will have sympathy aplenty, but we really need determined and rapid action.

This debate is timely, being held 51 years after homosexuality was first partially decriminalised in the UK, 50 years after the Stonewall riots in New York, which signalled the beginning of the fight for LGBT liberation worldwide, and in the aftermath of the WorldPride march in New York this weekend, which drew 3 million people—it looked like quite a party, and I was sorry to have missed it. However, our debate also comes in the week of the huge Pride march that will bring London to a joyful halt on Saturday, and I certainly have no intention of missing that party.

LGBT liberation and the fight for respect and equal treatment in law have undoubtedly come a very long way in the UK over the past 30 years, and we should not underestimate the progress we have made. As the first

openly lesbian Government Minister, and only the second out lesbian ever elected to the House of Commons, I am proud to have played my part in the many gains made under the last Labour Government, including granting equal status in law to LGBT+ people and their relationships; repealing the odious section 28, which stigmatised LGBT+ people at school; and banning all discrimination in the provision of goods and services on grounds of sexual orientation.

Those progressive advances have undoubtedly made the lives of many LGBT+ people immeasurably better. However, although we have come a long way as a community in a relatively short time, these angry political times have created a backlash. There has been a spike in violence and hate crime against the LGBT+ community in recent years, and online abuse seems now to be spilling over into real-life violence. Homophobic and transphobic hate crimes have doubled in the past five years, yet according to the LGBT equal rights campaign group Stonewall, four in five hate crimes go unreported by the victims. Its comprehensive survey "LGBT in Britain" has revealed that one in 10 LGB people has had online abuse directed at them personally in the past month, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge pointed out, with that figure rising to one in four for trans people, who are especially at the frontline and vulnerable at the moment.

The figures are brought to life when we think of the actual victims of the increases in violence. In London a couple of weeks ago, two gay women were beaten and robbed on a bus by five teenagers for refusing to kiss each other on demand. In Southampton, two women kissing in the street were injured by an object thrown from a passing car. In Liverpool, two men were stabbed and seriously hurt in a homophobic knife attack; one of the people held for that attack is 12 years old. In Birmingham, there have been vocal anti-LGBT demonstrations outside two primary schools, mischaracterising and protesting the No Outsiders curriculum, which teaches respect for diverse families and seeks to end the stigmatising of LGBT people in school. Utterly false and outrageous claims have been made that its lessons are trying to turn children gay, and the Government have not reacted firmly enough to prevent such claims.

Our values of respect for diversity in society are now being tested, and we must not be found wanting in our defence of them. As my hon. Friend said, the current criminal law rightly offers legal protection to all who experience direct homophobic physical violence. In fact, both the Public Order Act 1986 and the Criminal Justice Act 2003 offer extra opportunities for the courts to increase sentences in such cases of assault if they believe that hatred of LGBT people was an aggravating feature of the crime. It is right that that is an aggravating offence in law, because it demonstrates our determination to prevent the kind of hate speech and activity that would cause our society to lose its civilisation.

The laws on online abuse are far less coherent and far less effective when it comes to being used successfully. My hon. Friend pointed out some of the practical difficulties and the fragmented nature of the law, which is inadequate and in urgent need of an update. Inadequate as it is, however, it would still benefit from being enforced more seriously by the police, who all too often tell victims to avoid going online. Such victim blaming is not an adequate response to the hate and trolling that

many people experience online. Expecting people who are being bullied to exclude themselves from the digital world will simply isolate and punish them further.

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend; although I am new to this place, I know that she has led the way for many years in fighting for the rights of LGBT people in our country. I stand with her every single step of the way.

Online homophobia is growing across the UK, even in my constituency. Given the ability of criminals to access and hack cyber-security measures, does my hon. Friend agree that resources such as specialist IT services must be increased and apportioned effectively to tackle this form of hate crime?

Ms Eagle: I thank my hon. Friend for her kind words. She is right that we need properly financed enforcement, as well as ensuring that we can make our laws more user-friendly and easier to understand and enforce for the authorities responsible for making decisions.

The two provisions most often used to protect against online abuse, hatred and threats are the Malicious Communications Act 1988 and section 127 of the Communications Act 2003; the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, which was originally introduced to deal with stalking offences, is also available for use in more extreme cases. All those statutes were passed by Parliament before the emergence of social media, which has fundamentally reshaped the way in which we engage and communicate as a society. The world wide web—as you may remember, Mr Walker—was invented only in 1989, the iPhone did not exist until 2007, and Facebook was created only in 2004, and we have not yet reconsidered our laws in that context.

So much has been changed by the arrival of the world wide web and dominant tech giants such as Apple, Google and Facebook that the Government must now urgently update our laws to make them fit for purpose. I know that the Government are aware of that need, because their second response to the petition points out that they have asked the Law Commission to consider specific reform in this area. They admit that the current level of online abuse against vulnerable groups, especially women, is completely unacceptable, yet there seems to be little urgency, if I may say so, about the action that they are prepared to take to counter that abuse. A Law Commission review is welcome, but it has never been and can never be an active or effective way to take rapid action against a growing threat.

As a recent Law Commission report points out, the law has not kept pace with the rapidly changing environment online. Some 96% of 16 to 24-year-olds are now using social media, but only 3% of malicious communications offences, online or offline, are ever prosecuted, even though there is demonstrable harm to the victims, the seriousness of which we are only just beginning to understand. The report outlines the harms that online abuse can cause, including

“psychological effects, such as depression and anxiety; emotional harms, such as...shame, loneliness and distress; physiological harms, including self-harm”

and, tragically, suicide;

“exclusion from public online space”

and all the potential that it provides; and “economic harms”. The report also concludes, as we all should, that hate crime harms society.

I am afraid that the Government’s response to the Law Commission’s report typifies their response to the entire issue: they have asked for a further review. We expect that to happen in 2020, but I would have thought that if the Government were really determined, they could come up much earlier than that with more concrete ways of dealing with this ever-present problem. I certainly hope that the Minister can give us a bit more confidence that the issue is getting a higher priority than it appears to have at the moment, and that her reply will make us happy.

In the White Paper on online harms that was published in April, the Government rightly characterised the new online environment as resembling the wild west. After all, it is the world of alternative facts and casual fascism, which has been allowed to fester, and it is high time that there were tough rules and regulations enforceable in law. Completely spurious anti-vaccination propaganda spreads, doing real damage to real lives offline, and mad conspiracy theories also spread, unchecked by truth and reality. For example, large numbers of people believe the world is run by lizards. It is hard to believe that we went through the Enlightenment if that kind of approach to truth and facts is going to be allowed to fester online. We ought to be worried about the effect that this is having on people’s ability to judge facts and truth, without which we will not have a democracy deserving of the name.

Terrorist propaganda and the online exploitation of children are also proliferating. After the Christchurch terrorist attack, 300,000 of the 1.5 million copies of the live streaming of murder that were uploaded to the internet went undetected by the automated systems that were attempting to take them down, making that horrendous event available to all who wanted to view it.

Can the Minister therefore assure us that we can expect more determined and urgent action to enforce decency and standards online? Is she prepared to increase the punishments for abuse, so that the harm caused is better represented in the sanctions available to the courts? What action can we expect, including on the financing of adequate enforcement, to ensure that enforcement is much more effective? Currently, it is laughably inadequate. When can we expect to move from endless press releases and the commissioning of more reviews to concrete action that minimises online harms rather than tolerating them and expecting victims to put up with them? Will the Minister support moves such as those we have seen in Austria to end online anonymity and remove the digital mask behind which so many perpetrators of abuse hide? It is time to get serious about the trail of damage that this behaviour causes, and it is also time to introduce updated, effective and streamlined laws to counter this menace.

5.12 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): It is a pleasure, Mr Walker, to serve under your chairmanship.

I am happy to contribute today and to represent the 159 constituents from Bath who signed this petition, but I also want to pay tribute to those who initiated the petition and the many thousands who have signed it.

It is shameful that a debate about online homophobic abuse is necessary in 2019. Intolerance anywhere is unacceptable, but it is especially despicable when it is directed at people we should support and protect. Insulting those who already face so much discrimination is vile and we should do our utmost to stamp it out.

[Wera Hobhouse]

We have made real progress in tackling homophobia, and I am proud to be a representative of the party that championed the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013. However, there is so much more that we need to do. Homophobic abuse, intimidation, threats, harassment, assault and bullying are hate crimes, both in the physical world and online. Social media is full of such content, which has gone unpoliced.

Legislation changes slowly, while abuse and bullying are very adaptable and move quickly. While I was working on the Voyeurism (Offences) Act 2019 last year, this became painfully obvious; our law is designed to govern real world spaces, and our security forces struggle to enforce it online.

Banning upskirting was a positive step, bringing an abusive online practice into both the public and parliamentary spotlight. In the case of upskirting, there was a specific gap in the law that needed to be filled. Homophobic abuse is more complex. Creating new legislation is not always the best way to protect people. My party calls for an extension of the definition of “aggravated offences” to cover hate crimes motivated not only by racial or religious hatred but by hostility based on gender, sexual orientation and disability. This change would protect victims, sending a clear message that homophobic abuse is a hate crime.

The online aspect of this abuse is harder to solve, and I am not sure that creating a new offence is what is needed; on this issue, we might have a debate and possibly disagree. We must make our existing law fit for 2019 and ensure that our security forces can handle online crimes.

This is a question of capacity, training, and education. Police forces and prosecutors are under increasing pressure from central Government to do more with less resources. That simply is not good enough. If we want our security forces to be responsive and to protect people across the spectrum, we cannot handcuff them to ever-shrinking budgets. We need an online crime agency, an organisation with the training and resources to investigate online abuse and harassment. The Government must also invest in understanding internet safety, and locate the gaps between enforcement and regulation.

Upholding the right to freedom of expression does not mean a laissez-faire approach. Bullying, abuse and harassment that prevents people from expressing themselves freely cannot be tolerated. As many of my colleagues here are already aware, and have agreed in this debate, online harassment often falls into the grey area between expressing a view and inciting harm. We must educate everyone about where the boundaries lie, and users must be empowered to report comments or content that they are concerned about.

We have fallen behind when it comes to protecting our LGBTQ+ community from online harassment. That is a symptom of the Government’s failure to understand and resource cyber security adequately, to engage with the new problems of the digital age, and to educate in a way that protects tolerance and progressive values. And, yes, absolutely—why cannot we all be a little bit nicer to, and more tolerant of, each other?

The days of normalising homophobia are behind us, but we must work collaboratively across the House to ensure that they do not return. We must do everything, in the House and indeed everywhere in our society, to stamp out homophobic abuse online.

5.16 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Walker.

It was a real privilege to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) introduce this debate with such clarity and passion. At risk of “fanboying” on both sides of my place, it is good to see Bobby Norris here today—the leadership he has given on this issue has been incredible—and to see my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle); to witness the leadership she has shown in this debate was also a privilege. So I am between two incredible people here.

Hate is on the rise; we all know that in our communities and it is no different in Plymouth, which I represent. We need to recognise that hate is on the rise and we also need to properly identify the reasons and causes, and deal with them. However, we also need to reflect that the vast majority of people in our society are not in control of laws; they do not get to write the legislation they will be governed by. However, we can do so here, and that is the real opportunity presented by this petition, because it speaks to lived experience, not only of the 150,000 people who signed it but of countless others who are victims of abuse all the time.

I have said this in a number of different debates and every time I get emails from people saying, “Oh! I didn’t know.” I would like to think that it is because I am so epically fabulous that I do not need to out myself all the time, but frequently I do. I am very proud to be gay, and I say that because I am Plymouth’s first ever out MP, which means something in a community in which we have not always been out and proud; instead, we have often been hidden at the periphery of society and written out of the very history that we have contributed to. LGBT people have not always been at the forefront of our public life, especially in a naval city such as Plymouth, but that is changing, which is a good thing. That is why I feel very passionately about this issue.

It is also important that we talk about people not as one homogenous blob of LGBT people but as individuals who all have different experiences: in their family lives; in their working lives; in their societies; and even at different times of the day. When people talk about LGBT+ equality—I know there are lots of them here today—we often just say LGBT. However, if we break down what “LGBT” means, we can see different lived experiences for all those different communities online. By and large the debate around LGBT is so much driven by people such as me—the “G”s in “LGBT”—that we do not frequently pick up the “Ls” in public debate, which is not only a recognition of the hatred towards gay people and lesbians that exists, but a reminder that in many cases women are marginalised in these debates anyway, so they get narrower and narrower. In gay culture, it is fashionable sometimes to diminish the Bs, to say that bisexuals have not made their proper decision yet, and that is something within our own community—and sometimes within our community online—that we must challenge. We also know there is an awful lot of hate towards those folks who are trans. We need to look at the lived experience of all those people.

As I frequently do before these debates, I posted on my Facebook page inviting the good folks of Plymouth to send me their views about online homophobia, and I was pleasantly surprised. It might be because those who

like a Labour MP's page are not some of the biggest bigots in the world, but the stories that came back were really interesting. I was expecting some abuse myself, a repetition of some of that which came when I spoke in a debate in the main Chamber about LGBT-inclusive children's books, including the fantastic "And Tango Makes Three", about two gay penguins that adopt a baby penguin. For those who have not read it, it is well worth a trip to the local library. I was speaking about age-appropriate sex and relationships education and the abuse that came back was direct. I will not mention all the words I was called, but they included faggot, queer, fag and bitch. I will not drop the C-bomb but that was used as well.

One reason LGBT people take on insults and make them our own is the frequency with which we hear them. That, and the hurt the insults cause both off and online is one reason why we sometimes make the words our own, to take the strength away from the people who use them. But we should not have to absorb the insults and suck them up.

We must also recognise that the language that is frequently used in our political debate can be equally disappointing. The use of "bum boys" for instance, by one of the contenders to be Prime Minister merits, I think, extra reflection in trying to get something better at the end of this.

We must strive for better, and that is why, when I woke up this morning and checked my Twitter, I was overjoyed to see Olly Alexander's speech yesterday at Glastonbury. He is a fantastic LGBT icon, and he used a moment in his set to talk about the importance of equality. Today we are talking about online homophobia, and it is really important to do that because it is a specific type of hate that we see online, but Olly Alexander spoke about the importance of the LGBT community not just standing with other people who are LGBT but against racism, sexism and ableism. He spoke about us embracing it all, and that matters, because when you break down LGBT into the different bits someone is not just gay in isolation; they can have many other characteristics and that is where the research from Stonewall that a number of colleagues briefly mentioned really highlights what is going on.

When asked by Stonewall whether they had been victims or targets of homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse online in the last month, 8% of women and 10% of men said they had been, but the figure for non-binary people—those who identify as being neither a man nor a woman—was 26%. One in four 18 to 24-year-olds had been personally targeted in the last month, which shows that the problem is perhaps more acute in younger age groups than in older ones. A third of young people had been targeted online in that way, as had one in five black, Asian and minority ethnic LGBT people, compared with only one in 10 white LGBT people. I use those statistics not to say that one group is worth more than the other, but to show how prevalent online hate can be and how someone can be abused for being black and gay or for being disabled and gay. Hate begets more hate in the online pile-ons we frequently see.

How algorithms work has been mentioned, and directing more and more traffic to those posts that generate the most controversy and interest directly contributes to the perpetuation of hate because it drives an economic value for hate. We are talking about the criminalisation

of online hate, but we should also talk about its economics. Although I am hopeful that the Minister will listen to the petition and the speeches today, we need the Government to get tougher with online social media. At the moment, it seems appropriate to roll out Nick Clegg every now and then to apologise for Facebook, but we need to recognise that online hate drives traffic, traffic is the basis of advertising and advertising is the basis of the economic model of our social media companies. The more traffic that can be driven, the more money that can be made, and that is where hate drives money, and profit. We need to not be blind to that in this debate, because the online social media companies have a role in this as well. They cannot just leave the reports for algorithms to deal with; they must take responsibility and, importantly, take the reports seriously. All too frequently, when people report online abuse it is not actioned by the people at the other end. I do not know where my report goes when I press "report", whether it goes to an algorithm, or to someone in Dublin or San Francisco, or just up the road in Old Street. Where I want it to go is to a person who looks at the piece of abuse and at what its impact could be on the individual. All that matters.

Last week, something gave me cause to hope: my fantastic friend and the co-chair of Labour's LGBT group, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), organised a fantastic showing in Portcullis House of trans photographs—young trans kids with their parents—from the British Film Institute's Flare exhibition, and I had the opportunity to meet many of the young trans people. We meet a lot of inspiring people in this place, but I have been more uplifted by their experience than by anything else. I spoke to some of them afterwards and asked, in relation to this upcoming debate, whether they had been the victim of online abuse. One trans kid looked at me and said, "Yes, of course. Every day. Every single day. I carry around an 'insult machine'—his phone—"and I get a notification when someone wants to hate me". That was really worrying, because it was true. I spoke to another person, who said, "Why would my friends do that?" That showed that in some cases people live free from abuse, but that is not everyone's lived experience. It really lifted my heart and showed where we could be if we took the right steps.

What Britain does matters, what we do in this place matters and what the Minister says matters; whether we agree with the introduction of homophobia and abuse against other protected characteristics as a discrete criminal offence, the language around this debate also matters. I was really pleased to hear the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) speak about his support for human rights, because that is effectively what we are talking about. We can categorise and sub-categorise ourselves all we want, but we are talking about the protection of individuals so that they can live their lives and fulfil their potential, based on who they are. That is very, very powerful and we need to do it.

The distinction between online and offline that has been mentioned by a number of Members is important. One of the tests I give to people, especially those folks who sometimes accidentally fall foul of online abuse is: "Would you say it in a pub? Would you just rock up to someone else's conversation in a pub and shout 'faggot'?" It is a good test, and well worth trying. If someone did

[*Luke Pollard*]

that, they would probably be aware that there would be a consequence, but that consequence is not always there in the online world. “Would you interrupt a conversation or introduce yourself? Would you listen to other people?” In pubs we do one thing, but we know there is a regulatory system there that polices our bad behaviour—we will get kicked out, barred or arrested, and we could get prosecuted. But online, things are much less certain and it is easier to hide behind the mask that my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge spoke about. That is really important.

I want to pay tribute to some people who have not been mentioned so far. We have spoken about the importance of police and enforcement and about social media companies upping their game, but I want to say thank you to all those who work in third-party reporting centres, the organisations, charity groups and community groups across the country that do so much to support, nurture, encourage and protect those who are victims of abuse, both on and offline, but frequently go without a mention. I have used an online reporting centre myself to report homophobic abuse, and it was a good experience that made me want to encourage others to do it.

This is the gayest Parliament in the world. We have more LGBT representatives than any other Parliament on the entire planet, so let us use that and those lived experiences to help drive the legislative change that my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey spoke so clearly about. I say to the Minister, although 150,000 people signed the petition, we should not think of it as 150,000 people but as 150,000 episodes of lived experience, of people who have been bullied and have felt the impact. Bullying is a bit like an economic driver—if it did not work people would not do it. Bullying does work: by bullying someone, a person can create an effect on the person they are bullying. That is why bullies do it.

In some cases, people fall into it accidentally. The vast majority of people are good, law-abiding citizens who do not want to hurt their neighbours or people online, but sometimes their words are inappropriately or clumsily chosen or typed quickly. However, we are not talking about those people in this debate. It is really important to make a distinction between those who might accidentally fall foul of using language that is not appropriate or timely anymore, and those who are persistent bullies: people who abuse, make death threats or rape threats online, and talk about outing people inappropriately or revenge porn. That is the type of stuff that we are talking about. Those people are not normal, law-abiding citizens; they are the people who my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge spoke about, and who we must do something about.

We have come so far in terms of LGBT equality in the past 25 years. We now need the law to catch up with some of those welcome, positive advances and changes in our society, because Britain is not yet a place where LGBT people can feel safe, included and free to be themselves. I am hopeful that the Minister will give us positive news, as a step towards making Britain the safer place that we want to see.

5.30 pm

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): It is good to see you in the Chair, Mr Walker, and to follow so many eloquent speeches. I thank the hon.

Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) for introducing the debate and for the way in which they placed it. I hope Bobby will understand—he is no longer in the Public Gallery, I think—that, as an honorary Essex boy, having studied at the University of Essex for three years, I commend him for all the work he has done.

As has been mentioned, the intrinsic nature of homophobia—whether in the real world or the unreal world—is bullying. It is a bully that does not show its face, and is often ignorant of the reality and the impact of that type of discourse. Plenty of people engage in this type of discourse, which is based on a falsehood, evidenced by hate, which allows them a veneer of respectability; there are those of us who believe we see it even in this place on a regular basis.

Therefore, why should the digital age be less full of hate than the previous age? Since the dawn of time, the LGBT community has faced unfounded and pernicious discrimination. As an openly gay man, I am very much aware of it; I was born into a world in which homosexuality was illegal. I hope the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) will forgive me if I mention that the legal systems of the United Kingdom meant that, in Scotland, homosexuality was not decriminalised until 1980—when I was nine years old—and that in Northern Ireland, it was not decriminalised until 1982.

Notions of who we should be, and the dictation of what we are meant to conform to, are so often what underlines hate. The transfer of hate from the real world to the unreal world should come as no surprise. This debate is taking place on 1 July, so we have come to the end of Pride celebrations in June specifically—I know a Pride march is coming up in London at the end of the week. That should remind us, especially those of us in the LGBT community, about the real nature of Pride, which is activism and solidarity. We must now seek to transfer that traditional method of activism and solidarity to the unreal world, where we really need to challenge these things.

This is a situation in which neither politics, religion nor society is free. As I mentioned during a debate on the Floor of the House last week, I am especially grateful that the Bishops' Conference of Scotland has signed up to the Time for Inclusive Education campaign. It has stated that no child in state-funded Catholic schools in Scotland should leave school having been bullied because they are gay, whether in the real world or—as I have said—the unreal world. I use the terminology “unreal world” because online is not real; the words are real, and the hate is real, but it is a world that is controlled in a very different way.

We need to be clear that online homophobia crosses over to the political sphere—a place in which it has always found fertile ground, whether on the far right or the extreme far left. Earlier, we heard mention of the LGBTQ community in Russia, which suffers more from the onslaught of online hate transferring into physical hate. We also heard about Chechnya, and we can only imagine the trauma caused to the LGBT community there. However, let us not assume that social or liberal democracy is free from homophobia; how many political debates in this place have been infused by it, across both the right and the left? No political party, including my own, can claim a clear conscience about the history of homophobia. As of today, I am sure I will start to get a hell of a lot more of it; I actually do not get that much,

but I believe that is about to change. I have actually told my team who deal with online communications for my office to expect it, because it is something they have never really had to deal with.

I am especially grateful to my 256 constituents in West Dunbartonshire who signed the petition. I also note the actions—I have to say this, because a lot of the elements mentioned today are devolved—of the Scottish Government and Members of the Scottish Parliament in light of the Lord Bracadale review of hate crime legislation in Scotland, which reported in May 2018. It has been noted that crimes against LGBTQ people in Scotland have risen, and, in an ever-changing world, there is no place for complacency. The Scottish Government's consultation on hate crime aims to ensure that the legislation is fit for the 21st century and that Scotland, like the rest of the UK, has laws that remain focused on protecting its citizens from all hate crime, in either the real or the unreal world and across myriad platforms.

We have heard mention of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and so on, but what we have not heard about is mass data storage. Large conglomerates own the physical data, strewn across the globe; some would think of Google and so on, but, more importantly, there are organisations such as Amazon, which owns that data through Amazon Web Services, commonly known as AWS. It is hate data, and there can be no doubt that such private companies are aware of the online hate that they physically own. They must be challenged about their custodianship of such hate-filled data. To exclude them from this debate is to ignore the word “online” in the title of the petition, and to ignore how hate-filled data dominates our lives today.

Before I conclude, I will pay tribute to some of my colleagues who cannot join us today, who come from what is proportionately the largest LGBT group of parliamentarians in the House of Commons. In this very room, my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mhairi Black) has articulated, boldly and publicly, the vile and pernicious abuse that she receives on a regular basis, both for being lesbian and for being a woman. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) receives pernicious, continuous online abuse because he happens to be a gay man. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) receives abuse because she is a lesbian, a woman and of Irish Catholic background.

In conclusion, we must continue to challenge at every opportunity the normalisation of hate, whether in the real world or the non-real world. We must ensure that there is a call to arms for my constituents and for anyone who may be watching in Scotland to participate in the Scottish Government's consultation, which is now in Holyrood. We must combat the monopoly of data ownership—I hope the Minister can say something about this—by stating that the conglomerates must come to the table, talk to Governments and be held to account for the data they physically own. Finally, I congratulate those who have campaigned for this petition.

5.38 pm

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker, and to respond to this debate on behalf of the Opposition. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge

(Daniel Zeichner) for his thoughtful introduction to the debate, and I also thank the petitioner, Bobby Norris, for the petition. I first met Bobby on the dance floor in a club, over a glass of wine, and we had quite a good time. I remember somebody saying to me, “Do you know who he is?” I said, “No, but he's a good dancer.” In a way, it is quite sad that an individual feels that online abuse has affected him so badly that he needs to share it with the world, but it is great that Bobby has organised this petition to stop that happening to anybody else and to bring this issue into the limelight.

How do we stop the rising hate crime against LGBTQI+ people? My hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) clearly highlighted the increase in LGBT+ crime, which has more than doubled, going up 144% in some areas. Transphobic attacks have trebled from 550 to 1,650. The biggest increase in attacks has been in West Yorkshire, which has seen an increase of 376%. It is an astonishing amount of hate, and a lot of it is not only words, but physical and violent abuse. As my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) highlighted, when race is added into the equation, the numbers go up further.

It is interesting that social media can be so antisocial. What is good about social media is also what is bad about social media. A lot of things have fuelled this hostile environment for the LGBT+ community. Many in the community have said to me, “It feels like we are going back to section 28 days, with all the stuff around the schools and the protests.” Brexit has fuelled hate in all areas, but particularly for LGBT+ people. The Government should take responsibility for the delay on the gender recognition Bill, which has left a huge void. That delay was fuelled by misconceptions, misinterpretations, lies and hate, and it has created a hostile environment that has meant that hate crime has gone up by almost 400% in some areas.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey made some excellent points, and I hope the Minister will address them almost as if they were a tick-list, because we will go through them and hold the Government to account. We need more than warm words from the Government. Too often we have a lot of warm words, but not a lot of action. I plead for the Minister not to announce any new consultations. I am up to my eyeballs in Government consultations. We have had 29,952 consultations since 2010. We need to start changing the law and changing legislation. We know that hate crime exists and that it is happening, so we need to change things.

The Home Affairs Committee report states:

“Most legal provisions in this field predate the era of mass social media use and some predate the internet itself. The Government should review the entire legislative framework governing online hate speech, harassment and extremism and ensure that the law is up to date.”

That is the Government's responsibility, and it will make a huge difference to people's lives.

There is a common understanding now that the old mantra, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me”, is not very helpful and is wrong, because words do hurt. That mantra is no longer valid. We should no longer accept bad language and bad words, because they do hurt and they are powerful. Wars are started by words. Words can be used for good and they can be used for evil.

Gandhi had a quote. He said:

[Dawn Butler]

“Watch your thoughts, they become words; watch your words, they become actions; watch your actions, they become habits”.

All throughout the excellent speeches today, we have heard that people are forming habits of being hateful and aggressive online when they would not do that face to face with someone. We have to ensure we say legislatively that that is wrong.

Labour has already committed to bringing the law on LGBT+ hate crimes in line with hate crimes based on race or faith, making them an aggravated offence. That is really important. If a person's sexuality has been a factor in how they have been treated or in their being attacked, what has happened needs to be classified as an aggravated offence and have harsher sentencing. We need to ensure that we change discrimination laws so that things can be done on multiple grounds. Labour has already committed to that. We do not need an Olympics of oppression; we just have to understand the intersectionalities of hate and to ensure that equality is equality and applies to everyone, so that we all fight for each other's equality.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge mentioned unmasking the bullies. It is important that we hold social media providers to account in unmasking the bullies, because it can be done—we can trace them back. Not only should they be unmasked, but we should be closing down all their social media platforms, whether that is Twitter, Facebook or Instagram—I am sure there are more I do not know of, because the platforms increase in number every day. Once someone is hateful or vindictive in any way online, that is it: the platform should be taken away from them. We could save someone's mental health and save people's lives. That is the difference we should be making in this House.

Luke Pollard: The list of social media platforms that my hon. Friend gave should also include online dating apps. The abuse that is sometimes given on apps such as Grindr, especially to those with disabilities, can be painful. In many cases, people have opened their hearts up to look for someone special, so the abuse can sting even more.

Dawn Butler: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I absolutely agree. Sometimes people deliberately go on those platforms and pretend to be something else. I think they call it catfishing.

Luke Pollard *indicated assent.*

Dawn Butler: I have to keep up. People deliberately go on those apps just to get people to open up, and then they bring them down and abuse them. Who wants to live in a world with that kind of cruelty, and where we are not actively doing something to close it down?

Many people in this arena have paved the way over the past 25 or 50 years to ensure that we are living in an inclusive society. I hate the terminology “tolerant”; I do not want to be “tolerated” as a black woman—I want to be accepted for who I am. I do not want us to “tolerate” people for their sexuality; I want us just to accept them. Many organisations are involved, including Stonewall, DIVA and LGBT+ Labour, as well as lots of people, including Lady Phyll. New York Pride was just this weekend. Ruth Hunt has just stepped down from Stonewall and has done amazing work, as have Linda Riley, Sarah

Garrett, Pride and UK Black Pride. The Albert Kennedy Trust looks after people who have been kicked out of their homes and removed from their families just because of who they love. The trust gives them a safe place to be and live.

I will end on this point. If anyone is looking for something to do this weekend and they want an environment where they can surround themselves with happiness, love, diversity, smiles, a lot of dancing and a lot of drinking, if I can say that—there is a lot of drinking—they should join me, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey and all the others who will be on the Pride march in London. If anyone ever needs to understand why we should just let people be, Pride is one of those places where people can just live and understand what that means.

5.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I start by thanking Bobby Norris for raising the important issue of online homophobia. I thank the more than 152,000 people who have signed the petition so far. I understand that it is still open.

I thank the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) for opening the debate in such a thoughtful way and I thank all colleagues who have contributed this afternoon. They have given different accounts, some very personal, of their own experience or that of their constituents of online homophobia. The hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) spoke movingly about Bobby and others putting their heads above the parapet. I feel honour-bound to reflect on the fact that she herself has done the same. I thank her sincerely for all that she has done in the pioneering fashion that she has described.

The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) rightly talked about the diversity within the phrase “LGBT+” to describe a wealth of experiences, a richness of life experiences, some happy, some not, but I thank him for making that very important point. As has been mentioned, this debate is timely because we are on the cusp of one of the world's largest Pride events this weekend in London, and last week we remembered that it is 50 years since the Stonewall riots, an event that sparked a global advancement of LGBT+ rights around the world. We have come a long way in those 50 years, but these debates and discussions today show how much further we must go.

To be clear—I do not think it is necessary, but I want it on the record—homophobia, online or offline, is wrong. It is a prejudice all too often accompanied by behaviour that has no place in a modern, vibrant and inclusive Britain. Unfortunately, homophobia rears its ugly head, including, as we have heard today, online, where it can be particularly pernicious and pervasive. The hon. Members for Cambridge and for Wallasey set out some stark statistics, including the terrible one highlighted in the Stonewall research that showed one in 10 people surveyed had experienced online homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse or behaviour in the past month. I have seen and been appalled by such abuse. Indeed, Mr Norris shared on his Instagram account on 15 June a particularly disgusting message that he received. I will not dignify either the messenger or the message by

reading it into the record of our democracy, but if Mr Norris and others face such hateful language, with all the terrible repercussions that it can have for someone, particularly if they are in a vulnerable place at that point in their life or perhaps do not have the network of support that we would all wish for loved ones, it can have, as we have heard from the hon. Member for Wallasey, very serious consequences.

The internet, as in life off the internet, should be a place where all people feel free to socialise, share information, do business, share photos, and enjoy the massive benefits of the online space. My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) brought an international perspective to the debate with his work for the Council of Europe. He talked about the treatment of people within our community, our neighbourhoods and our society, who may love someone of the same sex or gender and about other manifestations of LGBT inclusivity, and rightly pointed out the dire experiences that people overseas, particularly in places such as Russia, can share. I am sure we are all with him in agreeing that we would like other countries such as Russia to follow our lead.

For the purposes of the debate I shall set out the current legislation, given that the petition asks us to make online homophobia a specific criminal offence. There are already criminal offences to cover some of the horrific forms of abuse that we have heard about. For example, there are harassment offences in the Public Order Act 1986 and the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. There are offences covering “grossly offensive” material in the Malicious Communications Act 1988 and the Communications Act 2003. There is also an offence of “stirring up” hatred based on sexual orientation in the Public Order Act 1986. Where such crimes are motivated by, or demonstrate, hostility towards a victim based on sexual orientation, or perceived sexual orientation, they are hate crimes. The hate crime legislation, which also covers race, religion, disability, and transgender identity, allows for increased sentences for those convicted of such an offence.

However, I absolutely understand the concerns that have been raised today, not least the fair observation that all of the legislation that I have cited was passed before the internet, as we know it today, came into being. I suspect that were we to have this debate in 10 years’ time, the internet would be very different from today. That is precisely why the Government asked the Law Commission to take forward two important reviews. The first review looks at the current legislation on abusive and offensive online communications to ensure that laws are up to date with technology. The Government announced the commencement of phase two of the Law Commission’s work last week. It will build on the analysis in its scoping report, including considering the potential for improving existing communications offences, and whether the law might more effectively address co-ordinated harassment by groups of people.

Ms Angela Eagle: The Law Commission does important work in trying to bring together sometimes fragmented laws and updating them, but the review is not due to be published until 2020. There is a tradition of Law Commission reports sitting gathering dust on shelves and never being acted on, so will the Minister say something about the Government’s determination, if

such there is, to act on the Law Commission’s report? Will she consider bringing forward its work so that we can be in a position to legislate faster than the current timetable allows?

Victoria Atkins: I absolutely understand the hon. Lady’s impatience with the timetable. I think I am correct in saying that she was in government herself when some of the legislation we are looking at came into force. I remember the 1997 Act coming into force when I was a practitioner trying to make sure that that law was applied in the criminal courts. I appreciate that my answer will not satisfy the people who have contributed to the petition, but we have to get this matter right. We have asked the Law Commission to look at the issue because it is a very complicated area of law. The hon. Lady will know—this draws me on to the second review—about the debate on whether misogyny should be listed as a hate crime. In this Chamber almost a year ago I was open to the concept or the idea that that form of hatred, particularly, as has been said, the intersectionality with homophobia, biphobia and transphobia, should be looked at carefully to ensure there are no unintended consequences of any legislation that we bring to this House in future. We must get it right. As has been noted in the debate, the ways in which people of ill intent target the people to whom they wish to be hateful shows that we need to be considered, thoughtful and careful in the way in which we approach it.

The second review that we are conducting is a full review of hate crime legislation. As I have said, we are looking at the coverage and approach of the current hate crime laws, including whether misogyny should form part of it, to ensure that the legislation continues to protect the existing characteristics covered, but also whether we need to update the law in this really important area, given all the factors that have been raised in the debate, to ensure that the law reflects the lived experience of our fellow residents.

The petition raises questions not only about our criminal laws, but about how we stay safe and are kept safe online, which is one of the biggest debates of our time. The challenges presented by the internet—the wild west, as it has been described—along with the freedoms that it brings about have to be carefully balanced.

We are clear that we want the United Kingdom to be the safest place in the world for everybody to be online. That is why the Government published the “Online Harms” White Paper in April. Through it, we plan to make technology companies more responsible for their users’ safety, including through a new statutory duty of care, which will be overseen by an independent regulator. The White Paper sets out plans to hold companies to account for tackling a comprehensive set of online harms, from which we will expect technology companies to take reasonable steps to protect their users.

[GERAINT DAVIES *in the Chair*]

We have said that technology companies must do more, and they need not wait for the legislation following the White Paper to do so. The platforms must have clear and accessible terms and conditions about what is and is not acceptable behaviour, and they need to enforce them in a fair and consistent manner.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: Other than the platforms, what about those who own the data and own the servers?

Victoria Atkins: That is a very interesting point. The hon. Gentleman will recall that we recently introduced the Data Protection Act 2018, bringing into force the GDPR rules of Europe. Worldwide, Governments are now much more mindful about data. However, this is a fast developing area, and one which I will ask the Security Minister and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to look into, as part of their consideration of the consultation as a whole.

Reports to the police, which I will come on to in a little while, were rightly mentioned, but I am mindful that not everyone wants to involve the police. If someone receives a hateful tweet or Instagram message, they may not want to involve the police for a host of reasons. That is why it is critical that tech companies have proper measures in place to clear up their own backyard. Many platforms have been making progress across a whole range of harms for which the Home Office has responsibility, but frankly it is not enough. That is why we introduced the White Paper.

Colleagues have understandably raised anonymity, which is something that we considered carefully as the White Paper was being drafted. If people feel strongly about the anonymity of users, I ask them to contribute, if they have not already, to the consultation on the White Paper. It closes at midnight tonight, and it will be interesting to see the results.

Ms Angela Eagle: Can the Minister take a view? I certainly believe that we should get rid of anonymity online. Rather than have me respond to a consultation, surely she can take such a declaration on the Floor of the Chamber, and add it to the total that will be counted at one minute past twelve tonight.

Victoria Atkins: I do not pretend to know how the consultation responses are counted; it may well be a dreaded algorithm. I know that officials will look carefully at the *Hansard* report of the debate. If the hon. Lady cannot contribute online, certainly Members' views can be added to the result of the consultation. *[Interruption.]* A number of arms are going up in the Chamber, for the benefit of *Hansard*.

I understand the points that have been made about the need for action now, as well as in future. That is why we have set out, under the hate crime action plan, a number of commitments that the Government are taking forward that will support a robust criminal justice response for those who feel able to seek the help of the police, or who find themselves in a situation where others call the police on their behalf. I am very struck by the recent horrific attacks in London, Merseyside and Southampton that others have mentioned. The police are doing all that they can to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Of course, I always encourage anyone who feels able to report their experiences to the police to do so, partly to ensure that they get the right support. There are many excellent support and advice centres for victims of homophobic incidents, particularly the charity Galop, with which the Government work closely. However, I take the point about the reaction of the police when someone is able to report an incident to them. That is why we are funding a police online hate crime hub to improve the police response to victims of online hate crime. We are raising awareness of hate crime through a public awareness campaign, which people may have seen last autumn and again this spring.

Ruth Jones: I understand that the Government employ experts, but may I specifically request that the Minister looks at the IT side of things? Cyber-security is really important to us in tackling such crimes. Will the Minister give a specific pledge about IT specialists as well?

Victoria Atkins: Yes, I am very happy to do so. We are funding the police online hate crime hub, which is an expert police team that helps forces across the country to respond to hate crime cases effectively. We are also working with the police to ensure that that support reaches the areas that need it, because I appreciate that some forces may need to improve their performance. Indeed, the police inspectorate recently inspected some police forces. Some already do bespoke training and upskill experts in their own forces. Gwent has been held up as a strong example of that.

We need to ensure in our awareness campaign that members of the public understand, first of all, what hate crime is, the forms it can take and, as has been mentioned, that the use of certain words and language may well be incredibly offensive and abusive to people. It is about having that understanding of one's own conduct as well. We are pleased to support a number of community projects focused on tackling LGBT+ hate crimes, including working with Barnardo's, Stop Hate UK and the football initiative Kick It Out. We continue to take that and other work forward, working closely with the Government Equalities Office and a range of stakeholders, including Galop and Stonewall.

I conclude by reiterating the Government's unwavering support in the fight against homophobia in all its forms. No one should have to face abuse, discrimination or harassment based on who they love. The Government are committed to eradicating bigotry and abuse, and I think that the House agrees with the plea of the hon. Member for Cambridge for us to be civilised in our debates. The sketch writers may have a field day tomorrow with us all agreeing that we should be nicer to one another, but I think—*[Interruption.]* There seems to be disagreement across the Chamber.

Ms Angela Eagle: Obviously we should all be nicer to one another, but the plain fact is that a lot of people are having their mental health badly affected because there are some very nasty people out there. That can be solved only by taking it much more seriously and much more urgently than I am afraid the Minister seems to be indicating that the Government are going to.

Victoria Atkins: I simply do not accept that. I was trying to end on a collegiate note, precisely because of the experiences that have been reiterated and addressed in the debate. I simply do not accept that I am not taking the matter seriously. I was simply agreeing with the hon. Member for Cambridge on how we should use our language, and that trying to be decent and civilised in our interactions will go some way towards making it clear to those who do not use decent and civilised language and behaviour that that is simply unacceptable. I hope that that is a point on which we can all agree.

6.9 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I thank all hon. Members who spoke in the debate. It has been constructive, and we have had positive contributions from all the major parties in the Chamber.

There are reasons to be optimistic. As I was preparing my speech this afternoon, I looked out of my office window and saw the rainbow flag flying above the Treasury. A few weeks ago, we had a marvellous Pride event in Cambridge. I was heartened by a number of speakers' comments about the action that is being taken around the world at the moment—the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) talked about the Council of Europe.

In conclusion, I echo the frustrations that my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) expressed. I recollect the fine words from the Government in the discussions on the Data Protection Act 2018. Opposition Members are, however, frustrated that the Government do not seem able to move as quickly as the tech industry

does, and the technology keeps changing. It is hard—no one disputes that—but the real harm being done out there at the moment cannot be underestimated. I am afraid we cannot continue to move at this measured pace; we need stronger action, and to move more quickly. To return to the petitioners and to Bobby, who raised the issue of online homophobia in the first place, we need Bobby's Bill sooner rather than later.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 239444 relating to online homophobia.

6.11 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 1 July 2019

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Tourism Sector Deal

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): The Government's modern industrial strategy sets out a long-term plan to boost the productivity and earning power of people throughout the UK. Sector deals bring industry and Government together in partnership to boost productivity in their sector and to ensure sectors are able to take advantage of major global changes such as those identified in the industrial strategy grand challenges. The tourism sector has the scale and geographical reach to deliver real change for local economies.

The deal that has been struck today means that the Government and industry have agreed a plan that will drive economic growth, underpin continued infrastructure investment and enhance the attractiveness of the sector as a long-term career.

Tourism zones will bring businesses and local organisations together to establish a co-ordinated strategy for growth in their local visitor economy—and a reduction in the impact of seasonality. Industry will deliver 30,000 apprenticeships in England per year by 2025 as well as leading a mentoring programme aimed at supporting 10,000 employees—so that they are more likely to remain in the sector.

The UK will continue to be Europe's leading hub for hotel investment for the next decade with over 130,000 additional bedrooms added to accommodation stocks by 2025—with 75% of these outside of London.

A new independent tourism data hub will be created with support offered from some of our biggest travel companies. This will allow organisations, including SMEs, to make the most of the big data revolution to understand activity and product preferences in their area.

In conjunction with the sector deal, the UK Government have also published an international business events action plan. The action plan outlines in detail how the Government will support the business events industry in attracting, creating and growing international business events.

These mutual commitments are impressive but we want to go even further—ensuring that as many different visitors as possible can experience our tourism offer. That is why this deal commits to ensuring that the UK will become the most accessible tourism destination in Europe by 2025 and increasing the number of international disabled visitors by 33%.

Additionally, the introduction of sustainable development plans as part of the tourism zones policy sets a clear expectation on the sector to reduce its carbon footprint today, and in the future, helping the UK on its path to clean growth.

Taken together these measures are key in building a world-class experience economy and will ensure the tourism industry can continue to grow inbound visitor numbers by an estimated 25% by 2025. They will boost local economies by making best use of tourism assets throughout the year—ensuring we will be able to give the visitors of the future the very best of experiences throughout our country.

This is an ambitious deal—which is why joint delivery mechanisms are being established to ensure government and industry work closely together to deliver the plans. The UK Government will also work closely with the devolved Administrations—complementing their existing tourism strategies—and ensuring the benefits of the deal extend right across the UK. It is a deal that will support tourism and hospitality employees as the sector grows—helping it to remain a global leader, long into the future.

I will be placing a copy of this document in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS1678]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

The Secretary of State for International Development (Rory Stewart): I would like to update the House on the UK's contribution to the sixth replenishment of the Global Fund as announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May) at the G20 Osaka summit.

The UK pioneered universal health coverage through the establishment of the national health service and we continue to host many of the best medical scientists and practitioners in the world. Good health is a foundation for development; it enables people to go to school, go to work, and contribute to the economy. It is firmly in the UK's national interest to work with countries to promote good health, to prevent and respond to disease outbreaks, and to contribute to the fight against antimicrobial resistance.

More than 2.5 million people died from AIDS-related illnesses, tuberculosis and malaria in 2017. Every day nearly 1,000 adolescent girls and young women in Africa become infected with HIV. A child still dies of malaria every two minutes. Tuberculosis is still one of the world's top 10 causes of death. The progress made so far is being threatened by growing drug and insecticide resistance, wavering political will, and the difficulties of meeting the needs of neglected and vulnerable populations.

Tackling these challenges is essential to achieving sustainable development goal 3: ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages. The UK's support to the Global Fund is an important contribution towards achieving this goal. I am proud of the UK's commitment to the sustainable development goals and this July we look forward to setting out our progress through our first voluntary national review. The UK will also support the high-level meeting on universal health coverage at the UN General Assembly in September and host the replenishment of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance in 2020.

The Global Fund is an extremely successful public-private partnership which was rated as one of the top three performers in the UK's multilateral development review. This partnership has so far helped to save 27 million lives, reducing deaths from AIDS-related illness, tuberculosis and malaria by one third in the countries where it invests. Joining forces with other donors to negotiate low prices for life saving health technologies, the Global Fund has saved \$855 million in procurement over the last five years. It is the leading international financier of the fight against multi-drug resistant tuberculosis, a disease which causes a third of all deaths due to antimicrobial resistance.

I am pleased that the UK will pledge up to £1.4 billion to the sixth replenishment of the Global Fund which will be hosted by France in October. The UK's investment will help to:

Provide life-saving antiretroviral therapy for more than 3.3 million people living with HIV;

Support treatment and care for 2.3 million people with tuberculosis;

Distribute 92 million mosquito nets to protect children and families from malaria;

Make countries' health systems stronger, promote global health security and tackle antimicrobial resistance.

I am particularly concerned that the number of malaria cases is at risk of increasing due to growing resistance to our current tools and the potential impacts of population growth and climate change. I have agreed to double the value of private sector contributions to the Global Fund for malaria up to a maximum of £200 million, providing £2 for every £1 contributed by the private sector. This will help us to meet our target to spend £500 million a year on malaria over the five years from 2016-17 to 2020-21. Our previous malaria match funds have so far raised almost £200 million in additional private sector contributions to the Global Fund.

The UK pledge to the previous Global Fund replenishment included, for the first time, a £90 million published performance agreement which set out areas where the Global Fund needed to do even more. I am pleased to report that the Global Fund has performed well against these priorities, including by making significant savings. This has enabled us to release all performance payments on time and in full.

For this replenishment I have agreed a £100 million performance agreement with the Global Fund. This sets out the priorities for further improvement: working with Governments to integrate Global Fund programmes into national systems and strengthening these systems to support achievement of universal health coverage; a greater focus on disease prevention; strengthening the focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and marginalised, including women and girls; and antimicrobial resistance and global health security. These are all critical to the Global Fund's long-term success. Each year my officials will speak with the Global Fund's senior management to review their progress on these critical areas and make sure that we are working together as effectively as possible.

A successful replenishment will help the Global Fund partnership to save 16 million lives, avert 234 million cases or new infections, and strengthen countries' health systems to accelerate progress towards universal health coverage. To reach the Global Fund's ambitious target of at least \$14 billion and get the world back on track to

end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria by 2030, as called for in the sustainable development goals, everyone must step up.

We will use our early decision to encourage other donors, new and existing, to make ambitious commitments. Meanwhile our commitment to a new £200 million malaria match fund is an invitation to the private sector to contribute to and play an essential role in delivering the sustainable development goals. Ultimately, though, protecting the health of citizens is the responsibility of national Governments. We expect them to play their part and further increase their public spending on health.

I am aware of the significant degree of interest in this issue from Members across the House, whose advice and support on this issue have been invaluable for the Government. For the convenience of Members, I am depositing a copy of the performance agreement in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS1680]

JUSTICE

Children's Funeral Fund

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): I am pleased to announce that today the Social Fund (Children's Funeral Fund for England) Regulations 2019 are being laid before the House. It is the Government's intention that these regulations will come into effect on the 23 July.

The laying of these regulations fulfils the Prime Minister's commitment to establish the children's funeral fund for England (the "CFF").

No parent should ever have to endure the unbearable loss of a child. Whilst recognising that nothing can ever truly heal the pain of such a loss, it is right that the Government ensure that all families who lose a child are given the support they need.

Under the CFF, bereaved families will no longer have to meet the fees charged for a cremation or burial of a child under the age of 18. Rather, they will now be able to access this provision for free at the point of need, with the costs being met by Government funding and providers applying to the CFF for reimbursement. As a further gesture of this Government's commitment to supporting bereaved people, families in England will also be provided with a contribution of up to £300 towards the price of a coffin (or shroud or casket, where preferred), and will meet other specified expenses.

The CFF marks a key milestone in the delivery of the Government's manifesto commitment to provide bereaved parents with the support they need. Its provision will be universal, available to all bereaved parents in England who have lost a child regardless of their means. It is also intended to complement other measures such as the Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Act 2018, which received Royal Assent last September and is expected to apply from April 2020.

We have worked closely across government to ensure that the CFF is compatible with other relevant measures and will continue to work with devolved Administrations to ensure co-ordination with their own equivalent schemes.

In particular, I have worked closely with the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince), and officials in the Department for Work and Pensions in order to ensure the CFF's compatibility with the social fund funeral expenses payment scheme.

In developing the CFF, we have engaged with a range of interested parties from across the funeral services sector, whose insight and expertise continue to be invaluable to ensuring the successful implementation of the CFF. I am also grateful for the continued support offered to bereaved families by the wider funeral industry. I hope that the CFF will be a welcome addition to the existing free provision which is already made available for families who have suffered the loss of a child.

In conclusion, I would like to pay tribute to the tireless work of the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) for bringing this important issue to the Government's attention. Drawing on her own experience, she has led a courageous campaign to secure this additional support for all those families who, tragically, face the burden of losing a child. As the Prime Minister has said, it is in memory of the hon. Lady's own son, Martin, that the CFF is being established.

[HCWS1681]

TRANSPORT

Maritime Safety

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I am delighted to inform the House today about the launch of Maritime Safety Week 2019 following the extremely successful inaugural event last year.

The maritime industry is crucial to the UK economy. It is a simple truth that, if safety were not a priority for the sector, it would rapidly grind to a halt.

The UK is recognised internationally for its world-class maritime safety framework and already sets the standard in ensuring the wide variety of people who use and enjoy our waters for business or pleasure can do so in safety. It is not only Government who have achieved this reputation, through the work of organisations like

the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and the general lighthouse authorities, but also sector bodies like the Royal National Lifeboat Institution.

The marine environment can be dangerous, however, and there is always more that can be done to keep people out of harm's way.

Maritime Safety Week aims ultimately to help reduce preventable maritime accidents. The week creates a focal point to recognise the fantastic and innovative work that is already being delivered and the strong partnership between Government and the sector which is vital for further continuous improvement.

As well as recognising the excellent safety work that already goes on, my key objectives for maritime safety week 2019 are to facilitate the sharing of knowledge, experience and best practice and to focus on some of the challenges which remain. That is why, as well as meeting many of the organisations and individuals who make a difference through their work, I will be hosting a fishing safety MP roundtable this week to consider what more can be done to make the fishing industry a safer one.

Throughout the week I will be launching new initiatives and announcing new funding in support of maritime safety. Today I will also be publishing the Government's first maritime safety action plan. This sets out a path for the future of maritime safety work in the UK, makes new commitments and specifies the actions which will be taken to deliver them. The action plan underpins our Maritime 2050 strategy, which I published in January, outlining our ambitious vision for the future of the sector. Copies of the maritime safety action plan have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and are available on gov.uk.

Ultimately, I want to reduce the number of preventable accidents in UK waters and Maritime Safety Week 2019 is an important step towards that goal. I invite Members to show their support on social media by sharing our content and using our hashtags for the week—*#MaritimeSafetyWeek* and *#MaritimeSafetyMatters*.

The attachment can be viewed online at <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2019-07-01/HCWS1679>.

[HCWS1679]

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**not later than
Monday 8 July 2019**

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