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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Monday 15 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

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Disclosure and Barring Service

1. **John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): What steps he is taking to improve the Disclosure and Barring Service.
[911916]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): The Disclosure and Barring Service is a vital part of the safeguarding regime. The DBS issued more than 5 million certificates last year, which was more than the previous year. The Home Office, as the sponsoring Department, continues to oversee the DBS's performance.

John Spellar: Does the Home Secretary not understand—I think he does, along with the Justice Secretary—that it is widely accepted across the House that the service is not fit for purpose, because it makes it far too difficult for those with a record to get back into work, which is bad not only for them but for their families and society? Can we have some urgent action to get back to trying to rehabilitate offenders by putting tight limits on disclosure, especially for cautions and minor offences in early years, and so let many of our citizens turn their lives around? Why does he not cut through the bureaucratic inertia in the Home Office and get a move on?

Sajid Javid: The House will be aware that there have problems with the service in recent years. As a result, a number of changes are being made and performance is up. In fact, a new chief executive is starting this week, I believe, so there is new management. On the actual policies it implements, the right hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Changes can be made and active discussions are taking place right now between me and the Justice Secretary.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): Already this phenomenal summer of sport will have inspired many children to play football, tennis and cricket, with netball, golf and rugby still to come, but there are still failings in our safeguarding processes, including the DBS checks. I worked extremely hard with the excellent Minister on this policy. The main issue remains broadening

the remit of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 to include sports coaches, but will the Home Secretary update the House on progress towards strengthening DBS checks for those involved in coaching, including assistant coaches, to ensure the next generation of possible sporting heroes and heroines are safe from abuse?

Sajid Javid: I thank my hon. Friend for the work she has been doing for several years to encourage more people, particularly young people, to take part in sport. She is right about the current position: sports coach is not included as position of trust. Enhanced criminal checks are available, but I agree that we need to do more work, which is why we are reviewing the effectiveness of the law on those who take advantage of young children with sexual relationships and are looking at what more we can do to include them as positions of trust.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The scope of the DBS is far too narrow. Private tutors are exempt, as are host families of international students. As we head into the summer, it is a reminder that we need to safeguard all young people. What steps is the Home Secretary taking to ensure it is far more comprehensive in who it covers?

Sajid Javid: I understand that the hon. Lady has had a meeting recently with the victims Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), on this very issue, and I am glad that she has raised it. She may be aware that there are changes we have to, and want to, make because of a recent Supreme Court judgment, and because of that I want to bring forward other changes that we are looking at and planning and that, when they happen, she will welcome.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Some of these DBS checks take far too long and prevent people from getting into employment. Is it the fault of the DBS, local police forces, or both?

Sajid Javid: Sometimes, when there are delays, they will probably be very case-specific, so it is hard to attribute fault, but my hon. Friend is right to raise the need for speedy checks. There have been significant improvements. He may be interested to know that there is a 14-day maximum on the basic checks we apply, and in 98% of cases that has been met.

Economic Crime

2. **Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to tackle economic crime.
[911918]

The Minister for Security and Economic Crime (Mr Ben Wallace): Last week, the Government published a new economic crime plan in partnership with the private sector to create a whole-system approach to economic crime. Her Majesty's Government are investing at least £48 million this year to bolster capabilities to tackle economic crime, including with the establishment of the National Economic Crime Centre, to increase the number of financial investigators and to recover more assets.

Nigel Mills: I welcome the new economic crime plan, and I agree we need more resources to finance people to tackle these various crimes. What more will be done under that new plan to strengthen our protections against fraud?

Mr Wallace: The new economic crime plan brings together all the different actors on the stage the Government have invested in and identifies all those areas that need to be solved. It is a better analysis of economic crime. We have set up the NECC to bring together all the assets of government—everything from UK Visas and Immigration and the Home Office to the intelligence services—to focus on some of the biggest money launderers and to implement the new powers in the Criminal Finances Act 2017, to deal with criminals and money launderers and to take the money back from them.

17. [911933] **Ruth Jones** (Newport West) (Lab): Given that the Government are constantly telling us how much more money they are putting into funding the police forces across the UK, can the Minister tell us how many detectives were assigned to serious organised crime in 2010, and how many there were in the latest available data?

Mr Speaker: Including of an economic character.

Mr Wallace: Given the economic character of that question, the best thing is for me to write to the hon. Lady with the detail of the number of financial investigators—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Lady has not been particularly specific. Does she mean the number of detectives within the National Crime Agency, within the Met's serious organised crime command, within the regional organised crime units or within the local forces? I will send her the details so that she can analyse and discuss them.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I welcome the economic crime plan, but I do not see any mention of extending the “failure to prevent” offence to include economic crime. Is the Minister still keen to do that?

Mr Wallace: Absolutely. Building “failure to prevent” offences such as bribery and tax evasion into statute makes a real difference. It is important for us to give our law enforcement agencies powers to deal with, for instance, corporations that engage in conspiracies, because in the past that has been very hard to prove.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Poor pension transfer advice can amount to fraud, but in my experience local police officers often refer such cases to the Financial Conduct Authority, which often focuses on administrative penalties rather than criminal prosecutions. Will the Minister agree to meet me, and to review economic crimes against pensioners, so that justice can be done?

Mr Wallace: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. While large sectors are regulated under the FCA, we have seen fraudsters exploiting marketing as a guise to escape that regulation. When we identify them, there are criminal investigations, but I should be delighted to meet the hon. Gentleman and hear more about his views.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): How will the forthcoming legislation requiring the registration of overseas entities prevent money generated through crime and corruption overseas from being invested in the London property market?

Mr Wallace: Transparency is the best disinfectant in such cases, and the Government are working hard to improve the operation of Companies House to ensure that we get to the bottom of some of these spurious companies. We are also fully committed to the establishment of a public register of property ownership in the UK, and are working with overseas territories to ensure that similar registers are established to cover ownership there.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): As capital moves ever more easily, it is imperative that we look again at the very limited circumstances in which large financial actors can at present be held accountable before the law. The Minister mentioned corporations a moment ago, but the Government's economic crime plan totally fails to take on the issue of corporate criminal liability, which we must consider. Here is a very simple question: what are the Government afraid of?

Mr Wallace: As the hon. Gentleman will know, I have been talking about that issue for a long time, and we have been working hard on it. “Failure to prevent” in relation to tax evasion is now being rolled out, and the National Security Council discussed the issue more than a year ago. The hon. Gentleman will, I hope, wait to see what happens, but we are determined to try to deal with it.

EU Settlement Scheme

3. **Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): What assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the EU settlement scheme application process. [911919]

The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes): EU citizens are our friends, our neighbours and our colleagues, and we want them to stay. The settlement scheme is performing well. The latest published statistics show that more than 800,000 applications have been received and the majority of people are finding it easy to apply. Additional support is available to those who are vulnerable, or who do not have the appropriate access, skills or confidence to apply online.

Ronnie Cowan: Instead of implementing a scheme that makes EU citizens—many of whom have lived here for a great many years—unlawfully resident if they fail to apply by December 2020, will the Minister introduce a declaratory system whereby people apply for proof of settled status rather than the right to stay?

Caroline Nokes: A declaratory system that did not require EU citizens to obtain status and provide evidence of it would risk causing confusion, especially among the most vulnerable, and people might struggle to prove their status in years to come. There would also be a risk of confusion among employers and service providers, and the system might impede EU citizens' access to benefits and services to which they are entitled.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): The vast majority of people I hear from say that the settled status scheme is working very well and is easy to use. Many receive responses within a few hours of submitting their applications. However, it is a bit frustrating that the service is still not available on Apple devices such as phones; can the Minister update us on when it might be?

Caroline Nokes: It is not just anecdotal information that tells us that people are finding it easy and quick to apply; we know that most applications are settled within one to four working days. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has been tireless in pursuing the issue raised by my hon. Friend, and we are very hopeful that the app will be available on Apple devices in the autumn.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Change UK): There is a significant eastern European community in Enfield and other parts of London. Sections of the Bulgarian, Romanian, Polish and Roma communities can be hard to reach, and some have limited English language skills. Community representatives are concerned about individuals who have worked in the grey economy as cleaners or handymen, or for unscrupulous employers, being able to supply the right paperwork. What further steps is the Department putting in place to support these communities and to ensure that everyone can access, and apply to, the scheme?

Caroline Nokes: The right hon. Lady will be aware that the Home Office has provided up to £9 million of grant funding to 57 voluntary and community-based organisations specifically to help the vulnerable people to whom she refers. I was pleased to visit the East European Resource Centre and to have the opportunity to speak to a group of long-standing UK residents about the support available. She references the grey economy; we do not wish to see anybody working in the grey economy, but we recognise that there will be those who do. The Home Office is absolutely prepared to accept a wide range of evidence of people's stay in the UK, including tenancy agreements or letters from health providers with whom they have been in contact. This is absolutely about working with individuals. The EU Settlement Resolution Centre is up and running, and is incredibly well staffed. I was pleased to visit it, to see the help that it can give to individuals.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): There is a seeming desire among some Opposition Members for the EU settlement scheme to be a complete failure, but will my right hon. Friend again confirm that this is a successful scheme and that take-up has been positive? If Opposition Members continue to tell their EU citizen constituents that they will not be able to apply, they are not being helpful.

Caroline Nokes: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The scheme has been a success, and it is shocking when hon. Members talk the scheme down. It is working well. We are determined to put in place support for those who are vulnerable, as I said. Later this week, we will see the latest statistics surrounding the scheme, which will show a considerable uplift from the figure of 800,000 reported from the end of May.

Refugee Settlement Programme

4. Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): When he plans to announce details of the integrated programme to resettle an additional 5,000 refugees from 2020-21. [911920]

23. Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): When he plans to announce details of the integrated programme to resettle an additional 5,000 refugees from 2020-21. [911939]

The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes): We continue to engage with international and domestic delivery partners and stakeholders, as we work through the detailed policy and operational considerations for the new global resettlement scheme. In the meantime, we continue towards our commitment of resettling 20,000 of the most vulnerable refugees affected by the conflict in Syria.

Thangam Debbonaire: The Minister knows that I would like the ambition to be as high as possible. What plans has she got to consult refugees and refugee organisations about the lessons that can be learned from current resettlement schemes?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Lady will know—this is an ambition that I have often voiced to her—that we have sought to bring together the vulnerable persons resettlement scheme, the vulnerable children's resettlement scheme and the gateway protection scheme, to consolidate our refugee programmes. We continue to work closely with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and indeed with those delivering the schemes, local authorities included. As part of the ambition—this is why we have given a figure in the region of 5,000—it is important that we learn from VPRS, work through local authorities to establish the number of people they can best assist through the schemes and make sure that we do not downgrade the good commitments we have previously given on resettlement.

Helen Hayes: Young adult asylum seekers often face unique and complex challenges to their mental health and wellbeing, with many having survived unimaginable experiences in their country of origin and during their long and treacherous journey to reach this country. In setting out details of the integrated programme to resettle an additional 5,000 refugees from 2020 to 2021, will the Minister commit to there being a youth welfare officer in every asylum accommodation and dispersed accommodation location, so that vulnerable, traumatised 18 to 25-year-olds receive the support that they need to recover from their experiences and can live as well as possible in the UK?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to point out the distinction between the formal resettlement schemes referred to in the question and those young people who have made, in many instances, terrible and perilous journeys of many thousands of miles and who have travelled across the whole of Europe to get to these shores. It really is important that we work to support young asylum seekers; I am conscious that the largest numbers will be found in a small number of local authorities, particularly Croydon, Kent and Hillingdon, which work incredibly hard to support not only unaccompanied minors but

those leaving the care system and those for whom we have a responsibility up to the age of 24 under the Children and Families Act 2014. It is crucial that we get this right; that is why I was so pleased to see the uplift in funding to local authorities for unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Scotland has played a leading role in the current vulnerable persons resettlement scheme, resettling nearly 3,000 people across all Scotland's local authorities. Recent opinion polls show strong support in Scotland for maintaining that commitment and, indeed, for improving on it. Will the Minister join me in welcoming Scotland's success story, and will she commit, through the comprehensive spending review, to funding integration support for refugees under the new scheme at the same levels that are currently provided under the VPRS?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. and learned Lady is absolutely right to point out the significant role that Scotland has played. In Jordan last summer, I was pleased to meet a family who were being resettled to East Ayrshire within a few days of my visit. It is important that we provide not only support for resettling people but the necessary integration, not least through the provision of English language teaching, which is a crucial component. She will know from previous comments I have made in this House that one of my big passions is ensuring that we assist those with refugee status into work and ensure that good schemes exist across the entire country to help them to do that.

Mr Speaker: I can tell that there is a second question coming from the hon. and learned Lady.

Joanna Cherry: Thank you, Mr Speaker. As well as Scottish local authorities, Scottish community groups are also planning to sponsor refugee families. I met representatives of Refugee Sponsorship Edinburgh in my constituency recently. This is the first group of people to do this in Scotland. They will be delighted that the UK Government have finally agreed that any refugees supported under the community sponsorship scheme will be additional to those resettled under the UK Government scheme. Will the Minister commit to ensuring that the new scheme will make it easier for named individuals to be resettled and for family members dispersed across the world to join refugees who have already been settled here? I am sure I am not alone in being approached regularly in my constituency surgery by refugees with those concerns.

Caroline Nokes: The hon. and learned Lady is absolutely right to highlight the brilliant role played by community sponsorship schemes. They are absolutely the gold standard of resettlement. However, it is important that we continue to work with the UNHCR to ensure that it is the most vulnerable people who are resettled here, whether through community schemes or through the sponsorship of local authorities. It would be very wrong for us to use resettlement schemes to resettle people from safe third countries when many people across the middle east and north Africa region and across the world are in parlous situations and in real danger. They must always be our first priority.

Mr Speaker: In noting that the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) was chuntering from a sedentary position in evident disapproval of the length of an inquiry, I simply say to him in the gentlest possible spirit that I feel sure that, in his own mind, his own questions are never too long but merely fully developed.

Modern Slavery Act: Business Compliance

5. **Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to monitor business compliance with the Modern Slavery Act 2015. [911921]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): Around 16,400 UK businesses are within scope of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. The Home Office has commenced the first stage of a compliance audit, following which non-compliant businesses will risk being publicly named. We are developing a Government-run registry to track compliance and make it easier for consumers and others to scrutinise business action. We are also consulting on strengthening modern slavery reporting requirements, including improving compliance and the quality of business statements.

Ellie Reeves: I thank the Minister for her answer, but the number of potential victims of modern slavery identified in the UK each year has more than doubled since 2015 and now stands at just under 7,000. The Modern Slavery Act was a step in the right direction, but it has been left to go stale due to lack of enforcement, with a staggering 40% of companies not complying with it at all. Will the Minister take urgent action to commit to an enforcement body to enforce sanctions against non-compliant companies?

Victoria Atkins: I think that, when we have the opportunity to do so, we should talk up our country and what we are doing to lead the world in tackling modern slavery. We really are leading the world; the Prime Minister hosted a dinner last week with the McCain Institute, at which people from across the world acknowledged the world-leading work we are doing in this country. Of course there is more to do, which is precisely why we asked the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) and Baroness Butler-Sloss to conduct an independent review of the Act to ensure that it is up to date and working. We know that modern slavery criminals change their mode of working. From that, last week we announced £10 million over five years to establish cutting-edge policy and evidence centres on modern slavery and human rights. We also responded to the independent review of the Modern Slavery Act and accepted the majority of its recommendations. I really believe that this work on transparency in supply chains will be groundbreaking.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I entirely endorse what the Minister said about how this country leads the fight against modern-day slavery, which is a great credit to the Prime Minister, but should she not encourage all businesses to report possible victims as they come across them in their daily business? Police would prefer to have an investigation that leads to nothing than leave victims in modern-day slavery.

Victoria Atkins: I very much agree with my hon. Friend, who has done much work in this field. We have only to look at the terrible case that was finalised last week to see the breadth and range of ways in which people who indulge in modern slavery torture and enslave their captives; some of the details of that case were truly shocking. It absolutely underlines the fact that every single business that meets the criteria in the Act is obliged by law to report and ensure that its supply chains are free from slavery. That has a trickle-down effect for smaller businesses that are contracted to those larger businesses, because they have to make sure that they are doing the right thing too.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): Will that requirement be carried out in the public sector? Given the size of the procurement budget, will the Minister tell the House what plans the Government have to ensure that Government spending is within the scope of the Act?

Victoria Atkins: May I thank the right hon. Gentleman, as I said, for the work that he and his colleagues did on the review? It was an extraordinary piece of work and very thorough, and I know that he was pleased that we were able to accept the majority of its recommendations. We absolutely accept the point about the public sector, and he will know that the Prime Minister recently made an important announcement to confirm that Departments will make modern slavery statements to ensure that their supply chains are free from slavery. As for the further details, I will write to the right hon. Gentleman in due course.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): We on the Labour Benches appreciate the progress that has been made on modern slavery thus far, but the House will be aware that there was recently a shocking case of agricultural slavery. A fresh produce supplier to major US supermarkets was using slave labour in its supply chain. Does the Minister accept that consumers who are conscious of issues such as organic production and sustainable food production will not appreciate unwittingly purchasing fresh food with slave labour in its production? Will the Government act more swiftly? We need faster action than she is suggesting to get proper business compliance with their modern slavery legislation.

Victoria Atkins: I am delighted that this is one of those issues that enjoys the support of Members from all parts of the House. The right hon. Lady will know from the announcements last week on our response to the independent review that we are very much seeking to toughen the regulations and requirements for the largest businesses. For what it is worth, some 75% of businesses that are in scope have set down a modern slavery statement, but we want to make it easier for civil society and others to judge how effectively businesses are doing, which is why we are looking into setting up a central Government registry to help that happen. We are conscious, too, of the role that non-governmental organisations can play in this space. Only last week, Oxfam released its new behind the barcode supermarket scorecard, which shows how the sector as a whole needs to step up activity to identify and rectify labour exploitation risks. I am delighted that many UK supermarkets have signed up to that.

Immigration Policies

6. Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure that his Department's immigration policies do not unfairly discriminate on the basis of (a) race and (b) nationality. [911922]

10. Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure that his Department's immigration policies do not unfairly discriminate on the basis of (a) race and (b) nationality. [911926]

14. Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure that his Department's immigration policies do not unfairly discriminate on the basis of (a) race and (b) nationality. [911930]

The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes): The Home Office is bound by the public sector equality duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good race relations. The Equality Act 2010 provides that discrimination is not unlawful if it is required by legislation or authorised by Ministers. For example, a visa regime that applies to a particular nationality constitutes discrimination, but is lawful under the Equality Act.

Kate Hollern: An Iranian refugee in my constituency applied for a Home Office travel document and has been refused. He was told that he must get a passport from his own country, which, as he fled that country, is almost impossible. Even to apply for a passport, he would have to agree to sign up for national service. Surely that is discrimination.

Caroline Nokes: I thank the hon. Lady for raising that specific issue. Although I cannot comment on individual cases, we do not wish to see anybody disadvantaged because of the individual requirements of travel documents from their country of origin. I would be very happy to work with her to see whether we can find a solution.

Matthew Pennycook: The Department's own statistics make it clear that last year's average refusal rate for entry visas from Nigeria was 37%, and almost 44% for entry visas from Ghana, compared with an average refusal rate of only 12% across all countries. Can the Minister explain to my west African-born constituents, whose family members, friends and ministers of religion are being refused visitor visas in ever rising numbers, why the system is discriminating in that way?

Caroline Nokes: I reassure the hon. Gentleman that the system is not discriminating in that way and that the Home Office is obliged to consider all visa applications in light of the evidence presented by the applicant. He might be reassured to learn that, in the year ending June 2018, we saw a 2% increase in the number of visas issued to sub-Saharan African nationals compared with the same period of the previous year.

Janet Daby: The Home Office has offered warm words and reassurances to migrant communities about a movement away from the hostile environment, yet the Government are appealing against the High Court ruling that the right-to-rent scheme, which requires private landlords to check the immigration status of tenants, is discriminatory and breaches human rights law. Does the Minister believe that discrimination is a necessary price to pay for enforcing the hostile environment?

Caroline Nokes: The Government disagree with the judgment and are appealing. The evaluation conducted during phase 1 implementation found no evidence of systemic discrimination as a result of the scheme. However, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has commissioned further evaluation, which will examine the potential for discrimination in right-to-rent checks.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Churches in Stirling and in other parts of Scotland are struggling with the recent change in immigration rules for visiting ministers of religion. Does my right hon. Friend appreciate the degree of difficulty this is causing faith groups in Scotland? What can be done to alleviate it?

Caroline Nokes: I was very pleased last week to meet ministers of religion across a wide range of faiths to discuss this specific issue. I am sure Members will agree that when it comes to ministers of religion, as opposed to religious workers, it is imperative that those who are going to preach and conduct pastoral work within any religion need to have a good standard of English, which is why the Home Office is requiring them to apply for a tier 2 visa, as opposed to a tier 5 visa, which of course does not require the language check.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): The Windrush crisis did not fall from the sky but was a direct result of the hostile environment, which the High Court has found directly causes discrimination. The Windrush compensation scheme took over a year to set up and has a two-year deadline. Has anybody actually received the money in their bank account yet? How will the Minister ensure that claimants receive speedy compensation? Does she believe that two years is long enough to ensure that nobody who is entitled to compensation loses out?

Caroline Nokes: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question. He will, of course, recall that elements of the compliant environment were introduced under the last Labour Government, including the controls introduced in 1999 on temporary and illegal migrant access to benefits and the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, which introduced controls on local authority social care.

The hon. Gentleman raises an important question about the Windrush compensation scheme, and it is important that we have the scheme up and running and are receiving applications. We have, of course, undertaken to provide regular updates to the Home Affairs Committee, which will provide exactly the information that the hon. Gentleman seeks.

Of course, it is a requirement under legislation that the compensation scheme be for a period of two years, but we are looking closely at that. I reassure the hon. Gentleman that should there be a requirement to extend it, which would undoubtedly need primary legislation, we would be happy to consider that.

Violent Crime: Young People

7. **Giles Watling** (Clacton) (Con): What steps he is taking to divert young people away from violent crime.
[911923]

15. **Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): What steps he is taking to divert young people away from violent crime.
[911931]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): Diverting young people away from crime is at the heart of our approach to tackling serious violence. Factors such as domestic abuse, truancy and substance abuse can make a young person more vulnerable to becoming a victim or perpetrator of serious violence. That is why, for example, we are investing £220 million in early intervention schemes—a record amount.

Giles Watling: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer. We all know that instances of violent crime in urban centres such as London get the most media attention, but sadly we are also seeing our share of violent crime in my coastal constituency. We had one robbery at knifepoint and one serious assault in the same area of the town in the past week. Following a campaign that I led in Essex, we have seen 12 more officers on the streets of Clacton. They work so hard, but what more can be done to prevent young people in areas such as my constituency from turning towards violent crime?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend has led an excellent local campaign and I commend him for it. As he will know, Essex police has received £1.7 million from the £100 million extra funding to tackle serious violence that was recently announced. In addition, his local police and crime commissioner has been provisionally allocated a further £1.16 million for a violence reduction unit. He may also welcome the £660,000 allocated to Essex from the early intervention youth fund.

Sir David Amess: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating N-Act, in my constituency, which has toured the schools producing plays that have a profound effect on young people, meaning that they do not get involved in gangs, and Gorgui Thiam, a Senegalese sports coach whose work has been very effective in breaking up violent gangs through the power of sport?

Sajid Javid: I happily join my hon. Friend in commending that work. The work being done there locally and similar work across the country shows the power of early intervention. That is why we have set up funding to support more and more schemes like that, both through the early intervention youth fund and the youth endowment fund.

Mr Speaker: Of course we all join in the celebration of the power of sport as a positive force, be it, for example, tennis, cricket or indeed football. *[Interruption.]* And lots of other sports to boot—netball, hockey, rounders and athletics. We also celebrate those who teach sport, and those who broadcast it and write about it, one of whom I spy not very far from me at this every moment—the great Richard Evans. *[Interruption.]* That will do for now.

21. [911937] **Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Reducing school exclusions is key to tackling this problem. Will the Home Secretary join the Housing, Communities and Local Government Secretary to co-fund high-quality intervention for young men who are falling

out of school and being excluded from school between the ages of 13 to 15, which appear to be the key ages when they are at risk of going from pupil referral units to prison?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady raises an important point and it shows precisely why we are planning to introduce the public health duty—to get more Departments and public agencies to work together in providing early intervention through many different types of programme. She is right to highlight alternative provision and some of the issues associated with it, especially how some of those children, sadly, become the target of gangs, and we are doing more work across government.

22. [911938] **Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): What is the Home Secretary doing with other Departments in the spending review to fund youth centres properly? That would go some way to tackling youth crime.

Sajid Javid: When it comes to early intervention, youth activities, youth clubs and the kind of thing we have just heard about in Southend are the sort of important work that we want to support more. I have talked about the £220 million of early intervention funding, which is a record amount, and it will go towards doing that, supporting some 200 different projects.

Mr Speaker: Ah yes, you're a very fine sportsman—I call Mr Tom Pursglove.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): You are far too kind, Mr Speaker.

What difference does the Home Secretary believe putting 20,000 more police officers out on the beat, catching criminals and deterring crime, will make in practical terms?

Sajid Javid: I have long said that we need to tackle crime, especially serious violence, on many fronts, and that means making sure that the police are properly resourced so that we have enough police on the streets. That is why this year we had a record settlement of almost £1 billion, which was voted for and supported by Government Members but rejected by Opposition Members.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Often, the focus is on violent crime in cities, but towns such as ours in West Yorkshire have seen an increase in robberies and antisocial behaviour, and the results of county lines and drug violence, too. Our area has lost nearly half its neighbourhood policing, which the Home Secretary will know has been cut throughout the country. The Home Affairs Committee has called for more police on the beat—we need more police back on the beat—and the Home Secretary has recognised that we need 20,000 more police back on the beat. When does he estimate we will get them?

Sajid Javid: I very much agree with the right hon. Lady about the need for more police. That is why we had a record settlement this year, which included, for example, more than £28 million extra for her local police force, which is leading to more police officers and more police staff. I have said that we need to go further,

and we are discussing that internally in Government to see what more can be done. I hope the right hon. Lady recognises, though, that it is about more than just police; it is about early intervention and understanding some of the underlying causes of crime. I have always recognised the need for more resources and more police.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): The Home Secretary referred to the new public health duty. The Opposition agree that it is a good idea in principle, but does the Home Secretary agree with the Children's Commissioner for England, Anne Longfield, who has said that the change is not enough on its own and who is calling for the next Prime Minister, and perhaps his Chancellor, to ensure that preventive services such as youth services have the right resources? Will the Home Secretary tell us how often the Prime Minister's knife crime taskforce has actually met?

Sajid Javid: The right hon. Lady has mentioned an important partner in tackling serious violence, and the Children's Commissioner is part of the serious violence taskforce and we listen to her important views regularly. Of course, the Children's Commissioner is right that this issue requires action on many fronts. There is no one single answer—we have talked about resources, new powers, early intervention and, of course, the public health approach—which is why we are working across Government. We have institutionalised that in Government in many ways, including with the taskforce that the Prime Minister set up, which has already met once and is meeting again today.

Extremist Views

8. **Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): What steps he is taking to support community organisations to counter extremist views. [911924]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): Our £63 million “Building a Stronger Britain Together” programme provides funding to local community groups that seek to challenge extremist views. Since 2016, we have supported more than 230 civil society groups, which have access to training opportunities and a network of 40 expert counter-extremism community co-ordinators who are embedded in local authorities.

Dr Lewis: What more can the Government do to publicise those important examples of where communities and community organisations have succeeded in the supply of information that has prevented terrorist plots, saved innocent lives and helped to take people who were at risk of radicalisation away from extremist doctrines?

Sajid Javid: My right hon. friend is absolutely right to raise this issue. We have often talked at the Dispatch Box about, for example, the importance of the Prevent programme, which is fundamentally about safeguarding and supporting vulnerable individuals to stop them becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. My right hon. Friend may be interested to know that in just one year, 2017-18, our Channel safeguarding programme supported some 394 individuals, and 181 different community projects that have reached 88,000 different people.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Home Secretary really should be ashamed of himself. If he comes to a place such as Huddersfield and other towns in West Yorkshire, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) has just mentioned, he will find that it is about not only diverting young people from violence, gangs and crime, but tackling extremist views early on. If the Government dismantle local government youth services, they cannot just pass the responsibility across to community associations and think that is okay.

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman should know that we have done a great deal since 2000 to support community projects, including youth community projects. I mentioned earlier the £63 million that we put into the “Building a Stronger Britain Together” programme. That is through the Home Office alone, but much more is going on through the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Department for Education and local government. He mentions Huddersfield. Just last week, I had the pleasure of meeting a young man called Jamal, who was the victim of racism, a form of extremism, in the hon. Gentleman’s own constituency. I had the opportunity to welcome him to our great country and to tell him that what happened to him in Huddersfield in no way represents the people of our great nation.

Mr Speaker: I call Sir Roger Gale.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): Topical Question 1, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: No, no, no; the right hon. Gentleman is ahead of himself. He is working on the basis that we always stick to time, which is not an unreasonable assumption except that it suffers from the disadvantage in factual terms of being wrong.

Hostile State Activity

11. **Sir Roger Gale:** What steps he is taking to counter hostile state activity in the UK. [911927]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): Across Government, we are taking a broad range of legislative, diplomatic and operational action to prevent, disrupt and deter hostile state activity.

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) will have Topical Question 1 as well, so he will get two bites at the cherry and he will have nothing about which to complain.

Sir Roger Gale: A wonderful opportunity! Scarcely cricket, but a wonderful opportunity.

Following the attempted poisonings in Salisbury, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister took robust action to secure the dismissal from the United Kingdom and other European countries of Russian spies posing as diplomats. There is some reason to suppose that that network is now being rebuilt. Without asking my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to give details of the work of MI5, may I ask him to give us a reassurance that it is very firmly on the case?

Sajid Javid: As my right hon. Friend says, I will not comment on any sensitive intelligence matter, but he is right to be concerned about the rise in hostile state activity. There is ongoing activity across Government to ensure that our democracy is protected. We have taken many steps and co-ordinated them across Government and the relevant authorities. He will also be pleased to know that, now that the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019 is on the statute book, it gives us many more powers to counter hostile state activity.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): The Home Secretary will know that police numbers remain key to hostile state activity prevention. I have still not heard an answer to the question that my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) posed—how many extra police officers are going to be recruited, and when, to tackle this important issue?

Sajid Javid: When it comes to hostile state activity, it is not that police numbers are unimportant, but actually, the key is intelligence and support for our intelligence services, especially for MI5 and the excellent work that it does.

Mr Speaker: I am enormously tickled to see the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), the Father of the House, beetle into the Chamber by walking across the Government Front Bench. I suppose that he was so long an habitu   of the Treasury Bench that it may seem a perfectly normal means by which to enter the Chamber, but, in any case, we are delighted to see him.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): I do apologise to the House. It was once the only way that I entered this Chamber.

Mr Speaker: As I say, we are very pleased to see the right hon. and learned Gentleman, and we look forward to hearing from him ere long.

Community and Neighbourhood Policing

12. **Ruth Smeeth** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with police and crime commissioners on (a) the merits of and (b) investment in community and neighbourhood policing. [911928]

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): As funding for the police increases, we have made it clear that we want to see more consistent, proactive neighbourhood policing, which is the cornerstone of the British policing model.

Ruth Smeeth: I thank the Minister for his reply, but my police and crime commissioner has cut the number of warranted officers by more than 500 since 2010, and, despite the efforts of my brilliant local police, only two are now allocated to Kids Grove. We have seen a spike in threatening antisocial behaviour in the past month, with some people now refusing to go to the local park. I will not have no-go areas in my constituency, so what will the Minister do?

Mr Hurd: I am a bit puzzled by what the hon. Lady says, because I have spoken to her police and crime commissioner, the excellent Matthew Ellis, and he is extremely animated about how he is going to use the additional money from the funding settlement to move

100 more people into neighbourhood policing by the year end and to get behind proactive policing to disrupt crime, including drug dealing, in hotspots. I hope that she welcomes such plans, and she certainly needs to sit down and discuss them with him.

Ms Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con): We all agree about the importance of neighbourhood and community policing, but does the Minister agree that effective community policing does not rely on police officers having degrees? Yes, it is critical that we have enough officers; yes, it is crucial that they have common sense; but does he agree with me and other blue collar Conservatives that it is ridiculous to say that all police officers must have a degree, as proposed?

Mr Hurd: They do not need a degree to go into policing; that is what the apprentice route is for. I know plenty of people with degrees who would make very poor police officers. What we are keen to do is upskill the force and, critically, ensure that the very considerable skills that people coming out of policing have developed are accredited.

18. [911934] **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Northumbria police has lost a quarter of its funding and 1,000 police officers due to Government cuts. Labour's candidate in the police and crime commissioner elections on Thursday is so concerned that she has raised a petition to reverse the cuts. Will the Minister send the next Prime Minister a message that he cares about community policing and sign Kim's petition?

Mr Hurd: Northumbria police has had its funding increased by £18 million in a process that the hon. Lady opposed. The excellent Conservative candidate in those elections—Robbie Moore, whom I have met—is absolutely committed to neighbourhood policing, as are this Government. We are making police funding a priority.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Investment in neighbourhood policing looks set to become even more difficult following last month's Supreme Court ruling that the Government's post-2015 pension changes were unlawful. This ruling affects tens of thousands of public servants, including police officers, who have no negotiating rights and have had these discriminatory changes imposed on them. Will there be an industrial resolution to this mess for officers who have been left in limbo, and will funding for policing be protected when the Treasury finally brings forward measures to remedy this illegal discrimination?

Mr Hurd: The Government have made very clear the priority that we attach to police funding. We are increasing funding, through council tax and other measures, by up to £1 billion this year. The Home Secretary and I have made it quite clear that police funding is our priority, as have the candidates for the roles of leader of our party and the next Prime Minister. In relation to the very important judgment—it is extremely significant—against which the Government cannot appeal, it is for my colleagues in the Treasury to make a considered response.

Mr Speaker: We are running late, but I want to take the questions from the hon. Members for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris) and for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) on domestic abuse.

Domestic Abuse

13. **Chris Heaton-Harris** (Daventry) (Con): What steps he is taking to tackle domestic abuse. [911929]

19. **Trudy Harrison** (Copeland) (Con): What steps he is taking to tackle domestic abuse. [911935]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): Ending domestic abuse remains an absolute priority, which is why I am delighted to announce that tomorrow we will be launching the landmark Domestic Abuse Bill, which will contain a groundbreaking series of measures to promote awareness, support victims and children, tackle perpetrators and improve services.

Chris Heaton-Harris: I thank the Minister for answering my supplementary question before I had asked it—I am delighted that the Bill will be introduced tomorrow. Can she confirm that it will support my constituents in Daventry who have experienced or been victims of domestic abuse, and protect others from experiencing it in the future?

Victoria Atkins: Very much so. I thank my hon. Friend for the work that he has done to raise with me the issues in his constituency. We are delighted that the Bill will be introduced tomorrow. There is also a package of non-legislative measures that will be critical in ensuring that we are supporting victims, preventing further opportunities for abuse and, also importantly, helping children who live in abusive households.

Trudy Harrison: Will my hon. Friend join me in commending the new and excellent Women Out West centre in Whitehaven, which is having a huge impact on women and their families in my constituency in partnership with the Copeland hub, which she recently visited?

Victoria Atkins: I would be delighted to commend the centre. It was a pleasure to visit the Copeland hub—a great example of multi-agency working, which, as everyone in the House knows, is essential if we are to tackle this pernicious crime of domestic abuse effectively across our country.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): It is great news that the Bill is going to be published tomorrow—real credit to the Minister personally for sticking with this. Can she confirm that she has listened to the survivors of abuse, particularly of emotional and economic abuse, through the draft process and strengthened the final Bill as a result?

Victoria Atkins: Very much so, and may I thank the hon. Gentleman, too, for all his work and his lobbying of me to support and protect victims of domestic abuse? I must also record my thanks to the Joint Committee—a brilliant Committee of parliamentarians from both Houses who scrutinised the draft Bill in great detail, heard lots of evidence from incredibly important stakeholders and produced a report, to which we will publish a response tomorrow alongside the Bill.

Topical Questions

T1. [911942] **Sir Roger Gale** (North Thanet) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): We continue to fight serious violence and support our world-class police. Yesterday I announced a new legal duty on public bodies to prevent and tackle serious violence, which will compel all relevant public agencies to work together to understand and address this epidemic. Over the last year, we have engaged with police officers and staff on our frontline review, which was published last week and will lead to even more support.

Sir Roger Gale: Given the ongoing police inquiry into the leaking of confidential Foreign and Commonwealth Office documents, together with the need to protect the freedom of the press, my right hon. Friend has a difficult circle to square. Can he tell the House how he intends to both protect the freedom of the press and ensure that the person responsible for this crime is brought to book?

Sajid Javid: I am not going to comment on an ongoing police investigation—I hope my right hon. Friend understands that—but the person who leaked the document should, of course, face the consequences. When I was Culture Secretary, I was very passionate about the freedom of the press. That view has not changed in any way whatsoever. I will always defend the hard-won liberties and the operation of the free press.

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): The latest Government fire and rescue service inspections found that nine years of austerity have created a postcode lottery of response times and crewing levels. We now have rising response times, with fewer firefighters attending incidents. The Government's reckless lack of oversight and investment is risking the safety of many communities across the country. Will the Minister consider implementing national minimum standards, to confront the geographical inequalities that his Government have deepened?

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): We have introduced independent inspections of fire and rescue services, which in fact show that most people across the country get an excellent service in the response to emergencies, but there are variations. That is why we have introduced a national standards board, which is looking at the opportunity to develop greater consistency in standards across the system in the light of the inspection findings.

T2. [911943] **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): Responsibility for enforcing the Vagrancy Act 1824 falls between the Home Office and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is time we revoked the Act and that homeless people should be helped, not arrested?

Sajid Javid: I commend my hon. Friend for the huge amount of work he has done on tackling homelessness and rough sleeping; I saw that as Communities Secretary as well. The Government believe that no one should be

criminalised for simply having nowhere to live and sleeping rough. The Government's 2018 rough sleeping strategy committed us to reviewing the homelessness and rough sleeping legislation, including the Vagrancy Act 1824. That is what we are doing, and I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss that further.

T3. [911944] **Kate Hollern** (Blackburn) (Lab): The Government have been severely complacent in preparing fire services for an emergency on the scale of Grenfell Tower. There are still hundreds of dangerous high-rise buildings, and by continuing to degrade our fire service, the Government are failing to recognise the severity of the risk. Since Grenfell, Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service's funding has been slashed by £3.8 million. Response times have continued to rise. Can the right hon. Gentleman guarantee that all fire and rescue services will be properly prepared for high-rise emergency incidents?

Mr Hurd: The Government continue to give the fire service the resources it needs against a background of falling fire numbers. We continue to monitor that in the run-in to the comprehensive spending review, working closely with the fire service. On the remediation of buildings and the urgent review of a fire safety system that had clearly failed, we continue to work closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in our consultation on that.

T4. [911945] **Dame Caroline Spelman** (Meriden) (Con): In 2018, the Home Secretary agreed to review the policy that bans asylum seekers from working within their first 12 months and severely restricts what professions they can enter thereafter. Can he tell the House when he expects the results of the review to be published and what proposed changes will be recommended?

Sajid Javid: As my right hon. Friend knows, asylum seekers can work in jobs on the shortage occupation list if their claim has been outstanding for 12 months. I know that she will agree that we need to distinguish between those with the need for protection and those who are here only to work. She is right to raise the issue, and it is time for reform. The work in the Home Office is ongoing, and we hope to bring something to the House as soon as possible.

T5. [911946] **Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): A blanket three-year temporary leave to remain visa after a no-deal Brexit will not cut it, especially for students wanting to study courses that last longer than that. When will that be fixed so students have certainty that they can complete their courses?

The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question on an issue that has been raised several times in the House. The Home Office is working hard to make sure that we have a solution so that not just students at Scottish universities but those in English universities who might be studying a longer course such as medicine, veterinary science or architecture are not disadvantaged. We are determined to find a solution that works for all students.

T6. [911947] **Mary Robinson** (Cheadle) (Con): Neighbourhood watch schemes and social media apps are widely used in my local community to share local information and to keep the community safe by working together. Will my right hon. Friend agree to meet me to

discuss this and the possibility of funding a pilot scheme to enable the police, neighbourhood watch and local people to engage in a wider network to better co-ordinate those digital platforms?

Mr Hurd: Those of us who have active neighbourhood watch networks in our constituencies know the value of that network of active citizens working closely with the police: it is the heart of our police model. We are big fans of neighbourhood watch and we have supported it for many years. I would be delighted to sit down with my hon. Friend to discuss how that funding could help in her constituency.

T7. [911948] **Tracy Brabin** (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): On Friday, Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, told the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse:

“I am convinced we need to move to mandatory reporting for regulated activities.”

Does the Home Secretary agree with the archbishop, and will he now introduce mandatory reporting legislation to protect children from harm?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): We are of course grateful to the archbishop for his thoughts, and to the independent inquiry, which is doing an incredibly important job in looking at tackling institutional child sexual abuse. We have looked at mandatory reporting really carefully, and the balance of evidence came down against, but it is something that we very much keep under review, and I am happy to meet the hon. Lady to discuss it with her.

T8. [911949] **Richard Benyon** (Newbury) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best way to get the message to those across the world who gain wealth from grotesque crimes involving hideous human rights abuses and fraud that they are not welcome here is to have more unexplained wealth orders and a robust UK sanctions regime up and running?

The Minister for Security and Economic Crime (Mr Ben Wallace): My right hon. Friend has led a long campaign against such people. He will be glad to know that in the last few years, with our new impetus on economic crime, we have found that a number have already had their collars felt, some have had to explain their wealth—the latest case being £100 million of London property—£112 million of assets have been frozen, and some have found it very hard to visit the country altogether.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): My constituent Bibi Rahima said that

“my life is just a prison”

after she was accused of cheating in the test of English for international communication. She was overjoyed when she won her appeal in May, but I have written to the Home Secretary on her behalf again today to plead against a further appeal now being taken against her. I am certain she did not cheat, and the judge in her appeal in May said that

“there is no specific evidence in relation to this Appellant at all.”

Will Ministers now withdraw that cruel and pointless action?

Sajid Javid: I appreciate the right hon. Gentleman's interest in this issue and the work that he is doing through the all-party parliamentary group that he chairs and helped to set up. We have discussed the broader issue several times. He will know that in 2012 the National Audit Office highlighted widespread abuse of the student migration system. That said, I have agreed with him and many other hon. Members that we need to look again at the action that was taken and see what more can be done. I am planning to come to the House with a statement to say much more before the summer recess.

T9. [911950] **Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): On 23 June, police had to swarm the once idyllic village of Roydon in my constituency to deal with a stabbing on a chalet estate. Since 2009, local residents have reported numerous planning breaches, suspected rogue employment practices, immigration offences, intimidating behaviour and the illegal tarmacking of our village green. What can the Secretary of State do to ensure joined-up working between the police and other agencies to squash this blatant disregard for the laws of the land once and for all?

Sajid Javid: I commend my right hon. Friend for the work he has done in this space, especially on tackling unauthorised encampments. He will know that the Home Office has identified a set of measures that will extend the powers available to the police. We are also conducting a review of the act of trespassing to see whether it can be automatically criminalised.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Disability hate crime has increased more than fourfold since 2011, and that is not even the real level of hate crime and abuse that disabled people have faced. Disabled people have been particularly hit by this Government's cuts, so what will the Home Secretary do to tackle not just the consequences of this hate crime but the causes?

Victoria Atkins: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. The latest official data indicates an increase in police recorded disability hate crime. We believe that is due in part to general police recording improvements, but more clearly needs to be done. That is why we are instigating a review by the Law Commission to ensure that the framework, generally, tackles such hatred. We have had a nationwide public awareness campaign, including specific examples of disability hate crime. We are also funding community projects across the country, including a number that directly tackle disability hate crime, such as Changing Faces and Barnardo's.

Joseph Johnson (Orpington) (Con): In his excellent op-ed in the *Financial Times* on 7 June, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said it made no sense at all to send back home straight after their studies some of the brightest and most enterprising people in the world, and he also backed a cross-party move to liberalise the student visa regime. Could he update the House on his progress in restoring the two-year post-study work visa that was removed in 2012?

Sajid Javid: I am very sympathetic to what my hon. Friend has said. I think that is exactly the kind of change we should be looking at. It is not the policy of

the current Cabinet, but, as he knows, there will be a change in the Cabinet very soon. We do not know who will lead that change, but it might well be someone he is quite close to, so he might want to lobby them too. However, I am very sympathetic, and I will happily work with my hon. Friend.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): TransPennine Express recently locked a gate that is a major access point to the Hull Paragon station, and prominent disability campaigners have been protesting about that. It has locked the gate because it believes that that is the best way to deal with the rising problem of antisocial behaviour. Does the Minister agree that the company should be letting the police tackle the problem of antisocial behaviour and not discriminating against disabled people? Will Ministers join me in sending a clear message to TransPennine Express to open the gate?

Victoria Atkins: I hope the hon. Lady will forgive me if I am not familiar with the precise railway gate in question. However, she will know that the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 provides at least six powers for not just the police but local authorities to tackle antisocial behaviour. It might be that the train company would benefit from a bit of discussion with not just the police but local authorities to see whether they can come up with a better solution.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): Over the last couple of weeks, my constituency has been rocked by two serious incidents of crime. I am sure my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will want to join me in thanking the emergency services and in wishing a speedy recovery to those who were physically injured in those attacks. However, what cross-departmental discussions has he had about providing a more holistic approach to supporting the victims of such crimes?

Victoria Atkins: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. Having visited her constituency recently, I am incredibly sorry to hear of the experiences her constituents have had. She will know that the Government have recently published the victims strategy, which, although led by the Ministry of Justice, very much had the input of the Home Office as well. We want to ensure that we support victims through targeted, focused help, while ensuring that all the relevant agencies, including the health sector, also play their part in helping victims of such terrible crimes.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I will call the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) if he commits to a single-sentence question and then honours his commitment, and I feel sure he will.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Absolutely, Mr Speaker.

Whose interests were served by tearing Lizanne Zietsman away from her family, business and community, and deporting her against the wishes of the entire community of the island of Arran?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Gentleman will understand the distinction between deportation, which happens to foreign national offenders, and removal, which happens to those who are immigration offenders. There is a very clear difference. He will know that I cannot comment on individual cases, but it is worth stating that the Supreme Court has upheld the Government's minimum income requirement to have dependants and spouses in this country. That is an important principle, which the Government support, because we want people to have an adequate level of income that will enable them to integrate into society.

George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): Given that we ran a highly successful seasonal agricultural workers scheme from 1945 to 2013, what do the Government think they can learn from a two-year pilot? Since we have an urgent labour shortage in agriculture, will the Secretary of State commit to convert the current pilot into a fully operational scheme next year?

Caroline Nokes: My hon. Friend will be conscious that at the moment free movement still prevails, which is one of the reasons why this is still a pilot. The Government will of course carefully evaluate the outcome of what is scheduled to be a two-year pilot to understand the impact and to look at what we can do going forward.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am sorry, but this will have to be the last inquiry, as demand exceeds supply. I am sure the Home Office ministerial team are delighted to know that they are parliamentary box office.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): The cornerstone of community policing in London, to use the Minister's words, is the safer neighbourhood teams, which have been cut by 50% to 60% and more. When will they be returned to full strength?

Mr Hurd: That is ultimately a decision for the Mayor in his capacity as police and crime commissioner, working with the Metropolitan Police Commissioner. Our role is to ensure that the Met has the resources it needs. That is why we have taken through funding settlements resulting in the Met receiving £100 million of additional investment last year and £172 million this year, with more to come. How that money is spent and allocated is down to the Mayor and the commissioner.

Detainee Mistreatment: Judge-led Inquiry

3.41 pm

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Prime Minister if she will make good on her Government's commitment, made over a year ago, to bring to the House within 60 days their view on reinstating the judge-led inquiry into detainee mistreatment and rendition that the former Government promised in 2012.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington): As my right hon. and learned Friend indicates, this issue has a lengthy history. It was in July 2010 that Prime Minister Cameron announced Sir Peter Gibson's inquiry into allegations that the United Kingdom had been implicated in the improper treatment of detainees held by other countries in the aftermath of 9/11.

In December 2013, the Government published Sir Peter's preparatory work and asked the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament to follow up on the themes and issues which that work had identified, to take further evidence and to make a report. At the same time, the Government said that they would:

"take a final view as to whether a further judicial inquiry still remains necessary to add any further information of value to future policy making and the national interest."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 2013; Vol. 572, c. 916.]

In June last year, the Intelligence and Security Committee, its work having been interrupted by two general elections and the task of reconstituting the Committee after those elections, published two reports: "Detainee Mistreatment and Rendition: 2001-2010" and "Detainee Mistreatment and Rendition: Current Issues".

In response to an urgent question from my right hon. and learned Friend on 2 July last year, the Minister for Europe and the Americas, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan), said that, in responding to the ISC reports, the Government would:

"give careful consideration to the calls for another judge-led inquiry and will update the House".—[*Official Report*, 2 July 2018; Vol. 644, c. 26.]

The Government responded formally to the ISC on 22 November last year, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, in a written statement, said:

"The Government continue to give serious consideration to the examination of detainee issues and whether any more lessons can be learned and, if so, how."—[*Official Report*, 22 November 2018; Vol. 644, c. 31WS]

That serious consideration has included the question of a further judge-led inquiry.

As the House will understand, this has been complex work, which has involved some of the most sensitive security issues. I confirm to the House today that the Government will make a definitive statement setting out their decision about a judge-led inquiry later this week and, at the same time, we will announce to the House our response to Sir Adrian Fulford's recommendations on the consolidated guidance.

Mr Speaker: I trust that that will be an oral statement to the House.

Mr Lidington: I will make sure that your comment to that effect is faithfully reported to my colleagues in Cabinet, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Thank you.

Mr Clarke: You have asked the most penetrating question, Mr Speaker. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister for finally producing some indication of when we might get a decision and for saying that the Government have reached conclusions. I will not repeat his précis of events, which goes back to the most firm undertakings in 2010 and 2012 that there would be a judge-led inquiry. The preliminary inquiry by Sir Peter Gibson set out the questions that the inquiry had to answer. It was postponed only because of the police inquiry into the further revelations of rendition to Colonel Gaddafi in Libya. After that, the resumption of the inquiry was postponed while the parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee examined matters. When the ISC finally discovered the extent of British intelligence services' complicity in cases of torture and their involvement in hijacking and the unlawful rendition of people for interrogation, mainly in America, the Committee's investigations were stopped and it made a report saying what it would have liked to examine if it had been allowed to interview witnesses.

For years and years, this has been put into the long grass in the hope that it would eventually go away, so I hope that that comes to an end this week. We need to know how there was such a terrible breakdown in responsibility and communications that produced the misdeeds that took place in the time after 9/11, so that we can avoid the culture of the intelligence services and their relationships with Ministers ever slipping back into the same thing again. I hope that we will not just be told, "It is too late. Everything is all right now; there is no need to do anything," because if it is all right now—as I trust it is—we have to reduce the risks that in future, we as a country will ever get involved in torture and rendition again.

If this decision comes out in the last days of this Session, on the eve of the summer recess and in the middle of the appointment of a new Prime Minister in an attempt to bury it away in the pages of *Hansard* and to escape any further challenge until the autumn comes around, it will be the most blatant further attempt to get out of the most solemn undertakings that were given by me when I was Justice Secretary and Lord Chancellor on behalf of the then Prime Minister. That Prime Minister gave these undertakings himself, in a Government in which the present Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and many of their colleagues were serving. We had cleared that line and should honour it, and the whole House should demand a proper, full statement later this week. If there is one success that the delay may have achieved, it is, I regret to say, that for serious personal reasons—not because I am going on holiday—I may miss the final denouement and the statement later this week, because I may be absent from the House. However, I hope that the House will hold the Government fully to account if they try to slip out of their commitments and obligations in the end.

Mr Lidington: I can reassure my right hon. and learned Friend that, far from there being any attempt on behalf of the Government to slip things out under the radar as the summer recess approaches, the Prime Minister has been very clear that she regards it as her responsibility to ensure that the decision is taken and announced to Parliament before she leaves office. It

[Mr Lidington]

would be understandable if a new Prime Minister on taking office wanted to look again at or acquaint himself with the material that was coming to the present Prime Minister. This decision and its timing are actually designed to ensure that we do not slip anything out under the radar.

I would just say to my right hon and learned Friend that the Government are very clear that officials in our agencies have not been involved in torture and that this Government and previous Governments have been resolute in opposing torture. We are talking about the extent to which it is alleged that there was knowledge of or to some extent complicity in the treatment of detainees held by the authorities in other countries.

In my right hon and learned Friend's time, a number of significant changes were made, both in internal Government practice and in the law, that I believe have put us in a much better position since his time in office. I agree strongly with him about the need for us when we debate these matters to look forward as well as backwards. That is exactly why I believe it is right that we acquaint the House with Sir Adrian Fulford's recommendations on the consolidated guidance at the same time as we respond to the obligation to take the decision on a judge-led inquiry and announce it.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question. I thank the Father of the House for securing it and for being so diligent on this issue. He has spoken with typical lucidity on this matter, and I agree with everything he has said, particularly about the unfortunate long grassing.

There is no need for me to repeat what the right hon. and learned Gentleman has already said concerning the constraints that were placed on a nevertheless damning report from the Intelligence and Security Committee. He rightly says that the only way to lift those constraints is to authorise a judge-led inquiry where all the witnesses can be called and all the evidence examined so that finally we can get to the full truth about the historical allegations of torture and rendition that took place under a Labour Government and about the operation of secret courts established by the current Government under the Justice and Security Act 2013.

The inquiry would be for the benefit of all future Governments, whichever party is in charge, as it would enable us all to truly learn the lessons from what has happened and to put in place new procedures and any necessary changes to the consolidated guidance so that we can absolutely guarantee that these abuses will never happen again. The reason it is so urgent is that in fewer than 10 days we will have a new Government in charge led by a Prime Minister who has proven by his actions not just as Foreign Secretary but also on the debate stage last week that he cannot be trusted to stand up to Donald Trump—a President who, let us not forget, has publicly said that he believes that water boarding and other forms of torture are effective and that we have to “fight fire with fire”. If we have a new Prime Minister who is willing to throw our ambassadors under the bus, we must have new procedures in place to stop that Prime Minister allowing our Government once again to

be in danger of becoming complicit in torture and rendition by the United States or any other country to whom he kowtows.

I am glad to hear that there will be a further statement, and hopefully that statement will include a decision by the Prime Minister, but will the Minister tell the Prime Minister to establish the inquiry that we were promised seven years ago in the next week and to provide at least one fitting legacy from her time in office and one necessary protection for the country from the recklessness of her successor?

Mr Lidington: Obviously I will not pre-empt the content of the Government's statement later this week, but I think it is clear from the way in which the right hon. Lady has posed her questions that it is acknowledged on both sides of the House that this is an extremely important as well as an extremely sensitive decision. What I will say to her is that the protections against involvement in the use of torture apply to this and any future Government in the United Kingdom, not least by virtue of Ministers' obligations to obey the law. That includes our international legal obligations, including those set out both in the United Nations convention against torture and the European convention on human rights.

In recent years we have seen not only a much stronger and, for the first time, a statutory role for the Investigatory Powers Commissioner—who now reports annually on his work, including the application of detainee policy—but enhanced powers for the Intelligence and Security Committee, notably the power that enables it, in law, to require rather than just request information from the security and intelligence agencies.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): I hear what my right hon. Friend says about obeying international law, but it is clear from the Prime Minister's apology to the Libyan victims alone that the British Government, at very best, came perilously close to breaching article 3 of the European convention on human rights, which forbids torture but also its facilitation or complicity in it. Moreover, without an independent judge-led inquiry, the Government may now be in breach of article 13, which, as well as encapsulating centuries of established common law, provides for the right to “an effective remedy”.

I do not know what is making the Government take so long to decide whether to pursue a judge-led inquiry. It may be pressure from the agencies, although I doubt that now, or it may be pressure from allies who were complicit or involved in this. Whatever it is, I hope that what I shall say next will help my right hon. Friend in his argument with them. If he does not announce an independent judge-led inquiry in his statement later this week, or next week, I will certainly seek advice on whether we have broken either of those articles, and, if need be, use the proper judicial mechanisms to ensure that the Government are put back within the bounds of the law.

Mr Lidington: As I said earlier, it is the duty of every Minister, in line with the Ministerial Code, to comply with our international as well as our domestic legal obligations. In the case of officials, those obligations are statutory, because the civil service code is itself

incorporated in statute. I hope that when my right hon. Friend sees the detail of what will be announced later this week, he will be able to feel reassured by it.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I commend the Father of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), for bringing this matter to the Floor of the House, and for securing what seems to be something of a concession in relation to an announcement later this week. However, it is still very unclear why there has been such a lengthy delay since the undertaking given more than a year ago that the decision would be brought to the House “within 60 days”. Can the Minister elucidate?

Before the publication of the Intelligence and Security Committee’s report on these matters last year, the United States Government were given the chance to review the report and to request redactions. Will the Minister tell us what discussions have taken place with the Trump Administration about a potential inquiry, and will he reassure us that the Government’s delayed response is not a consequence of pressure from the United States?

Mr Lidington: This has taken time because the Government have felt, I think rightly, that an issue of such importance and sensitivity requires very careful and meticulous consideration. The Government’s decisions are made on the basis of the United Kingdom’s national interest, and nothing else.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): Notwithstanding my right hon. Friend’s mellifluous and reassuring tones, it is pretty reprehensible that the Father of the House has had to raise this matter yet again. Not only were he and I members of the Cabinet that promised the House this inquiry nearly 10 years ago, but it is day 378 since the 60-day promise made by the Government and reinforced by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office in answer to a written question from me. The damage that this has done to the UK’s precious international reputation is not well understood. This is not about hauling individuals before the courts; it is about transparency, openness, leadership and lessons learned.

The right investigation would have been by the Intelligence and Security Committee; a senior group of Privy Counsellors would have been best placed to handle this, and it would have been cheaper, but we are asking for this inquiry, the Government having hobbled the ISC’s inquiry. We are thrown back on a judge-led inquiry, but it must be a judge who is not part of the securitocracy.

Mr Lidington: Looking at international practice, I think we in this country can point to a system that requires high standard, and that is remarkably transparent, given the extremely secret nature of some of the personnel and operations that are relevant here. We now have a statutory role for the Investigatory Powers Commissioner, and we have his annual reports, including on detainee policy. We have enhanced powers for Parliament’s Intelligence and Security Committee, and the Prime Minister no longer has the power to appoint its Chair. The framework established by the Justice and Security Act 2013 and the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 measures up against the best standards in the world.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): The Intelligence and Security Committee, on which I sit, finished its investigation on rendition, but the Government refused it access to certain individuals, so it could not interview them on

the matter. If there were to be a judge-led inquiry, would the Government allow all individuals to give evidence to the judge?

Mr Lidington: I will not speculate on the content of the decision later this week, but I take on board the challenge that the right hon. Gentleman has posed.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I note my right hon. Friend’s answer to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) about high standards for the United Kingdom, but if the United Kingdom’s reputation for having the highest standards in this area is to be sustained, surely it is important, in this case and in others in which our security services come into contact with potential violations of fundamental aspects of international law, that there is proper accountability, driven by the Ministers who are meant to oversee it.

Mr Lidington: I agree with the final point that my hon. Friend makes, but I ask him to take account of the fact that we are dealing with the work of security and intelligence agencies—work on which the safety, and indeed the lives, of our citizens often depends—and that information about how operations are carried out can be of great value to our adversaries.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Ind): It must surely be the objective of all civilised countries to ensure that such events as rendition and the mistreatment of detainees never occur across the world. If we are to achieve that, should we not stand on the highest possible moral ground?

Mr Lidington: We should certainly act on the highest possible moral grounds. I believe that we have a statutory framework in which we can take considerable pride, and that marks a significant improvement on the practices that the Intelligence and Security Committee previously criticised.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): As a member of the Committee, I think it is worth putting on record our extraordinary respect for the young men and women who serve in our intelligence services and who make impossible decisions, often at a moment’s notice. I think that an inquiry would show the extraordinary times in which they lived and how life has changed since many of the cases in question came before us. For example, there was no consolidated guidance in the earliest stages of the period we were looking at. I believe that the Government made a fundamental mistake in not allowing us to see the witnesses we wanted to see, because we would actually have been able to show something that assisted the Government—namely, that we live in a completely different regulatory regime. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Minister made the point about the changing powers and the extension of the consolidated guidance. Will he tell us whether the examination of the consolidated guidance will be announced soon, or whether we will have to wait a long time for it?

Mr Lidington: First, I thank my right hon. Friend for the just tribute that he paid to the men and women working in our security and intelligence agencies. I can give him what I hope is a reassuring answer to his question. Yes, we will be publishing Sir Adrian Fulford’s conclusions and recommendations in full later this week.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the Minister accept that any UK involvement in extraordinary rendition is a stain on our reputation as a country that claims to uphold the rule of law and defend human rights? Does he agree that the best way to deal with this is for him to announce this week that there will be an independent judge-led inquiry, and also to announce the appointment of the new Investigatory Powers Commissioner?

Mr Lidington: I cannot promise the right hon. Gentleman an answer on that final point this week, but I believe that Sir Adrian's recommendations will give him considerable reassurance.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): May I seek an assurance from my right hon. Friend that the scope of any inquiry will include reports of extraordinary rendition through UK territories such as the British Indian Ocean Territory?

Mr Lidington: As I have said in response to earlier questions, I cannot pre-empt what will be in the Government's statement later this week. However, I take note of my hon. Friend's question.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): When a Minister of the Crown stands at the Dispatch Box and says that something will be brought to the Chamber within 60 days, how should we understand such a commitment? Given the utter failure to deliver on this occasion, surely the House is entitled to a fuller explanation than the one the Minister has given so far, which is that this is terribly difficult?

Mr Lidington: It is not just a matter of something being difficult; it is a matter of Ministers having to consider the best course of action when we are talking about the work of security and intelligence agencies, which, by definition, has to be done in secret and whose disclosure could do considerable harm to our national interests.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (IGC): Governments all over the world are challenging international law and the rules-based international order, and we have a President in the United States who clearly does not support those laws, so is it not time for our Government to accept that the promises they made at the Dispatch Box should be carried out? The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), the Father of the House, is one of the most experienced figures in these matters, and he has been persistent in trying to get the clarity we need on these issues. When the Government make what I hope will be an oral statement on this, should they not bring the matter to a conclusion rather than forcing us to come back to it again under a new Prime Minister?

Mr Lidington: It will not be in my power to decide whether the House wishes to return to these issues, but I can promise the hon. Gentleman that this will be a definitive statement.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the Government on their work on human rights, but does the Minister share my concern that failure to protect

human rights by complicity by mistreating detainees diminishes the UK's capacity to be a champion for human rights abroad?

Mr Lidington: It is important that we demonstrate through our actions, not just our words, our commitment to human rights. Moreover, when one has the privilege of speaking to officers in the intelligence agencies about these matters, they make it clear that they want to uphold human rights. The intelligence agencies have to operate within the statutory remit that Parliament has given them. Anything that they do that breaches their lawful purpose and objective is something that they should not do.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Although the Gibson and ISC inquiries were curtailed or restricted, nevertheless they revealed hundreds of cases in which the UK was complicit or benefited from torture or mistreatment. Does that not mean that there is more of a case to set up such an inquiry than there was nine years ago, when the then Prime Minister said that there should be a judge-led inquiry

"fully independent of Parliament, party and Government"—*[Official Report, 6 July 2010; Vol. 513, c. 181]*?

The only thing that has changed in those nine years is that it would be difficult now to reach the truth because of the effluxion of time. Will the Minister at least say that there will be an inquiry, even if we hear the details later this week?

Mr Lidington: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman in his assertion that little has changed. There have been important statutory changes in the Justice and Security Act 2013 and the Investigatory Powers Act 2016. There have been important changes in the powers of the Intelligence and Security Committee, and in the statutory basis of the Investigatory Powers Commissioner, and in the practice that Ministers must be consulted whenever an intelligence officer involved in a planned operation believes that a detainee is at risk of mistreatment by a foreign state. That obligation applies even when consulting a Minister might be thought to lead to a risk of a terrorist act succeeding. The rules are much stricter than they once were.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Given that Britain's reputation is at stake in relation to human rights when we talk to the world about our values, an oral statement should be made in the House so that we can make a judgment on what sort of inquiry should take place and so that we can question the relevant Minister, even if that is the Prime Minister herself.

Mr Lidington: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. What we are discussing as, in fairness, the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) acknowledged, are historical allegations, particularly concerning the period from 2001 to 2010, and the immediate aftermath of the appalling 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States. The statutory and administrative basis on which our affairs are now organised give us much greater assurance in the House that decisions are made appropriately and that our agencies adhere to the highest possible standards of conduct.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister made it clear that he thought that the change in the legislative, statutory and administrative frameworks were sufficient to assuage concerns that the House might have, but how can the House assess that unless it is thoroughly tested in this inquiry? That is the only way truly to understand whether it is effective or not.

Mr Lidington: The tests would be threefold. First, there will be an annual report from the Investigatory Powers Commissioner on how Government and the agencies use the powers with which they have been entrusted. Secondly, there are the reports from the Intelligence and Security Committee, and the confidence that the House should have that that Committee now has much greater autonomy and power than was once the case. Thirdly, Sir Adrian Fulford, the commissioner, was asked by the Government to review, reflect on and recommend changes to the consolidated guidance, and that is what we will put before the House later this week.

Points of Order

4.14 pm

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I apologise for taking time on another point of order on the question of the Home Office's failure to answer questions satisfactorily, but you will recall that it is just over a year since, in June 2018, I raised a point of order on the Home Office's refusal to provide information about tier 2 general certificate of sponsorship visas in response to written questions that I had tabled. This information was subsequently released in response to a freedom of information request.

When, subsequent to the information being provided via that FOI, I tabled a further question asking for updated figures, I assumed the Home Office would provide them to me, given that the information was now in the public arena, but it refused again, hence my point of order last June. In response, Mr Speaker, you shared my concern about the danger of FOI requests becoming a more effective way for colleagues to obtain information than a parliamentary question, and you said:

"There is a basic issue here of parliamentary self-respect".—[*Official Report*, 18 June 2018; Vol. 643, c. 78.]

That is clearly relevant to all Members.

Mr Speaker, you also advised me on how to pursue the matter, and I followed up with a letter to the Home Secretary, on 19 June 2018, highlighting your comments. Despite repeated phone calls and emails to the Home Office's correspondence unit, I have not yet received a response to that letter—over 12 months later.

I finally tabled a written question asking when I could anticipate a response, and I was told that it was "being prepared". No reason has been shared with me that would explain why an answer about the procedure for parliamentary questions has taken over a year, Mr Speaker, so I would be grateful if you could advise me on how to pursue this matter and how I might receive a response before the House breaks for the summer recess.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order and for his characteristic courtesy in giving me advance notice of his intention to raise it.

In summary, the matter is very unsatisfactory. The way in which the hon. Gentleman has been treated does not fall foul of any particular rule or Standing Order of the House. That said, it does not in any way become any less unsatisfactory. The essential issue at hand is, as I indicated in response to his previous point of order, a matter of parliamentary self-respect and, I say to occupants of the Treasury Bench, of courtesy on behalf of Ministers towards Members of the House seeking to discharge their duty of scrutiny.

It is therefore very disappointing that the hon. Gentleman has not achieved satisfaction in this matter, and what I want to say to him is as follows. First, he has been dogged and persistent in pursuit of this matter and, as he indicated, he has waited over a year for a Minister to answer his letter, which referred to my answer to his previous point of order.

I would hope that the delay in replying—I say this as much in hope as in expectation—is because Ministers are keen properly to address the underlying issue of

[Mr Speaker]

providing a less helpful answer to elected Members of the House than to those who pursue freedom of information requests.

I hope that Home Office Ministers, having heard this point of order, will ensure that the hon. Gentleman receives the full ministerial reply for which he has waited so long, and that he does so in a matter of days—specifically, before the summer recess.

The final point I would make, on which I expect concurrence, not least from senior and experienced Members of the House who have been here for decades, is this: it was at one time a very established expectation that, if Members were experiencing difficulty in securing replies from Ministers to letters or, indeed, written questions, the Leader of the House would see it as her or his responsibility to chase them in order to secure expeditious replies. I am sorry if that is not currently the case, but it used to be the case—[Interruption.] I note that the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) is nodding from a sedentary position, and I assume this view would be shared by Members in other parts of the House.

What I would say to the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) is that he should approach the current Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Central Devon (Mel Stride), and try to extract a commitment from him that he will engage in the matter and pursue Ministers. That is not only right for the hon. Member for Sheffield Central and his constituents but is in the interest of the effective functioning of all Members of the House. This is a matter not of rules but of parliamentary courtesy, and we need to return to it.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I would have spoken to you earlier about this if there had not been a muddle in our diaries. I had a similar example, where I had tabled questions on how many victims of modern slavery were held in detention centres. The Home Office replied that it did not know, but an outside organisation, after two Freedom of Information Act requests, gained that information, which the Home Office had denied having. Might I therefore also register through you that there is something much more rotten in the state of Denmark than just one simple question taking a whole year to answer?

Mr Speaker: On the back of what the right hon. Gentleman has said and of the initial intervention of the hon. Member for Sheffield Central, I will raise these matters in correspondence with the Leader of the House. But on the principle both of repetition and of reinforcement by numbers, I would strongly advise Members to do so themselves.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Late last week, the Parole Board announced that Vanessa George, the prolific serial child abuser from Plymouth, is being released from jail. She abused toddlers and babies at the now closed Little Ted's nursery in Plymouth and then shared these images with a national network of paedophiles for their sexual pleasure, and was rightly jailed. I cannot express to you the pain and horror felt by the families involved at the release from prison of Britain's most prolific female paedophile. As she has not revealed the full list of the children that she has abused, the horrors

are probably much greater than those for which she was convicted. What advice can you give me as to how I can place on record the concerns of the people I represent, and have you had any indication from the Ministry of Justice that a Minister will be coming to the House to make a statement on this matter, so that we can question why she was released and why they feel she is no longer a threat to children?

Mr Speaker: I have received no indication from any Minister of an intention to make a statement on the matter. However, the matter is very important and of intense concern to the hon. Gentleman, to his constituents and, I rather imagine, to a lot of people around the country. What is my advice? My advice is that he should persist, persist, persist, as I invariably advise. What persistence means in this case is looking for opportunities to air concerns in the Chamber. My suggestion to him is that he seek an Adjournment debate, either on the specifics of the case or on what he considers to be its wider implications. If he does seek such an Adjournment debate, such applications tending to come my way, he might find that he is successful.

BILL PRESENTED

EMPLOYMENT (MINIMUM HOURS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Heidi Allen, supported by Frank Field, Ruth George, Ruth Smeeth, Justin Madders, Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck, Rosie Duffield, Anna Turley, Martyn Day, Kerry McCarthy, Mrs Madeleine Moon and Jeremy Lefroy, presented a Bill to require employers to offer workers on zero hours contracts the option of guaranteed minimum hours; and for connected purposes

Bill read the First time; to be read the Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 421).

HIGH SPEED RAIL (WEST MIDLANDS - CREWE) BILL: BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That the following provisions shall apply to proceedings on the High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill:

Timetable

(1) Proceedings on Consideration and proceedings up to Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption at this day's sitting.

(2) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption at this day's sitting.

Timing of proceedings and Questions to be put

(3) If, following proceedings on Consideration of the Bill, a Legislative Grand Committee withholds consent to the Bill or any Clause of or Schedule to the Bill or any amendment made to the Bill, the House shall proceed to Reconsideration of the Bill without any Question being put.

(4) If, following Reconsideration of the Bill—

(a) a Legislative Grand Committee withholds consent to any Clause of or Schedule to the Bill or any amendment made to the Bill (but does not withhold consent to the whole Bill),

(b) the Bill is amended to remove any provisions which are not agreed to by the House and the Legislative Grand Committee, and

(c) a Minister of the Crown indicates their intention to move a minor or technical amendment to the Bill as so amended, the House shall proceed to consequential Consideration of the Bill without any Question being put.

(5) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph (1) or (2), the Speaker or Chairman shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others) in the same order as they would fall to be put if this Order did not apply—

- (a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;
- (b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed;
- (c) the Question on any amendment, new Clause or new Schedule selected by the Speaker or Chairman for separate decision;
- (d) the Question on any amendment moved or Motion made by a Minister of the Crown; (e) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded.
- (6) On a Motion so made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Speaker or Chairman shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(7) If two or more Questions would fall to be put under paragraph (5)(d) on successive amendments moved or Motions made by a Minister of the Crown, the Speaker or Chairman shall instead put a single Question in relation to those amendments or Motions. (8) If two or more Questions would fall to be put under paragraph (5)(e) in relation to successive provisions of the Bill, the Speaker or Chairman shall instead put a single Question in relation to those provisions, except that the Question shall be put separately on any Clause of or Schedule to the Bill which a Minister of the Crown has signified an intention to leave out.

Miscellaneous

(9) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply so far as necessary for the purposes of this Order.—(*Mr Jack.*)

High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill

[Relevant document: Government overview of the case for HS2 Phase 2a and its environmental impacts, CP 118.]

Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Select Committee, not amended in the Public Bill Committee

New Clause 1

QUARTERLY REPORTS ON ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT, COSTS AND PROGRESS

“(1) The Secretary of State must publish quarterly reports on the scheduled works throughout the period in which those works take place.

- (2) Each such report must contain an assessment of—
 - (a) environmental impact;
 - (b) costs; and
 - (c) progress compared to the scheduled timetable.

(3) The first such report must be laid before Parliament within the period ending three months after the day the scheduled works commence.

(4) Each subsequent report must be laid before Parliament within three months of the publication of the last report under this section.”—(*Rachael Maskell.*)

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.24 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 2—*Compensation scheme for tenants*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must by regulations make provision for a scheme to compensate tenants adversely affected by the scheduled works.

(2) Regulations under this section may contain such supplementary, incidental, consequential or transitional provision as the Secretary of State considers necessary or expedient.

(3) Regulations under this section must be made by statutory instrument.

(4) A statutory instrument containing regulations under this section is subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.”

New clause 4—*Independent peer review*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must commission an independent peer review of the High Speed Rail (West Midlands to Crewe) project.

- (2) The review must include consideration of the project’s—
 - (a) environmental impact,
 - (b) economic impact,
 - (c) engineering, and
 - (d) governance.

(3) In this section, “independent” means it is carried out by persons who are independent of—

- (a) Government,
- (b) HS2 Ltd, and
- (c) persons contracted or subcontracted to carry out the scheduled works.

(4) In this section, a “peer review” is a review conducted by experts of equivalent professional qualifications, expertise and standing to the persons responsible for each aspect of the project set out in subsection (2).

[Mr Speaker]

(5) A report of the review in subsection (1) must be laid before the House of Commons within 12 months of this Act receiving Royal Assent.”

New clause 5—Non-disclosure agreements—

‘(1) The nominated undertaker, or any subcontractors thereof, must not enter into any non-disclosure agreement with any party in connection with the scheduled works unless the assessor of non-disclosure agreements related to the scheduled works (“the assessor”) has certified that it is in the public interest.

(2) The Comptroller and Auditor General must appoint a person to be the assessor.

(3) The assessor must be—

- (a) independent, and
- (b) a current or former high court judge, higher judge or Queen’s Counsel.

(4) In this section, “independent” means independent of—

- (a) Government,
- (b) HS2 Ltd, and
- (c) persons contracted or subcontracted to carry out the scheduled works.

(5) The assessor must undertake his or her work with a presumption in favour of transparency and public accountability in matters connected to the scheduled works.

(6) The assessor must review any non-disclosure agreement between the nominated undertaker, or any subcontractors thereof, and any party in connection with the scheduled works and in place before this section comes into force to certify whether it is—

- (a) in the public interest, or
- (b) not in the public interest.

(7) The assessor may not determine that a non-disclosure agreement is in the public interest for the purposes of subsection (1) or (6) except for the reason that it is justified because of exceptional commercial confidentiality.

(8) If the assessor certifies under subsection (6) that a non-disclosure agreement is not in the public interest that non-disclosure agreement immediately ceases to have effect.

(9) In this section, a “non-disclosure agreement” means any duty of confidentiality or other restriction on disclosure (however imposed).”

Rachael Maskell: May I thank you, Mr Speaker, for selecting the new clauses that stand in my name and those of my hon. Friends? When Labour envisaged HS2, it was a very different infrastructure project from what we see today. We recognised that the generations, particularly across the north and the midlands, needed far better connectivity. We wanted to regenerate the northern towns and cities of our country, and we saw the potential in the midlands to spark a new industrial age and how that was not being met.

After decades of disproportionate investment in London and the south-east, it was a Labour Government who saw how improved connectivity was needed to attract vital inward investment and to revitalise economies in the north. That is what Labour is about: creating high-quality jobs and opportunities to inspire a generation. It is in our name, Labour. Of course, we all knew that rebuilding connectivity had to start in the north, particularly with the east-west connections, to truly join up what is now aspiring to be the northern powerhouse. However, without the power of investment in the transport system, that will be nothing more than a soundbite. That is why Labour supports phase 2a, which will be the shortest leg of the route, at just 37 miles in total, and provide that

vital north-south link, north of Birmingham to Crewe. Our support is not unreserved, though, and we believe colleagues should join us in the Lobby today to vote for Labour’s new clauses.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): As the hon. Lady knows extremely well, I have opposed this Bill and its predecessor Act of Parliament, which inaugurated the first phase, absolutely 100% all the way down the line. Although I have a great deal of sympathy for the new clauses that the hon. Lady has tabled, I cannot quite understand how she can reconcile what she has just said with the origins of the proposals. New clause 4 says that an independent peer review ought to consider questions relating to the project’s environmental and economic impact and its engineering and governance and that that review must be carried out by persons who are independent of the Government, HS2 Ltd and all the rest. It sounds to me like the hon. Lady is not terribly keen on the proposals.

Rachael Maskell: The hon. Gentleman’s intervention seems slightly premature, so I ask him to hold his breath as I come to talk about the other new clauses. This is clearly a massive opportunity, not least for the hon. Gentleman’s constituents, to benefit from more high-quality jobs, which our country desperately needs. I am sure that his constituents would want him to go through the Lobby to achieve that aim.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Surely the answer is that, right from the scheme’s inception, there have been serious concerns about the impact on the environment—I do not have time to go through all that—so it is perfectly logical for that to be included among any amendments. However, one of my difficulties with the scheme is that the costs are escalating. Some of my constituents are affected by it but do not get any compensation. From another angle, cities such as Coventry do not get anything out of it because it bypasses Coventry.

Rachael Maskell: I remind my hon. Friend that the whole country will benefit, because this is a national infrastructure project. Indeed, many jobs will be created in the supply chain in his very constituency, which I am sure he will welcome. Of course, the environment is a central plank of why Labour supports the Bill. We want to see modal shift—people moving out of their cars and out of the skies and on to trains—and this project will provide such opportunity.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her generosity in giving way. She quite rightly points out that this was a Labour initiative. Given the point she just made about trying to move people away from the skies and on to rail, does she recall that the original Arup proposal would have linked HS2 with HS1, so someone could have got on a train in Manchester and got off that same train in Paris? It was Lord Adonis who actually made changes to prevent that from happening and created an environmental catastrophe in counties such as Staffordshire.

Rachael Maskell: The hon. Gentleman will know that one concern about the HS2 project is the escalating cost, and that is why we have tabled some new clauses. To join HS1 to HS2 sounds like a logical proposal, but it would mean that costs would go up considerably.

Perhaps that is a project for the future, but to get that long overdue connectivity in the north, it is vital that we press on and build a network for the future. We will then see serious modal shift, not only of passengers but of goods.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Is the hon. Lady not also worried by the very long delay before there is any additional capacity north of Birmingham? Is it not a paradox that something that was designed to help the northern powerhouse will actually produce only a Birmingham-London additional railway for the foreseeable future?

Rachael Maskell: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. As I have already said, we would focus on the north and on making sure that we get those trans-Pennine links in place. We see that as a priority over all rail infrastructure projects, because we understand the power of joining up Leeds, Manchester and Sheffield and the cities and towns beyond. We want to see that investment coming forward. Electrification will also ensure that we benefit from better journey times, reliability and connectivity, which are vital for building our railways into the future. However far into the future it will be until we see the realisation of new rail, it does not mean that we will neglect that ambition to build more capacity north to south, which is vital if we are to take lorries off our roads and give freight an opportunity to move on the west coast main line.

Sir William Cash *rose—*

Rachael Maskell: I will, if I may, finish my point.

Although we all get frustrated because we want projects delivered sooner rather than later, what is crucial to us is that, if we do not start now, we will push the completion date even further away. That is why we are keen to get on with it today.

4.30 pm

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. I share her enthusiasm for this ambitious project. She talks about journey times. To achieve that modal shift, particularly between Scotland and London, we need to get rail journey times below three hours. Does she agree that that requires much more ambition in the future to ensure that we have a UK-wide network, which includes integrating Glasgow and Edinburgh into the high-speed network?

Rachael Maskell: I certainly do agree with those excellent points, because HS2 cannot stop at Crewe. We must build further north and right into the heart of Scotland, particularly into the major cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow, to ensure that we get the connectivity right in the future. We know the power of infrastructure to transform people's lives. We want to see inward investment into those conurbations, which is why we believe that, at this point—this is where the Government have been far too silent—we need to ensure that we build that vision for Glasgow and Edinburgh and beyond as we move forward. As my hon. Friend is such an excellent champion for his city of Glasgow, I am sure that he will be making those points to the Government time and again until we see more action.

Sir William Cash *rose—*

Rachael Maskell: I wish to make a little more progress, and then I will be happy to take the hon. Gentleman's intervention.

Let me continue talking through a bit of the history of this project. We know that, by 2011, HS2 was being mapped out at a cost of £37.5 billion. We have seen that cost rise to £55.7 billion today. The narrative around the project has also changed. Frustrations have been expressed by the public, and often echoed in this place, because they want to fully understand the benefits that this project will bring. I trust that the Minister will go back and review the communications on this, because clearly people up and down the country have been hearing about the costs involved but not about the benefits. We need far more clarity, particularly when we know that this will be such a powerful instrument in creating jobs. We also want to give hope and new opportunities to businesses in the supply chain up and down the country, and there is work to do on that.

We need to ensure that those people who are making a sacrifice for this project—whether it is their home or their business that they are having to relocate—get the answers that they need. Labour wants far better governance of the project so that the public get their answers in a timely way from HS2, so that they can make their plans in confidence as they move forward.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Scepticism is shared by many of my constituents, especially given the track record of non-delivery for the north. If we genuinely want to power up the north, major infrastructure projects are essential, but we need that Crossrail for the north. I am sick and tired of hearing about Crossrail for the south, and it is great to see some of the southern colleagues on the Government Benches now seemingly speaking up for some constituents in the north as well as those in the south—if only they had done that in the past. I want assurances that this will be transparent and that investment will go into the north.

Rachael Maskell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and of course constituents right across the north really do want to see that investment, which is so long overdue. Therefore, again, the Government need to bring forward greater commitments in statute that they will deliver Crossrail for the north. We on the Opposition Benches are concerned that Crossrail 2, yet another infrastructure project in London, could well take priority and we will not see the full power being put into the electrification of the trans-Pennine route, which was promised, and let us all remember that that was cancelled by the Secretary of State conveniently on the day that Parliament rose. We want to see that investment for the future for our northern towns and cities, and that is certainly what we would see under a Labour Government.

Michael Fabricant: I totally agree with the hon. Lady: she is absolutely right about there being a need for a Crossrail in the north because the east-west communications are so bad, but I just want to ask her one thing. She is quite right to say that investment in the capital programme of HS2 will generate jobs and skills, which we so much need, but she also says it will create employment opportunities afterwards; does she not fear that Britain might go down the French route whereby jobs are in fact sucked south into London rather than being generated in the north?

Rachael Maskell: France is a very different country from the UK, and we must bear in mind the potential opportunities from improved connectivity across the north given, for instance, the power of the ports in Hull and of course in Liverpool. There is an opportunity for the economy to be built up through those ports, particularly when the Government are looking at our whole trade policy. So there is real opportunity in this project if we get the infrastructure built right, and that is why it is so important that HS2 does not stand alone but is fully integrated across the whole of our transport and rail network to ensure we get the power of the whole project.

Sir William Cash: I am not sure whether this will come as music to the hon. Lady's ears, but I am proposing to vote for her new clauses. However, I am really puzzled by new clause 4(4) and (5) and what they say about the independent review, which I am completely behind, as it is to be completely independent of HS2 and the Government and the persons contracted and so forth. Is this not really just window-dressing, however, because the new clause goes on to say the report

"must be laid before the House of Commons within 12 months of this Act receiving Royal Assent"?

In other words, it will be enacted, although I want to see it repealed—[*Interruption.*] Yes, I do indeed. What is the use of a report being produced by all these incredible independent experts if it will simply not be carried through?

Rachael Maskell: There are two separate points. We want to ensure that we get value out of the project, and it is astonishing that the Government have not put in place the peer review mechanisms over it—both economic and engineering peer reviews—as has been the case for other major infrastructure projects. This is a way to build public confidence and to ensure that we have a real comprehension of the power of these projects. Unfortunately, HS2 is working very much in isolation, and that responsibility sits with the Secretary of State, who is not calling it to account enough; it is a shame not to see him in his place today because he is answerable to the House for this project, and he has not done his duty in ensuring that HS2 fulfils its responsibilities. But perhaps we will get a showing from the Secretary of State later—let us hope so.

I want to talk about the environmental concerns that have been raised and the costs. Many have also questioned the engineering itself. In my experience, senior engineers from across the rail industry—not necessarily involved in the HS2 project—have been making these points and have called for greater scrutiny. It is therefore really important that we identify any fault lines in the project to ensure that amendments are made. Of course, it takes time to ensure that there is a proper review and that the project is built for the long term.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): Just before the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), the hon. Lady mentioned that she was in favour of—I think these were the words she used—a joined-up transport project with better co-ordination. At staggering expense, this project will take passengers from my constituency who want to go to Heathrow to a place called Old Oak Common. Now, I have never been there—it might be a most charming place—but I suggest that my constituents will want to

go directly to Heathrow. If they wanted to go to HS1 and link up to Brussels, Paris or wherever, as it is they would have to go to Euston, and either walk down the pavement, get in a taxi or get on a bus. That does not seem to be very clever co-ordination of the most expensive railway that man has ever yet conceived.

Rachael Maskell: My new clauses are so important to ensuring that we get that desperately needed connectivity built into the infrastructure. The fragmentation across our rail network is incredibly costly; there are delays and there is no joined-up thinking. That is why Labour wants to bring rail together. It is so important to reunite the whole network in one public body, of which we envisage HS2 being a part. We will then get the connectivity that the public would expect from a rail network. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will support my new clause later today to take that idea forward.

Mr Paterson: Does the hon. Lady therefore question the current arrangements as proposed, and is the Labour party prepared to vote against them unless this railway is realigned—with a direct link to Heathrow or a direct link to HS1?

Rachael Maskell: Labour is very clear that we will be supporting phase 2a that is before the House today, but we have called into question the way in which the Government are approaching the whole governance of the project. That is why we want to drive the project forward in a different way. I call on all hon. Members across the House to join us in the Lobby today to ensure that we get the right scrutiny over this project to drive it forward in the interests of their constituents, the public and the whole economy.

Members who attended the Westminster Hall debate last week will have heard the excellent speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), who so eloquently set out the idea that we measure what we treasure. I heard the powerful case for the east midlands, where over 60,000 jobs—high-quality ones, at that—have already been created, and we know that this project will bring opportunities across the country.

I hear the same expectations from Andy Burnham, the Mayor of Greater Manchester; from Steve Rotherham, the Mayor of the Liverpool city region; from my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis), the Mayor of the Sheffield city region; and from Judith Blake, the leader of Leeds City Council. Not only will 30,000 jobs be developed across the project; hundreds of thousands will also result from investment across the north and the midlands, including in my home city of York. That in itself is a game-changer in tackling social mobility issues and rebalancing national inequality, and will draw investment into places that are in urgent need of regeneration. The issue is not whether HS2 is the right project, but the governance that surrounds its planning and construction.

As I have already said, Labour would integrate HS2 with the rest of our rail enhancement programme and integrate the northern sections of the route fully with the trans-Pennine connections, ensuring the connectivity, journey times and reliability that are so desperately needed. This is what we can achieve with one transformative, publicly run rail service, and it is also what we believe

the Government can achieve if they are serious about delivering the rail system needed for the future of the country. We also believe that the environmental value of this project needs greater scrutiny.

4.45 pm

Mr Sweeney: My hon. Friend is making an excellent point about why we need to improve the governance and oversight of this project, to ensure that the maximum benefit is realised for the country. I am thinking of the supply chain benefits, particularly in my constituency, which was once a world leader in locomotive and railway manufacturing. We are just about to lose the last railway engineering works in my constituency because of a lack of coherent planning. There is a lack of capacity in the rolling stock overhaul business in this country, because of the failure to anticipate it. That is exactly the opportunity that this new clause presents, to ensure that we can respond better to changes in the market.

Rachael Maskell: I thank my hon. Friend for his point. The jobs in his constituency are vital. Having met some of those workers, I know that many of them have tremendous skill and could participate in this project. I urge the Minister to look at that situation and ensure that the gates do not close and that those jobs can be saved and integrated into the HS2 project. I trust that she will want to meet my hon. Friend, to advance the case that he has been fighting so hard for.

John Redwood: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Rachael Maskell: I will continue for a little bit, if I may.

HS2 provides a crucial opportunity to create a significant number of freight paths on the west coast main line, thus moving freight from road to rail, with additional capacity, which will attract more passengers to move from air to train and car to train, due to the attractive journey times. That is a crucial shift if we are to reduce our emissions, which are currently at 29% in the transport sector, and our carbon footprint. Of course, that means saving lives, from the poor air quality that so many people experience because of the use of poor fuels on the transport that many people use to get about our country.

Labour's new clauses seek to address something that is vital to rebuilding public confidence in the project: a transformation in the way that the governance works. We truly believe that the Secretary of State has failed in his obligation to hold HS2 fully to account and certainly has not brought the level of transparency we would expect from a Secretary of State to such a major infrastructure project. He cannot and must not hide, as he is today.

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Again.

Rachael Maskell: Indeed. In the light of concerns expressed by Members from across the House, Labour's new clauses 1 and 4 seek to drive greater transparency and accountability for the project.

John Redwood: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Rachael Maskell: I will give way briefly, then I must move on.

John Redwood: Does the hon. Lady agree that early and rather more moderate expenditure on digital signalling could greatly increase capacity and, along with short sections of bypass track, could improve reliability of fast train services, which is needed?

Rachael Maskell: I am honoured to have a centre for digital signalling in my constituency and have seen the power of it, but sadly, to achieve the capacity that we will need for the future, we have to build more routes. That is what this project will do. It is not either/or—both are required for the future of our rail network, but the right hon. Gentleman makes an important point.

First, we are calling on the Secretary of State to bring quarterly reports on the environmental impact, costs and progress of the HS2 project to the House. This is far too important a project for the Bill to be passed and then for us to read in the press that the costs have gone up and there are delays. The project must be far more accountable to the House, as should the Secretary of State.

Secondly, Labour believes that the scheduling, the integration, the engineering in places and the scope of the project need review. We cannot simply have HS2 Ltd saying, "This is what it is." There are major issues to be resolved, not least the vital Yorkshire hub and getting the right connectivity into Sheffield. Members and community groups have undertaken detailed work on how improvements can be made to parts of the route, and that is one such example. Labour is calling for the whole of HS2, including phase 2a, to undergo a complete peer review appraisal by independent engineering and economic specialists. We believe that that is the only way that Parliament and the public can have full confidence in the HS2 project. Such a process will ensure that the scope is right, that the integration with the wider network is right, that governance is put right and that the maximum environmental gain is harvested while the cost of the project is minimised. It will not delay the project but enable it to proceed in a way that delivers maximum benefit.

Ensuring that the best modelling of the wider economic benefit is properly appraised is also urgently needed on this project, while at the same time proper security can clearly deliver a focus and confirm that north-south connectivity—and, I trust, east-west too—is really integrated to deliver and to ensure that we get maximum benefit from it. I trust that hon. Members on both sides of the House will support the new clauses, which would answer many of the questions that they have been asking and enhance the Bill and the project.

Michael Fabricant: I just want to emphasise the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash). I understand the logic of what the hon. Lady says about peer review and so on, but supposing that says that the project must be done in a completely different way, for example using the original Arup route to which I referred earlier. That will not be possible if the Bill has become an Act. Surely she should oppose the Bill, have a peer review and then decide whether to support the legislation.

Rachael Maskell: The hon. Gentleman appears not to want to see the line built in his lifetime, my lifetime or the lifetime of any current hon. Member. The reality is

[*Rachael Maskell*]

that we believe that the route needs tweaking, changing and integrating, but that does not mean ripping everything up. We will never be able to satisfy everyone, because in the history of the railway there has always been a farmhouse, a field or a golf course in the way. Indeed, 27 vintage trees will be in the way on this section, and we are very concerned about them.

It is important that we press ahead, but that we review the project—especially the governance. That is about the management that we proceed with.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Would it not be right to think about my hon. Friend's proposal in new clause 4 as an attempt to learn the lessons as we go along? It is not as though this is a project without review or evaluation. Already it has oversight from the Department for Transport, the Treasury, the Cabinet Office and the Infrastructure and Projects Authority, and it is subject to National Audit Office review. It is hardly as though people are completely deprived of information. What we need to do is pull together that information and learn clear lessons as we proceed.

Rachael Maskell: My hon. Friend speaks eloquently and is right. We need to pool the information, including the scrutiny the House has put over the project and the external scrutiny, to ensure that we get the project right. That is what will build public confidence as we move forward.

Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Ind): My hon. Friend is doing an excellent job in making the case. Does she accept that the information that is available to the House through the various bodies and institutions that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) mentioned is massively undermined by the number of non-disclosure agreements that have been applied to former members of staff of HS2? More than 270 NDAs prevent people from saying what they really believe about the capacity and costs of the scheme. What does she think about that in terms of transparency and openness?

Rachael Maskell: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point and I will return to it shortly.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Rachael Maskell: Not at this time—I am going to move on.

As raised in Committee, there is a major issue with compensation for those who rent. For example, a tenant farmer who works on the land may be moved and have to work away from their farm. People who rent privately consistently miss out when infrastructure projects force them out of their homes or away from their businesses. We believe that they must receive compensation. The issue was raised at the petition stage of the Bill and it would be right to respond today. The new clause would enable that to happen when the statutory instrument is laid.

Let me briefly move on to new clause 5. I am looking forward to the contribution from the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach), and I confirm that Labour supports her new clause. There has been a lot of learning around non-disclosure agreements, as my hon.

Friend the Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) alluded to. I know from my time as a trade union official, and from my time on the working party on bullying and sexual misconduct procedures here, that these agreements are used to see that commercially sensitive information is not shared with external parties, but they are also used around failures of management, and bullying would be one such example.

If the culture is wrong, it is not right to put money into it, and the management should be held to account. My hon. Friend said that 270-plus non-disclosure agreements have been signed, so we need to ensure that there is proper scrutiny and transparency. New clause 5 addresses that issue very comprehensively, ensuring that commercial sensitivities are not undermined, and also that all of us can have a real grasp of what is happening in the culture of HS2. It is a sensible way of addressing the serious amount of money that is being spent on these agreements. We certainly believe that the culture in HS2 must move forward.

We will listen to the debate to decide how we handle the new clauses I have laid before the House. I hope the Minister will give us assurances on them, and I will be listening carefully to determine whether to proceed to a vote. With these enhancements to the Bill, the whole HS2 project could proceed with far greater confidence and far greater support.

Sir William Cash: I made it clear in my remarks to the shadow Minister that I am minded to vote for these new clauses. However, towards the end of what she said, serious doubt began to descend on the House as to whether she would actually push them to a vote. She is therefore welcome to come back to the Dispatch Box to tell me whether she in fact intends to do so.

On new clause 1, it would be eminently sensible to have quarterly reports on environmental impact, costs and progress. One thing that has been completely lacking is any proper analysis by the Government or HS2 of all three of those issues.

Sir Edward Leigh: On the question of environmental impact, does my hon. Friend think that we were too obsessed by speed in the early years of this project? The Government now justify it on the basis of capacity, but there would still be much less environmentally damaging ways of increasing capacity—for instance, by laying more of the line along existing motorways such as the M40. Will my hon. Friend and other hon. Members also bear in mind counties not directly affected by the line, such as Lincolnshire, which are being starved of resources for our rural and commuter lines?

Sir William Cash: I entirely concur with my right hon. Friend. The very fact that he is in the House, as are other Members who are not directly affected by the line, is a reminder of the fact that, on the last occasion the Bill was voted on—on Second Reading—the number of people who actually voted was very small compared with the number of people who could have voted, from which one might infer that the enthusiasm for this proposal is minimal. I think as many as 200 MPs did not vote, which was quite extraordinary.

On the question of environmental impact, I would simply say that my constituents will be deeply and profoundly affected not only by the havoc that will be created by forcing this juggernaut through my constituency

from top to bottom, but by the dislocation, the highways and the impact on businesses. A quarterly report is, quite frankly, a very good idea, but I am more interested in getting an answer from the shadow Minister—it is not forthcoming at the moment—because there is no point in putting forward the proposals if they will not see the light of day in a vote.

5 pm

Cost is another issue of monumental importance. I do not need to go into it all now—I made my case in a nutshell in the Westminster Hall debate I secured on this issue—but I would be grateful if the Minister could give us a clearer indication on cost, to unravel the mysteries of the continuous failure to be able to give an accurate idea as to what the project will actually involve.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): We started off with a figure of about £35 billion or £36 billion. The latest figure is somewhere around £55 billion. My hon. Friend and I have seen credible estimates upwards of £80 billion. Should the House not know what it is actually voting for tonight? How much will it be?

Sir William Cash: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend—a real friend, quite apart from being an hon. Friend—and I would add that we only have to look at clause 61 to realise the financial implications and how costs will be dealt with. There is talk about the overall cost being about £51 billion—there has been an upgrade in the amount of money intended to be applied to this part of the proposal. We cannot separate out the cost of distance between London and Birmingham, and then leave out Birmingham to the ultimate destination. The reality is that we are faced with a proposal under the Bill that is excessive in its totality and unjustified in the unbelievable havoc it will cause my constituents.

The other point I would make on new clause 2 relates to the compensation scheme for tenants, an idea I put forward on a number of occasions. There is no doubt that a huge number of people will be adversely affected by the scheduled works. It is not just tenants who will be affected but property owners. They will be severely damaged. Many of my constituents have been put under the most incredible stress and anxiety. There have been suggestions that some people, elderly people in particular, have been under such intense stress that they have died prematurely.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): There are some unusual cases in my constituency. There are a number of people with canal boats who pay for moorings. They are very hard to locate, and they will get no compensation. There are those with farm tenancies that give them security in their home, which is very difficult to replicate under the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986. Those are the kinds of tenants who need to be compensated, are they not?

Sir William Cash: They certainly are, and there are also freehold properties. People who own property, as I have just described, are being put under the most intense anxiety, so I understand the reasons that lie behind the principle of new clause 2.

On new clause 4, I made my point in my intervention on the shadow Minister. I simply cannot understand it. Notwithstanding the intention that appears to be behind

the first part the new clause—I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) for backing me up on this—it is inconceivable that the report should only come into effect within 12 months of the Act receiving Royal Assent. It is nonsense. I ask the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) to note that although I shall vote for the principle of an independent peer review, it will be on the strict understanding that that is without prejudice to my concern that the Act will need to be repealed.

I make this point now and may do so again on Third Reading: we are about to experience a new Government, effectively, with a new Prime Minister, depending on the outcome of the leadership election. The two contenders for the leadership have differing views on HS2: one is in favour and the other says that he wants to put it under review. Although rumours are like bats that fly in the night, the fact is that there are very strong feelings in favour of abandoning this entire project. We understand that it has already cost about £5 billion or £6 billion. That is enough money in itself, but to subject this country to unbelievable havoc as the project goes through constituencies such as mine, with all the attendant problems and anxieties that I have described, and to say, at the same time, that the proposal will go through and that the Labour party, by all accounts, will vote for it seems to be completely at variance with all the evidence and reports—I referred to them in the Westminster Hall debate and on many other occasions—which indicate that this is not a viable project. It was dreamt up by a Labour peer. I am never quite sure what the noble Lord Adonis's allegiance is these days, but he was certainly a Labour member of the Government when this was proposed, and he deserves to be thoroughly condemned for it.

John Redwood: Did my hon. Friend notice that while Labour says that it wants a 12-month review of fairly fundamental things, it made it very clear that it does not want any material changes to the project that might delay it? I do not really see what the point of the review is.

Sir William Cash: The hon. Member for York Central is smiling as she looks across the Chamber—[*Interruption.*] She says that it is unbelievable, but it is anything but unbelievable—it is entirely true and entirely credible. My hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield backed me up on this. What is the point in having a first-class, independent review of the kind that is being advocated and saying that it will come into effect only after this has been made into the law of the land? [*Interruption.*] I see the Opposition Front Bencher, the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald), chuntering, but perhaps he would like to come to the Dispatch Box and explain the nonsense that lies behind that reasoning.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that this is just good governance? If we are spending this amount of taxpayers' money, we have to have decent oversight to make sure that the money is being used to the best effect. That should perhaps have been built into the process earlier, but the fact is that it is being brought forward at this stage. Presumably that is why he supports it, but let us be honest: whatever is introduced, he will never support this project, which I do strongly, because

[*Jim McMahon*]

this is about not just rebalancing the UK economy but connecting the north to great opportunities across the whole of mainland Europe.

Sir William Cash: The hon. Gentleman is completely right to say that I will never accept this project. I have made that abundantly clear not only by my votes, but by the arguments that I have presented. I come back to this point: we cannot say that there is transparency if this is turned into the law of the land. It is one of the most nonsensical new clauses that I have seen, notwithstanding the fact that I strongly believe that an independent peer review would be a good idea. However, it should come before Royal Assent, not after.

Michael Fabricant: My hon. Friend is making complete sense. He mentioned Lord Adonis earlier. Is my hon. Friend aware that the original plan for HS2, designed by Arup, would have gone up the M40 and connected with Heathrow, as my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) said, and it would have connected with HS1 not by linking in the south at great expense, as the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) suggested, but by going directly through St Pancras?

Sir William Cash: That all sounds frightfully interesting, but I am afraid that it is not what we are dealing with. We have this Bill and a project that is the biggest white elephant that has ever been seen in modern history, as far as the United Kingdom rail system is concerned. It is a complete outrage that my constituents should have this perpetrated on them.

I am serious when I say that I shall be campaigning not only for a review of these proposals but in pretty short order to have the Act repealed, because that is the only way this can be sorted out. It is a complete disgrace that the Government have introduced the Bill in the dying days of this Government. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) is laughing because she knows I am right. These proposals almost certainly would not survive the review that will be taking place under a new Prime Minister. I am making a fair assumption about who that person will be.

Jim McMahon *rose*—

Sir William Cash: I will give way again to this extremely energetic Member of Parliament.

Jim McMahon: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I do not feel energetic. Is it not the case, though, that the zero-based review, which the Chief Secretary to the Treasury proposed, is not a genuine review of the project but is about creating a war chest to buy the support of Conservative shire candidates? It has nothing to do with HS2; it is about clawing back the money for a fighting fund.

Sir William Cash: The hon. Gentleman has very sensibly tempted me into saying something else that I believe. I am completely against these proposals in relation to my constituents and the national interest—it is the biggest white elephant of all time, as all the reports I referred to in my Westminster Hall debate demonstrated. There have been even more since, including

one from the Infrastructure and Projects Authority, which rated the whole thing as amber—although in fact it probably thinks it is in the red. If only, it said, we could get rid of this ridiculous proposal and put the money where it deserves to go, which is across the country, east to west, which I happen to agree with very strongly. On that point, I had some sympathy with what the shadow Minister said.

There is another factor. This incredible waste of money could make an enormous difference to this country's coffers in the not very distant future. It seems absurd to be wasting money like this. We hear all these ridiculous arguments about Brexit, but this is the kind of thing that is bringing the country to its knees by virtue of wasted expenditure on projects that are no more than a white elephant.

Laura Smith: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash). We disagree on almost everything, but I do sympathise massively with people's concerns about their property and will always support them as their constituency MP.

This is a significant Bill of vital importance to our future prosperity and a key feature of any strategy to build a more balanced economy. My contribution to this debate will outline the reasons why I believe we must support the Bill and also the vision that underpins HS2. Without that strategic outlook, we risk losing the bigger picture to narrow debates about direct benefits such as commute times or becoming distracted by false choices, such as whether to spend on HS2 or northern powerhouse rail.

Of course, it is important that any publicly funded project be wholly transparent and subject to proper scrutiny. Let me begin with my own constituency of Crewe and Nantwich. It goes without saying that Crewe is famous for being a railway town. In fact, it has been suggested that Crewe was actually named after the railway station, rather than the other way round. Before the Grand Junction Railway company chose Crewe as the site for its railway station and works, Crewe was reportedly a tiny village with as few as 70 residents. That was until our current station was completed in 1837. About a decade later Crewe Works was producing one locomotive a week. Our communities flourished around the works and ours is now widely recognised as one of the most historically significant railway stations in the world.

Sir William Cash: The hon. Lady might anticipate what I am about to say. The proposals put the railhead down at Yarnfield, which itself is an absolute and total disgrace. It was originally going to be in her constituency. She has just been rightly praising the people of her constituency for their wonderful work over the last century and a half. Would it not have been so much better had the proposal been to put the railhead in Crewe, as was originally intended, and not down in Yarnfield, where it will destroy so much of my constituency?

Laura Smith: I personally believe that the hon. Gentleman needs to look at the benefits of HS2 for people in his constituency, such as the jobs that it will bring. I do not think that it is all doom and gloom for his constituents, and I will continue to speak positively about my own constituency.

5.15 pm

The railway went on to open a cheese market and a clothing factory, and donated the land that would become Queens Park, which to this day attracts visitors from outside the town. At its height, Crewe Works provided employment for more than 20,000 skilled workers in a vast span of workshops stretching for nearly two and a half miles: forges, carpenters, boilermakers, machinists and apprentices. It was common for several generations of the same family to enjoy fruitful careers there, and the sense of pride in our works is still felt today.

By 2019, the workforce had fallen to fewer than 400, a fraction of its former size, and much of the former site has now been sold off. In its place stand icons of the modern economy, a supermarket and a cinema. Now the wall on its western boundary has been selected for demolition. For many local people, that will be a visual metaphor for the sense of loss and decline that has afflicted too many families.

However, it is not all bad. The railway still plays an important role in our local economy. Now owned by Bombardier, Crewe Works still offers quality employment opportunities to local people. Crewe is also home to Bentley Motors, a global success story providing thousands of skilled jobs. In addition to the large employers, we have many small and medium-sized businesses that are punching well above their weight, and a number of them are already benefiting from HS2.

I am not one for looking back on a fictional past through rose-tinted glasses. Change—for the better—is not only welcome, but must be pursued. It is in all our interests for the UK economy to produce the goods that people need and want. Nevertheless, the narrative really does matter, and the way in which our economy has changed has not benefited everyone. Decades of inaction by successive Governments have left the north to the mercy of market forces, and those forces have themselves been turbo-charged by aggressive globalisation. Many northern towns and cities are still struggling to recover from the industrial decline of the 1970s and 1980s, and the north-south divide threatens to hold back our national productivity.

The median wage in Crewe and Nantwich is literally thousands of pounds less per year than the UK average, despite the existence of well-paid jobs such as those that I mentioned earlier, which will be pushing up the average. Many workers in my constituency have seen little or no improvement in their living standards over the last decade, and some have even seen their living standards fall dramatically. Relatively high employment levels mask the reality of an increasing number of people finding themselves in precarious jobs, or working for poverty pay in low-productivity employment. As a result, more people in poverty now live in working households than in non-working households, after housing costs are taken into account. Consequently, our economy has become reliant on household debt, which has grown to worrying levels.

We have been told that inequality was the inevitable price of economic growth, but such arguments are now outdated, and a body of research now finds that economies in which income and wealth are shared more equally tend to have more stable paths of economic growth. If we are to build an economy that prioritises both sustainable growth and economic justice, addressing regional inequality must be part of that strategy.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. What the hon. Lady is saying is important, and I presume that she will be linking her remarks to the new clauses.

Laura Smith: My speech is all about the way in which HS2 will help to deal with these matters, but I will speed it up, Mr Deputy Speaker. My apologies.

I am not for one moment suggesting that HS2 will solve all these problems alone, but it can and must play an important role as part of a wider strategy. As I said on Second Reading:

“My vision for HS2 is not as an end in itself, benefiting only businesses and commuters, but as a catalyst for the radical rebalancing of our economy”.—[*Official Report*, 30 January 2018; Vol. 635, c. 741-42.]

I firmly believe that we need to shift our economy towards investment-led growth. The choice that has been presented between HS2 and better east-west links in the north is an entirely false one. In any case, Northern Powerhouse Rail services will, at two of their most important regional links, run on HS2 infrastructure.

Some businesses choose to pay almost four times as much per square foot for premises in London and the south because of the poor connectivity in the north. Last year, a report by the Institute for Public Policy Research North indicated that planned transport investment in London was two and a half times higher per person than in the north of England, and productivity in London is reported to be some 40% greater than in the north, demonstrating a strong correlation between connectivity and productivity. In its recent report, High Speed Rail Industry Leaders set out why it believes that improved connectivity will lead to greater regional productivity, and enhanced specialisation that will help us to bring about a more balanced economy.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend makes the case eloquently for her constituency. This independent review is so important because it is not about the pounds being spent globally; it is about the impact on jobs and local communities, economies and supply chains.

Laura Smith: Absolutely. The review is incredibly important. What does the review mean for places like Crewe? Crewe has the potential to build on the 360° connectivity it already has to become the key regional hub bridging the north and the midlands. The local enterprise partnership is working alongside Cheshire East Council on a proposal for a Crewe HS2 growth corridor that will bring together strategic development sites in Crewe, Middleswich and Winsford, so that they can build on their traditional strengths in high-value manufacturing. As for the model through which the LEP proposes delivering that corridor, it will invest up front to unlock development, and will be repaid through the generation of new business rates. Any surplus income will be used to help finance station improvements.

I am coming to the end of my speech, Mr Deputy Speaker; I get the impression that I might have pushed my luck a little, but I am still fairly new to this process, so please excuse me. I reiterate that the passing of this Bill is not nearly enough to unlock my constituency's full potential. I would like the Government to commit to seven HS2 trains per hour stopping at Crewe, and more frequent regional train services to and from Crewe

[Laura Smith]

on each of the lines radiating out of the town. A northern junction at Crewe is essential to allow Birmingham-Manchester HS2 services to stop at Crewe, and to allow Crewe to be part of the Northern Powerhouse Rail network, which would open up the possibility of direct service to Leeds and other destinations east of the Pennines.

I am concerned that some appear to be flirting with the idea of scaling back HS2, either through short-sightedness or, worse, for political gain. HS2 has shaped our local planning framework, and so much work has gone into bringing all stakeholders together to realise the potential of HS2 in Crewe that it would be nothing short of tragic if the Government failed to deliver.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): It is always interesting to follow the hon. Lady, who is my neighbour. She extols the virtues of HS2, but it is not her constituents but mine who will feel an impact. The rolling stock depot and the northern Crewe junction that she speaks of are not in Crewe; they are in Eddisbury. Largely owing to the extremely hard work of her Conservative predecessor, Edward Timpson, who argued for a tunnel under Crewe, a massive amount of the local impact will not be felt in Crewe. Perhaps the hon. Lady ought to spare a thought for constituents whose homes and lives are being destroyed.

Laura Smith: I absolutely agree. Constituents and businesses have come to me, as they have done to the hon. Lady, and we have dealt with them. I also agree with her new clause. I am not saying that what is happening is simple, and I have every sympathy for everybody affected, but I am looking at what benefit can come to Crewe and Nantwich, and the whole area, because of HS2. Without doubt, this is a huge project, and there will be winners and losers, but I think the positives outweigh the negatives.

Antoinette Sandbach: Sadly for Eddisbury, the number of losers there is very large. It will cost an extra £100 million just to do the extra 20 km of track from Crewe past Winsford. The geotechnical engineer's report that was served on HS2 many years ago has not yet been answered. I would much rather see that money going into improving public services and housing stock in my area.

New clause 5 seeks to restrict use of non-disclosure agreements by HS2. The reason that I tabled it is that a business in my constituency has been asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement, and it potentially affects the jobs of 166 of my constituents. I do not think it right that Members of Parliament are being denied information that is being stitched up by HS2. This relates not only to private businesses but to councils, in relation to denying elected members information. That is why the new clause is necessary.

Scarcely a day passes without a discussion on non-disclosure agreements. Last week, there was a discussion on NDAs in relation to the Labour party, but we have also seen questions about their use by businessmen and others to keep former employees and others quiet about information or personal conduct within a company. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr), who sits with me on the Business,

Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, for his work on the all-party parliamentary group on whistleblowing. The group has today launched a report calling for reforms to the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. What concerns me most is that HS2 appears to be stepping up its use of NDAs. Last Wednesday, the hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) described HS2 as having signed more than 270 NDAs, and the *New Civil Engineer* reports that the figure could be as high as 280, with 40% of them having been signed in the last year.

Mr Ivan Lewis: Last week, the hon. Lady's party rightly called for Labour to do something about non-disclosure agreements in relation to staff employed in the Labour party. Does she agree that, to be consistent, Ministers should instruct HS2 to release people from their obligations under non-disclosure agreements so that they can share with the House the truth about their experience of the capacity and cost issues when they were working for the organisation? Her new clause deals with the future, but does she agree that it should be able to deal with the past, too?

Antoinette Sandbach: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that point. He will see from the drafting of my new clause that it would allow an assessor to assess NDAs that have already been signed, and to allow them to be retained only in circumstances of exceptional commercial confidentiality. I would argue that that is the only ground for retaining them, and that an independent assessor—either a QC or a former High Court judge—should be appointed to assess those NDAs.

John Redwood: Could my hon. Friend give us some idea of what kind of information she thinks might be suppressed that we ought to know about? What is the inducement being offered to make people sign these things?

Antoinette Sandbach: So far, HS2 has refused to answer freedom of information requests. It claims, in answers given to me as a result of FOI requests, that it is unable to provide answers because it does not know how many NDAs its lawyers have got people to sign and because it would cost too much to provide a Member of Parliament with details of the number of NDAs.

Mr Lewis: Is it not true that a number of former senior HS2 employees who have expressed concerns about financial information provided to the House and other appropriate oversight bodies were soon asked to leave the organisation on the basis of non-disclosure? Does the hon. Lady agree that that is incredibly serious, which is why Ministers should instruct that those people be released from those non-disclosure obligations as soon as possible?

5.30 pm

Antoinette Sandbach: I completely agree. I am worried that NDAs are used to cover up wrongdoing in HS2, particularly in relation to redundancy payments, which have been discovered by the National Audit Office, and it has been agreed that the scheme was inappropriate. The difficulty is that without such provision being included in the legislation, that statutory protection is not available to those who wish to blow the whistle or otherwise highlight failures.

NDA's are also used for local authorities. I know that, because it applies to my own local authority. In answer to a written question, my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani), the HS2 Minister, reported that 31 local councils have an NDA in place with HS2, including Cheshire West and Chester, and Cheshire East Councils, which cover my constituency. Apparently, they are required to discuss advanced planning issues and matters of a commercially sensitive nature. However, the councils also sit on the implementation advisory group which feeds back to my community what HS2 plans to do in my area. Matters that go beyond planning and commercially sensitive information are being withheld on the basis of those NDAs signed with HS2, denying me as the Member of Parliament the ability to quiz HS2 on what it plans to do in the area. How, for example, will road movements be affected, and how will that affect my industrial estate? How is the public interest served by those NDAs, which limit the information that councils can give to my constituents?

Mr Paterson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and neighbour for giving way. I am shocked by what she has revealed. Does she have any idea what is driving those NDAs, and how long are they valid for? What is the intention behind this?

Antoinette Sandbach: I have asked for details, and for a copy of an NDA but, again, there was a refusal to disclose that to me. The claim is that that is exempt from disclosure, because it is commercially sensitive information, but I am afraid that I simply do not agree that all those NDAs are required just for commercially sensitive information. As I said, 40% have been signed in the past 12 months, and I am concerned that they are used to withhold from the public and from elected representatives information that the organisation may not wish to go into the public domain.

Mr Paterson: How long are they valid for?

Antoinette Sandbach: I do not know, but presumably for the length of the project.

That has an impact on Members representing constituencies on phase 2b of the route, because we cannot get information from HS2 about how it will impact our constituents. Any Member of the House who has had dealings with HS2 knows that it has an approach to secrecy unparalleled since the cold war. If our councils are prohibited from telling us details of their discussions, we struggle to assess local impacts. Clearly, there is a problem. My new clause tries to steer a path between an outright ban and the current approach of issuing NDAs as a matter of course. It tries to operate within boundaries already established for HS2 best practice and it gives discretion where necessary while erring on the side of transparency and the public interest.

HS2 already has a residents commissioner and a construction commissioner who, together, act as impartial monitors of HS2 and offer advice to those affected by the scheme, be they residents, businesses or other groups. My amendment would add an assessor, who would be a QC or a High Court judge. This individual—appointed by the National Audit Office, Parliament's spending watchdog—would be required to approve as in the public interest any future NDAs that HS2 seeks to enter.

The assessor would also have the power to review all previous NDAs and assess whether they, too, are in the public interest. If the assessor judges an existing NDA to be not in the public interest, it would cease to have effect.

My amendment would unshackle whistleblowers and elected officials to discuss HS2 freely and honestly. If, after any revelations emerge, Members wished to continue with the scheme, they would at least make that decision on the basis of the facts, and not the partial picture we see today.

I make no secret of my approach to HS2, but my amendment should appeal to everyone, whether or not they support the project. Those who see HS2 as a grand success should want to see it shouted from the rooftops, not swaddled in secrecy; and those of us who believe the costs will continue to spiral until the game is not worth the candle would be able to see for ourselves the full costs involved.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): As my hon. Friend knows, I take a personal interest in this matter. I am sorry that I have not been here for the debate, but my parliamentary duties elsewhere have prevented me from being in the Chamber to support her. Does she agree that the precedent for this secrecy on HS2 was set when it was revealed that the main reports on the project were going to be kept not only from the public but from this House, when the then Secretary of State for Transport refused to publish the reports from the Major Projects Authority? That, in itself, was very damaging. By setting that bar for secrecy, and through the NDAs, the largest infrastructure project in Europe continues to be concealed from Members of this House and from the public.

Antoinette Sandbach: I completely agree with my right hon. Friend, which is why I tabled new clause 5. NDAs should not be used to shut people up and prevent them from saying what is happening inside the organisation. Not only that, but NDAs are being used to deprive elected Members of this House and other officials of important information about some of the impacts and problems, which we should be scrutinising.

Jim McMahon: I absolutely respect that the hon. Lady is giving voice to her constituents, but she has been fairly negative so far. Can she think of one positive that HS2 will bring?

Antoinette Sandbach: I am glad to be giving voice, because I sound a bit croaky—I am losing my voice.

I agree that there are potential benefits, but the question is whether those benefits are worth the cost and whether the business case stacks up. I would much rather see the east-west Northern Powerhouse Rail connection happen as a priority.

When a rolling stock depot is moved from another constituency to mine and put next to a school, thereby requiring the whole school to move, there seems to be either a level of incompetence or staggering complacency in the management of the project. I have been at events where my constituents have asked questions and not received answers.

There have been ministerial orders to provide mock-ups of the rolling stock depot so that we can understand the scale and impact, and HS2 has just ignored them and

[Antoinette Sandbach]

said that it will not provide the mock-ups. Then there has been a change of Minister, who has taken a different approach.

My concern is that, unless this protection is in the legislation, we will potentially see a change of Secretary of State, and that we will then not have the protections in relation to this kind of infrastructure project that all our constituents deserve.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I rise briefly to support new clause 4 and the call for a full peer review of this project. I will also call for the review to go wider, particularly to look at the geographical impact of the HS2 investment and the impact on cities and towns. I raise this because, like most Members of this House, I strongly support the need for substantial investment in our transport infrastructure. I think it needs to increase; we should be spending more capital investment on transport, particularly on our railways, especially given the climate change challenges we face.

The more we look, however, at the current Government's transport infrastructure budget, the more doubts we should have about the continued focus on cities, rather than towns, and about the continued concentration of the capital budget on cities, rather than towns. HS2 and its plans raise those serious questions, which is why serious issues need to be reviewed about whether or not HS2 is the right priority now, given the need for investment in our towns. According to the National Infrastructure Commission, the Government propose to spend £4.5 billion a year on HS2 between now and 2025, but only £200 million a year on Northern Powerhouse Rail. We must bear in mind that Northern Powerhouse Rail is also predominantly focused on cities.

I want to set out the impact on my constituency, but the towns there could reflect many across the country. It is not clear that HS2 will have any benefit for Normanton, although Ministers say that it will mean faster trains to Leeds. Normanton used to be at the heart of the rail network. We used to have 700 jobs on the railways alone in Normanton and 700,000 passengers used to go through it. Normanton used to be a central railway town, but now there is only one train an hour to Leeds, even though it is less than half an hour away. Therefore, any benefits from speeding up journey times for anyone in my constituency just disappear, because the connections into Leeds are so rubbish. From Castleford, Pontefract and Knottingley, there are a few more trains, but they are often cancelled or late, or there are just too few carriages and so people cannot get on.

After the May timetable changes, things got worse. One constituent told me that on his regular trains the seating capacity was reduced by between 58 and 130 seats, making it impossible for many passengers to get on, so they were just stuck on the platform. Some trains currently run to London from Pontefract Monkhill, but it has no disabled access. So I have had constituents with wheelchairs who have been stranded on the platform as a result or who, in one case, have had to crawl over the bridge. Yet there is no sign of the investment in our station just to get basic disabled access. This is the capital investment we need in our towns.

We are told in other parts of our area that the regular trains cannot go any faster because the lines need upgrading, but there is no sign of it ever happening.

Time and again we are told that HS2 will mean better connections for our country and for our towns, but we never see it—we never see any credible plan. My hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), who spoke from the Front Bench, has rightly talked about boosting the connectivity between Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield. I strongly support that, because I believe that it will hugely benefit the north. Indeed, I think the House of Lords report was right when it said that investment in improving the rail links in the north of England would deliver greater economic benefit for every pound than HS2 would.

Having those connections between our northern cities would be substantial, but the economic benefits from better connecting our northern towns with neighbouring cities would be huge. That would boost our towns; give employers in our towns and our cities a far bigger catchment area, for staff and for customers; and build the size of local markets. Those town connections should be done first, before any of this, but we do not see it ever happening. We do not see it ever coming. As a result, we do not believe it is ever going to come. We get all these promises from these massive national infrastructure projects, which always concentrate on our cities, but we do not believe this is ever going to benefit our towns.

5.45 pm

Mike Amesbury: In 2017, Northern rail should have been delivering two trains an hour from Northwich to Manchester on the mid-Cheshire line; it is still not doing that. When we hear of HS2's costs spiralling from £57 billion up to even £106 billion, people look at the northern powerhouse slogan as a real damp squib.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I am just a little worried: we are obviously talking about new clauses to the Bill, and as much as we have all suffered with Northern rail, I want to try to keep the debate where it should be.

Yvette Cooper: Mr Deputy Speaker is completely right: we could go on for a very long time about the problems with Northern rail. My hon. Friend is also right. The review in new clause 4 should focus on the geographic impact and the impact for towns, because time and again we just see our town services go backwards and our chances of getting any capital investment in towns disappear, while the Government always talk about these huge billions of pounds going into connections for the cities. The compact between different parts of the country, particularly between our cities and towns, has now broken. I do not think anybody quite recognises the seriousness of that. This debate about HS2 is carrying on while we ignore that serious and growing divide.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: Does the right hon. Lady agree that the Department for Transport needs to update its national rail travel overview survey report, on which so much of its planning is dependent? It has not been updated since 2010. I received a written answer that said the Government are

“currently considering updating the National Rail Travel Survey”.

Does the right hon. Lady think that that needs to be done as a matter of urgency, so that the survey reflects the exact points she is making?

Yvette Cooper: If there has simply been no updated assessment, that might explain why so many of my constituents get stuck on platforms in Leeds, trying to get back to Castleford, or on platforms in Castleford, trying to get into Leeds. So many more people are commuting for work, yet the commuter infrastructure for them is just not there. It is continually our towns that are being let down.

John Redwood: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Yvette Cooper: I am conscious of the time and see Mr Deputy Speaker looking at me, so I shall give way only briefly.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): I am very relaxed.

John Redwood: How would a review help, given that the right hon. Lady's Front-Bench colleagues and the current Government are united behind the current scheme, which does nothing to help our towns?

Yvette Cooper: Nobody has done a proper assessment of where transport infrastructure investment is going and what the impact is on cities and towns. Some assessment has been made of the impact on different regions of the country, and that is important. Actually, it is significant, because I think the New Economics Foundation cites HS2's own figures showing that 40% of the benefits from HS2 will go to London, whereas only 10% of the benefits will go to Yorkshire. I want to see a broader assessment of the impact on cities and towns.

Job growth is twice as fast in cities as in towns. New digital jobs, service jobs, university-related jobs and cultural jobs are all being concentrated in cities, but manufacturing, distribution and retail jobs are disappearing from towns. That is a result of automation or changes to our economy, but public sector investment decisions, including on transport priorities, are making that worse. Public services are shrinking back from towns into cities, and the new infrastructure investment is always concentrated on cities rather than towns.

Jim McMahon *rose—*

Yvette Cooper: I will give way, even though I said that the previous time was the last.

Jim McMahon: I took the hint from Mr Deputy Speaker that he was relaxed about interventions.

I thank my right hon. Friend for her work to give a voice to towns, which is important. Does she accept that the capital focus of HS2 is one thing, but it is revenue spend that has massively affected towns? In Greater Manchester, we have lost 30 million bus miles because of central Government revenue cuts. One thing we could do today is reinvest the revenue that has been lost.

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is exactly right. Certainly, for bus services, which are crucial for our towns, the loss of revenue has been particularly crucial and devastating. This debate is about towns getting their fair share of both revenue and capital investment. Currently, I do not think we are getting either.

The campaign to power up the north led by some of our regional newspapers is immensely important, and I strongly back it, but I also think that it is time to power up our towns, as they have immense potential and are not getting their fair share of investment. Time and again, whether through HS2 or Crossrail 2, too much money—the big billions—is still going into the cities rather than the towns. That is why I support this review, but ask for it to be broadened.

I urge the Minister to broaden it as well, because the truth is that Members from our towns have been respectful, we have asked sensible questions, we have been patient, and we have waited and waited and, frankly, we have got nothing. We see no sign of anything improving for our transport infrastructure. We see no sign of anything other than warm words about promises in the future. We need that review of the geographic benefits and we need a proper towns plan—a proper plan for major infrastructure investment. Until we have that, the Government's transport infrastructure plan is simply not in the national interest.

John Redwood: My worry about the Labour new clauses is that they will not achieve the objective that Labour seems to think they will achieve. The truth is that, with the legislation already in place and the likely passage this evening of the High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill, all the legal powers are there to proceed with the scheme as originally designed. As the contracts are settled, the scope for any fundamental changes arising from a review is either limited or non-existent. As the project develops, there is less and less scope to make any changes to it.

I speak as someone who, when we were first faced with the decision about HS2, decided that it was not the right project. I fully share the ambition of practically everybody in this House that we need an even more successful northern powerhouse and better transport and connectivity throughout those northern cities and towns. As someone who represents a very fast-growing and hard-pressed area of the country, just outside London, I would love to see an even more effective counter-magnet to London elsewhere in the country to pick up some of that growth and some of that prosperity, because we have the difficulties of managing so many people coming in and so many people moving around on transport systems that are woefully inadequate for the task. I share the ambition for the northern powerhouse, but I accept that a decision has already been made in principle, that a lot of money has now been committed and that various works have been undertaken in the name of the project, so it would become more and more difficult to make fundamental change or to think about cancellation.

As it happens, I think that there will be another decision taken quite shortly about this mighty project, because the very likely next Prime Minister has said that he wishes to review it and to think about it again, and I wish him every success with that. It would be a very difficult task, and it would need to be done with reasonable speed. Given that we have committed so much and that there is some reasonable merit in the project, he may conclude that he wishes to go on with it. If he were to make a more fundamental decision, all that we are talking about this afternoon in this House is a waste of time, because, clearly, the project will be cancelled and everything else will lapse.

[John Redwood]

I work on the assumption that, after review, the new Prime Minister may continue with the project, and that we are in the business of trying to mitigate the difficulties and damages. My colleagues who represent constituencies who are very badly affected by this project deserve special treatment over how it can be ameliorated and improved and how compensation can be paid and businesses dealt with.

Certainly, we need transparency. I am very grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) for raising the issue. I want to hear from the Minister about what is going to be done on transparency, so that those who are most adversely affected, should the project go ahead in full, are able to see why the decisions are being made and also have access to the information that they need to get proper compensation.

I myself will not be voting for the Labour amendments, because they simply do not bring any advantage either to those who support the project in full or those who have the problems of handling the disadvantages of the project in their constituencies. I do not see how a further review suddenly will make this a better run project. If the project goes forward, this Minister and any future Minister will have to deal with how the costs will be controlled, how the works will be carried out in a speedy manner and to a high quality with safe standards for the workforce, and how the impact of those works can be minimised on those most affected by them as they go ahead. These remain continuing management problems. An additional independent review is not going to solve any of that. We are now getting to the point where it needs individual management solutions. It is about managers on the ground, how contracts are handled on the ground, and the extent to which Ministers can and should have proper oversight of those contracts, given their commercial nature and given the technical expertise of those actually running the project.

I do not see how an independent review can help at all. I do not believe that any serious change could result from it, because the contracts will be let, and we will be told that the contractors have to get on with it. There does remain the issue of whether a new Prime Minister wishes to reopen the whole question, but assuming that he does not we will need proper answers from Ministers about what action they have taken to control the costs, improve the quality and deal with safety, and about how much power they will have in future, given the commercial nature of the operation.

Jeremy Lefroy: I am generally very supportive of additional high-speed capacity between London, the north-east, the north-west and Scotland, but I have consistently opposed HS2 and the plans for it because this is not the right way to go about it. It is not a question of whether or not my constituency is affected; I would be happy to see a sensible route through my constituency. I and my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) were quite happy to see the very large Norton Bridge junction project in our constituencies, because although it caused quite a lot of disruption, we could see the benefit for the west coast main line—for improving capacity and for increasing speeds to the benefit of everybody. He and I and other colleagues do not see such benefits from HS2 as a whole. However, I personally would like to see a different design and lower maximum speeds—not the 400 km per hour

that is projected but something more sensible between 250 km and 300 km per hour. That would allow for a route that is not straight as an arrow, but that has some bends in it that could avoid the villages in my constituency. That kind of route, which would also be more consistent with the kind of trains that we currently have running on the west coast main line, would be infinitely preferable to what we have at the moment. Unlike to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) whom I greatly respect on this matter, I do not think that it is too late to think again about some changes that would make this or a similar project more acceptable to my constituents.

I will support new clauses 1 and 2, certainly, and new clause 5. My hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) has already eloquently set out the reasons why we should support new clause 5, and I will certainly do so.

John Redwood: I stress that I do not want to stop my hon. Friend getting a better deal for his constituents; I wish him every success in doing that. I was saying that once the contracts had been signed for this project, he will not be able to get change.

Jeremy Lefroy: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am not a believer in breaking contracts if contracts have been signed and if they do not have get-out clauses. I would strongly recommend that we put in get-out clauses, because there will be massive changes over the coming months and years. I accept, however, that once a decision has been taken by this House, if we are in a minority, we are in a minority and it will go ahead. I am just flagging up some of the problems that may be encountered in the future.

In respect of new clause 1, I welcome the quarterly reports. This is a very sensible approach and it is something that has been lacking. We have had intermittent reports from HS2 to constituency MPs who have been affected. We have had the occasional statement from the Minister—and I welcome the work that the current Minister and indeed previous Ministers have done to keep us informed—but what we have not had is an honest assessment of the cost of this project. We were told originally that it was in the £30 billion to £35 billion range, and then a Minister came forward a few years ago and said that it was going to be about £56 billion, but since then we have had nothing. They have stuck to the figure, and what we are being asked as a House today is to vote on a figure that I simply do not believe.

The figures I have seen, calculated by experts in the field, indicate that the cost will be in the region of £80 billion. I have heard it might be more, but let us stick at £80 billion. This House is being asked to agree today to a not insignificant part of a project for which we do not have an accurate cost estimate, and which could be as much as £24 billion a year more. I agree that this is a capital rather than a revenue project, but that is two thirds of what we spend on defence every year; that is an enormous sum of money about which we are not being given any indication. If these estimates are wrong, let the Minister come forward and say that they are wrong and prove that they are wrong. Of course estimates are estimates, and we know that we cannot pin them down to the last million or so pounds, but it is possible to try to disprove the credible figures that have been put in the public domain, and so far they have not been disproved.

6 pm

John Redwood: Does my hon. Friend agree that there could be massive revenue losses once the railway is up and running, because if it turns out that the number of seats provided is greatly in excess of demand, which some people think will be the case, there will be heavy discounts and lots of empty seats, and therefore a very major demand for a taxpayer subsidy?

Jeremy Lefroy: As so often, my right hon. Friend is absolutely right, and what has also not been forthcoming is a proper business case. We have had the business case for HS2, but we have not had—I have asked for this time and again—a business case for the remnant west coast main line, which will still be a much larger transport network than HS2. We are told that there will be freight on it, and it is good that there will be additional freight, but freight is a very competitive market and will not replace the extremely lucrative premium revenues that come from high-speed trains.

What we will be left with on the west coast main line, which is absolutely vital for my constituency and those of my hon. Friends the Members for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) and for Stone (Sir William Cash) and so many others, is a line which takes freight, which of course is heavy and causes extra maintenance, and with suburban and stopping services such as the London Northwestern Railway. That is an excellent service and I use it frequently, but I often pay £15 or £20 for a single ticket from London to Stafford. I welcome that, but it is not possible to run a proper, profitable railway on income like that. What it relies on of course is the incredibly expensive £106 or £108 single peak fare from Stafford to London—my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield will probably be able to quote the figure from Lichfield. These are the fares that pay for the railway at the moment.

Michael Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend share my concern that—I do not know whether this is because of HS2 or not—at present the Department for Transport has no plans for the replacement of the ageing Pendolino fleet?

Jeremy Lefroy: Yes, I do. I think the Pendolino fleet, introduced by a previous Labour Government, has done a great job, and I am therefore very disappointed that Virgin Trains and Stagecoach are not going to be involved in the next phase of this service. In the nine years in which I have had the honour to represent my constituents in this House, I have used that service between two and four times a week, and it has been late a handful of times. It is an excellent and reliable service; others may have had different experiences, but that is my experience over the past nine years.

Sir William Cash: I am glad to confirm everything my hon. Friend has said, but I am a little puzzled that he left new clause 4 out of the list of amendments on which he was intending to cast a vote. I wonder if he could throw any light on that: is it because of the point that I and others have made about the report coming into effect only after the Act has received Royal Assent, or is it because of something else? Most of the measures in new clause 4(2) would give rise to the business case my hon. Friend is calling for, and with which I agree.

Jeremy Lefroy: I listened carefully to what my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) said, and in principle I support the proposal, but I also recognise the points made about the fact that a review is needed now rather than in a year's time or a year after Royal Assent, which of course will not come until a few months after their lordships have considered the Bill.

I say to the Minister, for whom I have great regard, that there should be a proper business case for the west coast main line post the introduction of HS2. Although I do not know the east coast main line or the line out of King's Cross nearly as well, similar questions about the loss of premium fares might apply to it, although I recognise that the geography and the areas served are slightly different.

Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a very important point, although I am not convinced that the new clause is the right way forward. He talks about business cases, and my concern is that there are indirect impacts that should also be considered. For example in my constituency, on the midland main line, there will be an impact on the Chesterfield Canal Trust's attempt to regenerate our area; that has been held up now for nearly six years because we cannot get a guarantee from HS2 that it will not be impacted. Those kinds of costs must also be considered.

Jeremy Lefroy: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I will come on to such matters in a moment. He makes a very important point about the eastern side of the network, which is absolutely vital; we are obviously concentrating today on the west midlands to Crewe line, but we will come to that area later this year or next year.

Finally on this matter, I ask for my point to be seriously taken into account, because at the moment large subsidies are paid into Network Rail by the operators of the west coast main line, and in my view that will no longer be the case after the introduction of HS2.

Turning to other matters, I have serious concerns about the way in which HS2 has handled two or three areas in my constituency. Ingestre Park golf club has given evidence to the Committee and has been listened to by the Committee; however, it has still not reached an agreement with HS2 over what is going to happen. It is seriously concerned about the impact on the club and its employees—is it still going to exist? I ask the Minister to urge HS2 to reach an agreement as soon as possible with the golf club, as it did with Whittington Health golf club in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield under phase 1.

I would also like to raise the village of Hopton, which will be grossly affected by HS2 in the phase we are currently considering. It has constantly asked for more mitigation of the impact of the line, which goes pretty much straight through the village. Because of the impact on Hopton it is the village with possibly the highest proportion of houses that HS2 has had to purchase, certainly in this phase. We are asking for more mitigation. I know that the villagers will attempt to petition their lordships about this, but I ask the Minister to instruct HS2 to be more sympathetic than it has been so far to the needs of the village of Hopton.

Michael Fabricant: The position of Hopton is very similar to that of my own villages, and the problem is exacerbated by the fact that there does not seem to be any co-ordination within HS2 itself. On occasions villagers

[Michael Fabricant]

will get advice from engineers or liaison people from HS2 telling them what route HS2 will take, and then only a week later somebody else from HS2 will give a completely different answer. This only exacerbates the worries of constituents.

Jeremy Lefroy: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I have had a number of similar cases. In fact I was about to refer to one involving a constituent of mine who does not mind being mentioned: Mr Jim Prenold has a farm that is bisected by HS2 and has been trying to negotiate a proper solution to the problem caused by HS2. After several years—it is now more than six years since the route was initially published—there is still no solution for Mr Prenold and his family. Again, I urge the Minister to instruct HS2 to sort this out. That can be done very easily and quickly, and with good will.

Let me return to a matter that has an impact on costs and is therefore relevant particularly to new clauses 1 and 4: the whole question of the reuse of soil from the line, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Stone is very knowledgeable. HS2 considers that it can reuse on the line something like 80% of the spoil from cuttings and other excavations. If that is the case, I welcome it, because it would cut down the number of lorry and truck movements required to take away the spoil and to bring in the new spoil needed for embankments and other works. But what we understand—this needs to be proven or disproven—is that the percentage of excavated soil that can be reused on the line is in many cases as low as 20% and possibly even less. Hon. Members can do the maths and understand that we are talking about hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of tonnes of spoil that have to be taken off site because they cannot be used on site, and which then have to be replaced by millions of tonnes of spoil for use on site. That has two major implications: cost, and impact on the transport network in our neck of the woods.

If my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) were here, he would refer to junction 15 of the M6, which is already one of the most difficult junctions on the motorway network and needs to be remodelled. The number of truck movements through that junction will increase enormously if the figures about the use of spoil that are built into the provisions of this phase are not correct. The A51/A34 Stone roundabout would also be affected, because it is directly on one of the routes used by vehicles, as would many other parts of my constituency and the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for Stone and for Stoke-on-Trent South and the hon. Members for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) and for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly).

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): May I take my hon. Friend back to his remarks about his constituent's farming problem? When I was on the High Speed Rail (London – West Midlands) Bill Committee, we had some problems like this and representatives of the National Farmers Union gave evidence to the Committee. The NFU is constantly in touch with HS2 Ltd. There are well-known valuation techniques for dealing with all the problems relating to land that may be taken; it is just a question of getting HS2 round to actually doing it. May I suggest that if my hon. Friend's constituent were to contact the NFU, he might get some action?

Jeremy Lefroy: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. My office has been in touch with the gentleman in question for many years and we are also in touch with the NFU. I agree that there are many cases in which the course of action that my hon. Friend describes has been successful. The NFU has done a great job, as have local land agents and my constituency office. I particularly want to mention my chief of staff, James Cantrell, who has done a fantastic job on this for many constituents over six years. However, there are unfortunately still too many exceptions to the rule. I do not want to do down HS2's staff, a lot of whom work very hard and try their best to work for my constituents, but they are often frustrated by decisions higher up that do not give them the latitude to make sensible decisions locally on behalf of my constituents.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way again. On the Committee, we also found that cases tended to get resolved much quicker when a Member of Parliament got involved on behalf of a constituent. I say to the Minister, who I hope is listening, that HS2 should have sufficient staff that it should not be necessary for a Member of Parliament to get involved in every single individual case, whether it involves the taking of a house, a bit of a farm or whatever. Unfortunately, it is all too often necessary for a Member of Parliament to get involved, as my hon. Friend has demonstrated with his examples.

Jeremy Lefroy: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, but sadly we have had to get involved in almost every case, and some cases have taken far too long to resolve partly because of the lack of delegation.

6.15 pm

Sir William Cash: Only a few days ago the Stone Railhead Crisis Group, which represents the interests of my constituents around Stone, met the regional director of Highways England and discovered that there are some very serious problems for Highways England at both Hanchurch and the proposed HS2 junction at Yarnfield Lane that really require re-evaluation, which I intend to go into a bit on Third Reading. Is my hon. Friend aware of those conversations and the fact that Highways England is in fact very concerned indeed about the situation?

Jeremy Lefroy: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. I did in fact refer to junction 15, which is also known as the Hanchurch junction. It is actually a series of junctions that are critical to the national road network, not just the local road network. Junction 15 is one of the most difficult and congested junctions on the motorway network because of the topography of the area, and it finds it difficult to handle the current amount of traffic, let alone the vastly increased amount that there will be under phase 2a of HS2.

Michael Fabricant: Mr Deputy Speaker, you will know that I am not a controversial person. Far be it from me for one moment to cause any internecine warfare between my two great friends on the Back Benches, my hon. Friends the Members for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) and for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown), but I am afraid that I am going to have to take the side of my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford on the case of the NFU. I have been involved both with phase 1 and

phase 2a. My staff and I personally have been involved in trying to get people to meet HS2 and to have meetings with the NFU and HS2; it just does not often happen. HS2 has seen a huge turnover of staff, including managing directors and chairmen, so trying to get any form of co-ordination between one lot of HS2 people and another lot—let alone their meeting at the NFU locally—is often impossible. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): And that is from a non-controversial Member.

Jeremy Lefroy: Sadly, I have to agree that what my hon. Friend says is sometimes the case, but I would hope that with the Minister's intervention—she has been kind to intervene in a number of cases—matters will speed up.

Given that the Chair of High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge), is in the House, let me just say that it has been remarkable how some matters have been settled just when they were about to go to his Committee. It is therefore a matter not just of an MP getting involved, but sometimes of an issue actually coming before the Committee. That should not be the case. Common sense should prevail; getting common-sense matters put in place should not depend on pressure from a Member of Parliament or the Committee.

I am most grateful for the forbearance of hon. Members, but there are several very important matters that the House needs to be aware of and which I have tried to summarise. The first is the overall cost, about which we need the Government and HS2 to be honest with the House. The second is the question of the use and reuse of the spoil from the railway, another matter about which HS2 needs to be frank and honest with the House because of the consequences for the transport network and costs. The third is a plea that HS2 is open and transparent with all those affected, that it deals with things on the spot and that it delegates authority to its staff on the ground so that decisions can be made without the great distress that has been caused to so many of my constituents.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I thank you for allowing me to speak in the debate, Mr Deputy Speaker, because it gives me an opportunity to put on record my views and those of many of my constituents regarding HS2.

I have never voted for any motion relating to HS2 in the House, over many years, and that will be my consistent position today. That is why I will not even be voting for any of the amendments or for the Bill in due course. I cannot condone any expenditure in relation to this project, and I do not believe that the further reviews and reports proposed in new clauses 1 and 4 will do anything other than reinforce my view and that of so many of my constituents that the business case for HS2 has simply not been made.

It is a hugely expensive project. It will not proportionately benefit my constituents, who time and again say to me that the huge amount of money involved would be much better spent on improving local transport services, whether it is the cycleways; the bus services, which have

been reduced and need reinstating, particularly for the elderly; a bypass for Holmes Chapel; or better facilities at Sandbach station.

I need hardly mention the catalogue of concerns about local rail services that have been brought to my attention. I held a surgery a little while ago at Congleton railway station, and almost 40 constituents turned up to express their concerns about local rail services. They want to see better local rail services. That is a particular concern. If money is going to be invested in some form of Crewe hub, that will simply not be of benefit to my constituents unless there are appropriate local rail services fanning out from Crewe to Alsager, Congleton, Sandbach and Middlewich. That assessment needs to be done. I find myself in agreement with the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), who said that we need an assessment of the benefit of these proposals to local towns, not just cities. That is what my constituents have been saying for many years—what is the benefit to them?

I am entirely in agreement with many of the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), in particular regarding the current west coast main line. We need a proper business case for what will happen post-HS2 for the west coast main line. I use it every week, and I know that I am not alone among my constituents in thinking that the service currently supplied by Virgin is perfectly satisfactory. My constituents cannot understand why there is a need for them to contribute to the huge expense of HS2, particularly as only a tiny proportion of them are likely to use it.

Michael Fabricant: My hon. Friend will know that the Government argue, as indeed does the Labour party, that the reason for HS2 is to relieve the congestion on the west coast main line. Is she aware that double-tracking from just north of Rugby down to Euston, where two extra platforms are being prepared anyway, would resolve that problem?

Fiona Bruce: My constituents have often argued that solutions can be put forward using the west coast main line as it stands and that it should not be necessary to have the additional infrastructure that HS2 necessitates.

Moreover, there is real concern about the high—possibly too high—ticket prices that HS2 is likely to incur, when many rail charges are already very expensive for those who want to travel down to London. Speaking of London, many of my constituents are concerned that all this will do is draw business down to London. For a constituency like mine, which will not have a direct connection with HS2, there will still need to be local connections, whether it is from Crewe or coming up from Birmingham or down from Manchester. There is no confidence that HS2 will attract business to our area. There are many other reasons why business would be attracted to my part of Cheshire. It is a wonderful place to live—it is very attractive, with great schools and a good quality of life—but there is no confidence that the huge expenditure of HS2 will lead to increased business in our area. A proper business case has never been made for this.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): Unlike my hon. Friend, I have in the past supported measures related to HS2, but this evening I shall no longer be

[Mr William Wragg]

doing so, because the escalating cost estimates and the lack of apparent accountability for those increases is now quite frankly ridiculous. Does she agree that a fraction of this amount could be much better spent on improving connectivity within the north of England, rather than wasted on this vanity train set?

Fiona Bruce: That is exactly the point that I am seeking to make. I agree. It is very interesting that the Lords Economic Affairs Committee found evidence that the costs of HS2 appear to be out of control. That does not inspire confidence in my constituents. If there is going to be improved connectivity outside our constituency, many of them would prefer to see it across from Manchester towards Leeds and Yorkshire, rather than further connectivity down to London, which they already think is quite satisfactory for their purposes.

The case for speed has never been made. People work on the train and, because my constituents will have to make a connection—whether it is from Crewe or elsewhere—they are not convinced that the slim time saving justifies the expenditure that will be incurred. If the aim of the project is to narrow the gap between the north and London, the investment needs to be in the north.

Jim McMahon: I accept that Governments need to balance the books—they cannot spend the same pound twice. Quite a few times in this debate, we have heard northern MPs call for the money to be shifted across, but when has the same been done in London? When does London have to choose between good infrastructure and capital investment on the one hand, and affordable, efficient transport at a local level on the other? London does not have to choose. Why should we?

Fiona Bruce: Absolutely.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford referred to the series of junctions on the M6. Junction 17 of the M6 at Sandbach in my constituency needs improvement to take the additional traffic that is increasingly burdening it, particularly because of the additional house building. It is one of the few junctions in the country without a roundabout serving it. Each morning, we see huge pressure, in particular from those commuting from Sandbach to Manchester and elsewhere. It is highly unsatisfactory and another priority that needs to be looked at—in my constituents' view, looked at in preference to the proposed investment in HS2.

There is going to be an impact in my constituency, because while HS2 does not pass through it, it passes within yards of it. It will pass through Stanthorne and the Bostock Hall estate, literally within yards of Middlewich. Many of my constituents will be impacted—the quality of their lives will be impacted—by this without any compensation being available to them.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): The hon. Lady is making a compelling case. As a London MP, I want to point out that people on Wells House Road in my seat, which HS2 will pass through, do not welcome this development at all. They are already living on a building site seven days a week, and that will carry on for 10 years. The streets are not paved with gold, and even in London, people do not want this.

Fiona Bruce: I fully empathise.

Of course, there are also environmental concerns. New clause 1 proposes a review of those concerns, but they are self-evident. The Wildlife Trusts says that hundreds of special wildlife habitats are under threat from HS2, including ancient woodlands, lakes, meadows and other important habitats. We do not need an assessment to tell us that—it is obvious.

Michael Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend not find it extraordinary that the original proposal by Arup for HS2 was that it should travel parallel to the M40 on an existing transport corridor that would have connected with Heathrow and the channel tunnel, but the Labour Lord, Lord Adonis, changed it to an incredibly environmentally damaging route?

6.30 pm

Fiona Bruce: It will do much damage at a time when we are becoming increasingly aware of how important it is to address issues such as environmental protection and climate change.

My constituents are frustrated that HS2 will effectively terminate at Euston. So many of them would prefer not to fly to the continent from Manchester airport, but to take a train, but it would be impractical to have to trundle heavy suitcases across London.

We started with a cost of £35 billion and the latest figure is in the region of £56 billion. No one believes that the costs will not escalate, and there are now credible reports of up to £80 billion. Those are still only estimates, and that is unacceptable. My constituents do not see HS2 as a value-for-money enterprise.

In the Lords Economic Affairs Committee, Lord Forsyth of Drumlean said:

“Commuter services in the north of England are badly overcrowded and reliant on ageing trains. Rail connections between northern cities are poor”—

and between northern towns. He continued:

“rail infrastructure in the north should be the Government's priority for investment, rather than improving north-south links which are already good. The north is being short-changed by the Government's present plans, especially as construction on HS2 is starting in the south. Any overcrowding relief from HS2 will mainly benefit London commuters.”

If we are to have any assessments, reviews or reports, we need to look at how we can ensure a fair and proportionate benefit to constituents such as mine from an investment of this size.

Mr Ivan Lewis: I am happy to support the new clauses as they make a lot of sense in terms of accountability, evaluation and transparency, as well as ensuring constant review of a project as massive as HS2. It is also important to acknowledge the scandalous inequality of investment in the north of England that has been the case under successive Governments.

The former Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, deserves some credit for the concept of the northern powerhouse and the whole principle of devolving maximum power, but that has to be accompanied by resources. Since the change of Prime Minister and because it was the former Chancellor's project, the Government have taken their eye off the ball when it comes to devolution and the northern powerhouse, and it is even

less a central component of the Government's agenda than it was in the past. So I will actually say that the Conservative Government did more in terms of devolution in principle in England than previous Labour Governments had done, but it was not accompanied by investment and, since the change of Prime Minister, that agenda has been sidelined.

Jim McMahon: I should say that I think Labour has a good track record on devolution and devolving power. Does my hon. Friend accept that the concept of the northern powerhouse is like the concept of a cake without the ingredients?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): I do not want to hear too much about cake.

Mr Lewis: I know exactly what my hon. Friend is saying, although I do not watch "The Great British Bake Off" regularly. He is right and he was in the vanguard as one of the local government leaders in Greater Manchester who were the most dynamic and entrepreneurial in looking at the potential of devolution to transform the communities that he now represents in this place. He demonstrated that local leadership in that capacity could make a transformational difference and I pay tribute to him for that.

My hon. Friend also articulated, more than most, the risks of the northern powerhouse model that was presented, in terms of the lack of resources and investment, and the failure to transfer adequate powers. He is right that the Labour Government did some good things on devolution. I remember attending seminar after seminar at No.10 Downing Street about how to improve buses outside London. Every time we were asked the question and at every opportunity we said, "Reregulation and integration", but that was refused by the then Government. While it is true that many good things were done, that Government were reluctant to devolve in the way that they should have done.

Hon. Members have expressed concerns about the specific nature of HS2, but it is sad that we do not hear enough from them about the centrality of rebalancing the economy if we are to achieve our potential on a long-term basis. Whether we are for or against Brexit, that is a fact. If we continue to ensure that swathes of this country are not supported to fulfil their potential through investment, we are not only damaging those communities and preventing individuals from having the opportunities and life chances that others have, we are damaging UK plc by failing to see that it has a massive dampening effect on our productivity, our competitiveness and our capacity for innovation.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House and representing all areas of the country should acknowledge that this issue is about the national interest. It is not just about the interests of the north of England, although we are here to represent and articulate those interests, but about the long-term interests of the country. Our constituents have been short-changed for far too long in terms of the share of the cake that is available to be distributed under any Government.

I say gently to one or two Conservative Members that Lord Adonis has not been a Transport Minister for about nine years, so Conservative Ministers have had opportunities to make one or two amendments to the

scheme if they are uncomfortable with it. I wonder whether their concerns about Lord Adonis have something to do with other factors than his tweaking of the route—

Michael Fabricant: I am bemused by the hon. Gentleman's talk of one or two amendments and tweaking. Does he not think it is more than a tweak when the railway line was originally proposed to use an existing transport corridor up the M40 and then suddenly was changed with a ruler to go straight through the most virgin of countryside? That was more than a tweak.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Do not give way again.

Mr Lewis: I have been following instructions from you for 20 years, Mr Deputy Speaker, so I will continue to do so in this debate. The hon. Gentleman used his usual colourful language, but my point was that for nine years Lord Adonis has been nowhere near this scheme or the Department for Transport. If the hon. Gentleman genuinely feels that a massive mistake was made, Lord Adonis's successors have had plenty of opportunities to address those concerns.

Fiona Bruce: I want to put on the record that I believe that in the last nine years our Transport Ministers have taken a lot of cognisance of the needs of northern constituencies. My own constituency has funding for bypasses in Congleton and in Middlewich. Ministers are also looking favourably on reinstating Middlewich railway station. It is not as though our Ministers have not taken note of our requirements; it is simply that we feel that the HS2 project could provide better value for money if spent differently.

Mr Lewis: I respect the hon. Lady's views on some of those issues in the context of the debate, but I have to say assertively to her that, in the context of austerity, those at the bottom of the pile have suffered more than everyone else. When we look at the impact of austerity on the country and on communities, we see that many northern communities were starting at an incredibly low base. The impact of austerity, therefore, is not simply that we have not been able to catch up; the inequality and disparity in terms of the investment in skills, jobs, infrastructure and public services have actually made the situation far worse. That combination of austerity and the low base of investment, which has been an historical reality under successive Governments, is having a devastating effect on many northern communities.

The hon. Lady therefore really cannot afford to be complacent; she may have had some funding for a bypass in her constituency, but the reality in many of our constituencies in the north of England is that this has been an incredibly challenging and difficult period. If any business had 50% reductions to its budget in a four or five-year period, it would go bankrupt; that is what is happening to many local authorities in the north of England, and especially in Greater Manchester.

I want to come on specifically to the new clause on the non-disclosure agreements tabled by the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach). My view, having come reasonably late to this topic, is that what we have seen in terms of non-disclosure agreements in the context of HS2 is nothing short of a public scandal. Essentially,

[Mr Ivan Lewis]

many of these agreements have been used to silence people inside that organisation who are concerned that Parliament has been misled on a regular basis about financial information. Let us be clear: people have been given redundancy from HS2 because, internally, they have articulated concerns about misleading information that has been presented to this House in terms of finance and capacity.

Ministers have a responsibility to disinfect this issue. They should now make it clear that, former members of staff subject to non-disclosure clauses and paid redundancy simply because they felt Parliament was being misled should be released from those non-disclosure responsibilities and should be able to share their views with Parliament and to put them in the public domain. It is totally hypocritical to talk, quite rightly, about the outrage of the Labour party imposing non-disclosure agreements on its staff, but then for Ministers not to release members of staff in HS2 from such requirements.

I would like to reveal to the House today that a consultants' report costing at least £1 million was commissioned from a well-known consultant, which did not say what HS2 wanted it to say. That report was more or less shredded; it was certainly never put in the public domain or shared with Parliament.

We know that the costs have escalated time and time again and that some people in the organisation have alerted the HS2 board and other senior executives to the difficulties. I am not saying that HS2 should be scrapped, but for parliamentarians to make a rational, proper judgment on its viability, desirability and achievability, we have to have full possession of the facts. There is absolutely no question but that Ministers have not always been given full information by HS2. As a consequence, Select Committees and the House itself have not been given the full information that we and the public are entitled to in any debate about the desirability of this scheme.

John Redwood: If a Government had decided to offer all the northern councils involved their proportion of the original budget for HS2 as capital spend, to spend as they saw fit, does the hon. Gentleman think they would have spent it together on the railway or on something else?

Mr Lewis: I say genuinely to the right hon. Gentleman that that is a false choice. In Greater Manchester, thanks to changes the Government have made, we are seeking finally to have the capacity to reintegrate, re-coordinate and, where appropriate, re-regulate our buses. However, the level of subsidy per commuter in Greater Manchester, compared with London, is frankly shocking in terms of the Mayor of Greater Manchester's capacity to radically improve bus services across the conurbation. I genuinely say to the right hon. Gentleman—this is not a party political point—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. We are straying way off. We are not about bus services. We are not about subsidies. I am sure the Member for Bury South will not be tempted. That is what Members are trying to do: they are trying to tempt him into a debate that we are not having at this stage.

6.45 pm

Mr Lewis: I entirely accept what you say, Mr Deputy Speaker. I simply say to the right hon. Gentleman that he was talking about a genuinely false choice, and we should not go down the road of such false choices.

I am agnostic about HS2. The reason I have become agnostic is that I am absolutely convinced that Members of this House and people in this country are not being given full, appropriate and adequate information on cost and capacity, both of which are central to whether this project, compared with other projects, should go ahead and whether it can be delivered in budget and on time, in the way that Ministers have suggested.

I want to conclude by saying this to the Minister. It really is time for Ministers to insist that there is maximum transparency and maximum disclosure of information in terms of the amounts paid and the number of non-disclosure and similar agreements issued. Ministers also need to go further and instruct HS2 to ensure that people are released from these non-disclosure responsibilities where it is clearly in the public interest to do so. It is most definitely in the public interest to do so when senior members of staff were made redundant simply because they articulated concerns within the organisation that false financial information was being put in the public domain, which is not in the public interest. In those circumstances, Ministers have a duty and the right to instruct HS2 to release people from their obligations. For us to make considered and measured judgments about the future of the scheme, we need all the facts in the public domain, as do the people of this country.

Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con): I rise to support the HS2 rail development and to support the Government ahead of the votes this evening. The name HS2, as many have said, is somewhat misleading, because the project is clearly more about capacity. The greatest gain will be in terms of capacity and therefore improved resilience, allowing us to connect the north to the south and, I hope, the east to the west.

As it is Monday, I feel particularly able to talk about rail, because I have just enjoyed my twice a week, five and a half hour commute. I travel from Bootle village to Barrow, and change. Then, I move from Barrow to Lancaster, and change. Then, I move from Lancaster to Crewe, and it was lovely to hear the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) talk about her constituency, because I enjoyed a most memorable 25 minutes on platform 5, before moving again, from Crewe to London Euston. That is a journey I make twice a week—a round trip of 11 hours.

I can see for myself how vulnerable the infrastructure is and how one train being delayed impacts, with cancelled trains, thousands of inconvenienced commuters, thousands of pounds in compensation claims and, most importantly, lost confidence. That is at a time when the ability to travel by public transport is so vital if we are to decarbonise our transport systems and try to hit that 2050 target.

The Minister for HS2 rightly argues that it is critical to unlocking Northern Powerhouse Rail by providing the foundations on which Northern Powerhouse Rail can be realised. It is also planned that HS2 will link over 25 towns and cities, from Scotland through to the south-east, joining up nearly half the UK. It is important to recognise that the funding for HS2 does not come at

the expense of wider investment in the railways; it is not either/or—from my perspective in the north of England, it is in addition. That is about the investment in the Cumbrian coastal railway, but I also welcome the fact that the Government are investing billions of pounds across our railways between 2019 and 2024—the most significant such investment since Victorian times.

Just last week, we celebrated the confirmation of an £8 million investment in the preliminary works on the Cumbrian coast line. Living on the train line as I do, I see from my living room window the increase in services. There are 21 trains on a Sunday, which is a first between Whitehaven and Millom. Never before have we had trains on Sundays. It has made a huge improvement to our tourist economy. We now have 205 services between Whitehaven and Millom. After the tricky situation with the timetable change in May 2018, we have seen huge improvements in reliability on our line—now up to 93.5% reliability. Since the new timetable was introduced last year, the extra services have been running at record reliability, thanks to the intervention of the Department for Transport. That is great news for commuters.

We have seen an end to the very unreliable Class 37 locomotive. I am pleased it has been relegated to the scrapheap—or possibly the museum. We are also seeing an end to the very uncomfortable Pacer trains, or “nodding donkeys” as they are more commonly known in my area. As long as that investment continues locally, with the recently announced millions of pounds to develop preliminary works on the Cumbrian coast line to improve the rolling stock and to ensure that a reliable service connects people to places seven days a week, then I welcome the additional infrastructure investment that the Government propose with HS2 and, critically, Northern Powerhouse Rail. We have in the past referred to HS3 as a follow-on from HS2, but that northern connection is now termed Northern Powerhouse Rail, with a focus on connectivity from east to west from Liverpool to Leeds via Manchester.

New clause 1 refers to quarterly reports on environmental impact, costs and progress. However, the environmental statement, at 11,000 pages, is already incredibly extensive, so I do not believe we need another layer of reporting on a statement that is already out there. The environmental statement has been scrutinised independently and by the Select Committee, which has made its own decisions. It is important to recognise that not all scrutiny must take place in public. Ministers can maintain pressure through a co-operative, sensible, business-like environment, rather than having to shame a contractor on the Floor of the House for the sake of political point scoring.

Mr Wragg: Surely, the point of scrutiny is not political point scoring, but accountability for the billions of pounds for this project. We are not yet entirely sure about the total amount. Surely, that is the point of accountability, rather than political point scoring?

Trudy Harrison: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, but I refer him to the 11,000 pages of the environmental statement. We need less pen pushing and paper shuffling, and more progress and more connecting people to places.

We already have compensation schemes in abundance. A plethora of schemes are available: in a safeguarded area, the express purchase scheme and the need to sell scheme;

in a rural support zone, we have the cash offer, voluntary purchase schemes and the need to sell scheme; and in the homeowner payment zone, we have the homeowner payment scheme and the need to sell scheme. Outside the zones, we also have the need to sell scheme. How many layers of payment schemes do we really need? Surely, we can recognise that the current compensation packages are sufficient for those affected by the project?

Lee Rowley: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the complexity of the compensation schemes, and no compensation scheme is perfect, but in my part of the world, which is in phase 2b, there are problems with the compensation scheme in the town of Staveley because it does not adequately reflect what is happening on the ground. We have to accept that there are many issues on the ground. There are tenants who are renting from their parents. There are people in trusts to support their elderly parents living there. I hope that the Government will consider those kinds of nuances, on an ad hoc and case-by-case basis, in a way that I have not seen so far.

Trudy Harrison: I do not have HS2 or, indeed, any significant infrastructure projects in my constituency, but I look forward to doing so. In my constituency, we are looking forward to the Moorside development, which will have similar kinds of inconvenience and unintended consequences. I served the Minister in the past. I am confident that she will work with Members across the House and that, where there are issues, she will work with communities.

The independent peer review is another raft of bureaucracy and scrutiny that has been more than adequately covered by this House, its Committees and the Government. The four points addressed—environmental impact, economic impact, engineering and governance—have been reviewed time and again over the past five years. It is time we got on with this project and recognised that this country is crying out for greater north-south capacity.

Antoinette Sandbach: I am very interested in the point my hon. Friend is making. Can she tell the House why, if the reviews she mentions have taken place, the costs of this project have escalated by many billions of pounds?

Trudy Harrison: Any large-scale project, particularly a first like HS2, will see unintended costs, resulting in an increased budget. “You don’t make an omelette without smashing some eggs,” is a common phrase in my Copeland constituency. Regardless of that increase, for every £1 spent on HS2, £2 will still go back into the economy.

The north-south and east-west divides have for far too long separated our nation and stifled our economy. I am not interested in even more bureaucracy. This is about connecting people and places. That is why I will support the Government this evening, and look forward to HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail being delivered.

Mr Paterson: It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate. I have listened carefully to the arguments. The hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) might be interested to know that I was actually minded to support her new clauses until she spoke. Her new clauses would have no consequences: they would just lay a report and nothing would happen.

[Mr Paterson]

I have gone on a journey on this issue. I voted for the project when I was in Cabinet, and I have become more and more sceptical about it. At one stage I thought it might just die, because the finances were becoming less and less sensible. Now, however, I have real concerns. There are problems with it in my own constituency and nationally. I would have supported new clause 1 on assessing environmental impact, costs, progress on the timetable and economic impact, but I realise that all that would happen is that a report would be laid and there would be no consequences.

In an earlier intervention—I am not sure whether you were here, Mr Deputy Speaker—I raised the issue of the route. My hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) pointed out several times in interventions that originally the route was going to follow an existing corridor up the M40, but is now going to smash through virgin countryside and cause huge damage at vast cost. One thing I have in common with my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison)—it is a great pleasure to follow her—is that we both went to platform 5 at Crewe this morning and changed trains. I moved on to platform 11. I do that every week, twice a week. I raised this point in an intervention: my constituents want to go direct to Heathrow. I am sure Old Oak Common has many attractions and is a lovely place with charming people and wonderful things to do, but my constituents do not want to go to Old Oak Common. They want to go direct to Heathrow or direct to HS1.

7 pm

Rachael Maskell: I remind the right hon. Gentleman that we are debating phase 2a of the HS2 project. That is the remit of the Bill—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. That is for me to judge. I have been very lenient to Members on both sides throughout the debate. To try to stop these remarks at this late stage would be a bit unjust. I have tried to stop Members being tempted, but everybody is trying to build on the debate that took us out of scope, and I recognise that at times, we have gone out of scope. We have been in this area once already and it would be remiss of me not—

Rachael Maskell: It was with regards to my amendment.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Of course we will come to your amendment.

Rachael Maskell: I just wanted to say to the right hon. Gentleman that my amendment can therefore apply only to phase 2a. His aspiration may be to review the whole project, but my amendment applies only to the contents of the Bill.

Mr Paterson: I totally get that point, but one cannot get from Crewe to the end destinations in phase 1 without getting this part of the project done, and the point is that Labour's amendments do not allow any action. If the hon. Lady compelled the Government to do something, I might be minded to support that, but as I said, I have become increasingly disillusioned by the cost and the damage to my own patch.

The first I knew about the damage to my constituency was when a notice went up in the village of Woore, which the hon. Lady is probably not aware of, in the most extreme north-eastern corner of Shropshire. It is a salient that sticks out to the east between the counties of Cheshire and Staffordshire. Woore is a village of 1,200 people, with a nursery and a primary school of about 60. People walk every day to school and to work. In parts of the main road through the village, there is no footpath and some of my constituents have to cross the road three times, so the situation caused major consternation.

We have had a significant number of meetings with HS2, and I pay credit to the HS2 officials who have been assiduous in coming to meetings and providing information. We have looked at a whole range of alternatives to what could happen. It seems perverse that the original plan to move 600 vehicles a day through the village has come down to 300 by simply doubling the time—it was going to be 600 for three months and now it is 300 a day for six months. They are doing that because they are going to travel three sides of a rectangle. Every alternative that we have looked at has been turned down, and that is why I do not support these amendments. It is the sort of issue that the hon. Lady's amendments could have flushed out, and there could have been concrete action.

John Redwood: Does my right hon. Friend have any sympathy for the amendment from our hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) about non-disclosure agreements?

Mr Paterson: I am going to come to that in a minute. I am wholly amazed by the revelations from my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach), and I look forward to the Minister's comments on that, because I was really shocked by what my hon. Friend said. Given my experience of having a series of meetings with HS2 officials, all of which have been—at face value—thoroughly satisfactory and an open exchange of views, but have got absolutely nowhere, it now appears that there might some other reasons why that is. Given what she is saying, I cannot find out why, so if she presses her amendment, which I very much hope she does, I would like to hear from the Minister whether the Government will accept it. If they do not, I will be very happy to vote in favour of it. My hon. Friend has flushed out a most serious issue.

Jim McMahon: I absolutely accept the constituency issues that the right hon. Gentleman raises, and the poor consultation cannot be excused, but he must accept that with a route and project of this scale, the minor changes that are made in one part of it will have a massive impact if that is held across the whole route, and that has an impact on the budget and the timescale. Whether he supports the project or not, he must accept at some point that it is either time to back it or scrap it. There is this idea that we can keep throwing on hundreds of small, different issues and take that as a measure of the project, but that is just not a way forward. This is a major project for this country and it should be debated in that way.

Mr Paterson: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his interventions. He has been busy making these points throughout the debate and I understand that he is fully in favour of the project. I began my working life

by spending 25 years on Merseyside. I am fully aware of the need for transport connections for the north, particularly including west to east across the north of England. I began wholly in favour of this broad idea, but the more I look at it, the more worried I become.

Let me finish my points on my local issue in the village of Woore. We cannot just dismiss these as tiresome little irritations in a huge juggernaut of a project. These are real people: 1,200 people live in Woore and they will have 300 trucks a day going through a village where, in some places, there is no footpath. In schedule 1, on page 48, Members can see some proposals on mitigations, such as a “realignment of the A525” in a few places. These are just passing places. They in no way satisfy my constituents with regard to what they are looking for and are not good enough at all.

Will the Minister, who is beginning to get her notes together, comment on the proposals from Woore Parish Council that section 17 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 should be invoked? As I understand it, under that section, the unitary council’s—in my case—permission is required if there are heavy vehicle movements exceeding 24 a day. In Woore, we were faced with the horror of 600 movements. As a result of stretching out the length of the project, we are now looking at 300 a day, so we are massively over the threshold. I would like to know what would happen if Shropshire Council did not give permission as required under section 17 of that Act. Where would these trucks go? As I said, they are already taking a perverse route, over three sides of a quadrangle, to go from Baldwins Gate to Madeley.

I want to pick up some points that, again, could have been flushed out if the amendment had been properly drafted. Let me look at the economic impact. My worry about this project is that this is actually Victorian technology. Large steel boxes rolling around on steel wheels on steel tracks is not modern technology. *[Interruption.]* My neighbour, the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith), is laughing at that. We are looking at the most expensive railway ever imagined. The original proposals were set in 2010 and the projected cost was £32.6 billion. That is now up to over £60 billion. Some estimates are talking about £80 billion, while others suggest £100 million. Let us compare that with what we could do on broadband, where we are miles behind other countries. We have only 4% full fibre connections at the moment. Spain has 71% and Portugal has 89%.

Laura Smith: Can we not start looking at this perhaps as broadband infrastructure and rail infrastructure? All these things in the right hon. Gentleman’s constituency and in mine would be a great benefit to us all. It should not really be either/or.

Mr Paterson: That is a perfectly fair point, but there is no money tree. There is a limited amount of private and public money. I put to the hon. Lady that her constituents and mine have suffered for generations from the innate disadvantage of living in a remote rural area, 200 miles from London. With this new broadband technology, they can suddenly be level pegging with someone in the middle of Manchester or the middle of London. They can be just as competitive when talking to a customer in Ulan Bator or San Francisco. We are all absolutely level, but we have to have broadband.

A spokesman from Openreach, picking up on the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), said last week that

“building full fibre technology to the whole of the UK isn’t quick or easy. It requires £30 billion and a physical build to more than 30m front doors, from suburban terraces to remote crofts.”

Think of the benefit to our constituents if we had full fibre for £30 billion, which was the original estimate for HS2. This project is getting out of control.

John Redwood: People call this project an investment. Now, one aims to get a return on an investment. If we wanted a very modest 3% real on this £55 billion slug of capital, it should be generating profits of £2.75 billion every year. I do not think it will make a single penny. The case for investment has not been made.

Mr Paterson: I agree. There were questions about its original cost of £32 billion. We are now at £55 billion and looking at £100 billion. We know categorically that we would massively improve the productivity of every single human being in this country if we had full fibre broadband.

I am not prepared to vote for the Labour party amendments. I thought they were good when I first skimmed through them, but they place no consequential requirements on the Government. If the Government do not support my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury’s amendment, I will vote for it, if she presses it. I am also minded to change my opinion of the whole project, mindful that my constituents have not been given satisfaction and mindful that their lives will be turned upside down for a long period by this project, and to vote against the Bill on Third Reading unless I hear otherwise from the Minister.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): It has been a pleasure to hear so many passionate speeches about the power of transport to transform the outcomes of our constituencies and our country. Even though there have been some strong speeches from Members who have HS2 running through their patches—obviously they defend their patches and constituents—we have heard too about the transformative nature of HS2.

There is no denying that HS2 is a large infrastructure project—it is the largest of its kind in Europe—but it is also absolutely key as it links up eight of our 10 great cities. It will be transformative not only because it will increase capacity and reduce the time it takes to reach eight of our top 10 cities, but because, along the way, it will smash the north-south divide, creating jobs and opportunities for people in the midlands and the north.

I need to respond to quite a few Members and go through each of the new clauses, so I will be as swift as I can. I thank the shadow Minister for her comments supporting the project as a whole and her recognition of the number of jobs that will be created along the route and in the supply chain. At the peak, there will be 30,000 jobs, most of them outside London. I also welcome the comments about the urgent need to get on and deliver this vital infrastructure project and about how it is about not just speed but capacity.

I could talk about my passion for the project, but I thought it might be relevant, considering that we are sitting here in the middle of London talking about

[Ms Nusrat Ghani]

those who are supportive of HS2 and those who are critical of it, if I mentioned voices that do not often get mentioned in the Chamber. The Birmingham chamber of commerce has said:

“HS2 is a game changer for our region as Birmingham will proudly sit at the centre of a brand new network”.

Judith Blake from Leeds City Council said:

“HS2 will be transformational for Leeds and the region”.

Leader of Derby City Council, Chris Poulter, said:

“Whist I’m aware that there have been some concerns about the impact of HS2; we mustn’t lose sight of the benefits to Derby, and the wider Midlands area.”

There was also a fantastic article put together by the leaders of Manchester, Leeds and Newcastle and the Mayors of Greater Manchester and the Liverpool city region. These people represent 15.4 million people, and they say there is no realistic alternative to the delivery of HS2, which we know is key to delivering Northern Powerhouse Rail as well. I am concerned that sometimes the criticism comes from so far south. We should focus on the needs and aspirations of people in the midlands and the north.

Mr Wragg: I am probably as much from the north as Andy Burnham—I am from Greater Manchester—and I am critical of HS2 today. Although my constituents are unaffected, they are none the less aware of the scale of the increase in the expenditure and would consider it a waste of money as much as any Member from the south.

7.15 pm

Ms Ghani: The people I mentioned have all made it very clear that they do not think it is a waste of money. I can confirm for my hon. Friend and others that there is only one budget for HS2, and it is £55.7 billion. The bit we are talking about today, phase 2a, is £3.5 billion. The benefit-cost ratio is £2.30 for every £1 spent. There will always be people—we have heard some today—who will never support the project because of its impact in their constituencies, but we must not deny the positive impact it will have on the whole of our country.

I want to take a moment to refer to some of the contributions to the debate before I get to the new clauses. I know that hon. Members will be listening very closely to the words I use. My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) has been an incredibly passionate advocate for his constituency. I wanted to mention his staff member who has spent years dealing with constituent complaints, but I forgot his name.

Jeremy Lefroy: His name is James Cantrell. I am sure his situation is the same as that of staff in many other colleagues’ constituency offices.

Ms Ghani: I want to put on the record my thanks to James for doing such fantastic work. My hon. Friend raised an important point. It should not be up to Members and their staff to continually liaise between HS2 and their constituents. It is HS2’s job to ensure that the community engagement is appropriate and done with humility and that cases are dealt with swiftly.

My hon. Friend once again challenged the budget. As I said, it is £55.7 billion. It is the job not only of the Department but of the chairman and the CEO to keep budgets tight. He also talked about spoil and its impact on traffic in his constituency. It is expected that 92% of excavated material generated by phase 2A will be used across the HS2 route and that 4% will be directed to local placement along the route. I am more than happy to meet him again to go through his issues and will make sure that Highways England is in the room as well. He mentioned three cases—the golf club, Hopton and Hanchurch. I have an update on all three and am more than happy to put them in writing to save time on the Floor of the House. If he wishes to meet, I can also provide him with an update then, but progress is being made. I understand from my notes that they are more or less satisfied with the arrangements made with HS2.

I welcome the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison). I agree about the transformative nature of public transport and its impact on national prosperity, which is why we are making such a significant investment in our railways. I remind her, because I know it is incredibly important to Copeland, that there will be more than £2.9 billion of trans-Pennine rail upgrades—the single biggest project commitment in control period 6.

My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) asked repeatedly what HS2 would do for her constituency. At its peak, there will be more than 300,000 people travelling daily on this line. It will connect eight of our top 10 cities. Two technical colleges are already in place to make sure that our youngsters and older people who want to reskill have a job for life. It will connect our country. I completely understand, as a constituency Member, how Members should and must fight for the best deal for their constituents, but this will be a transformative project. All the cases raised today by Members on both sides of the House of where HS2 Ltd is not acting as swiftly as it could be have been put on the record, and I will do my best to take forward any cases that remain undealt with.

I hesitate to respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) in case he makes a passionate intervention, but I cannot see him in the Chamber. No doubt he will come back in. I thank the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) for her support for the Bill. She referred to businesses. There are 2,000 businesses already involved on the line and 9,000 people working on the line, and 98% of the businesses involved in HS2 are small and medium-sized enterprises.¹ I have personally tasked HS2 with making sure that it makes it an easier process for smaller businesses to bid for projects. I want this project to transform not just large but small businesses, making it easier for them to pitch for work.

The right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) spoke about investment in the north. I was lucky enough to be in the Chamber earlier with the Rail Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), and I can confirm that we are investing more than £40 billion in our existing network. Network Rail estimates that about 100 cities and towns could benefit from new or improved rail connections as a result of HS2. As some

1.[Official Report, 16 July 2019, Vol. 663, c. 8MC.]

of the passionate speakers have noted today, it is not an either/or project; we need HS2 as well as continued investment in our rail and road network.

I do not see my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) in the Chamber, so I will move on. As I am running out of time, I will now deal with the new clauses. I welcomed what the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) said about new clause 1, but I do not recognise the need for quarterly reporting. I think that once I have explained why, she will agree with me.

Let me first say something about the environment. The project is already bound not to exceed the likely significant environmental effects that were assessed and reported to Parliament. The environmental statement clearly sets out our approach to the monitoring, reporting and mitigation of environmental impacts during the construction of the phase 2a scheme, and follows industry best practice. Most important, the monitoring and reporting of individual environmental impacts must be tailored to the impacts in question. During phase 1 we are already publishing monthly and annual reports setting out compliance with air quality and dust commitments, and similar monthly reports on noise and vibration impacts are published.

Subject to Royal Assent, local environmental and management plans will be developed for each local authority along the phase 2a route. They will explain how the scheme will adapt to and deliver the required environmental and community protection measures in each local authority area. If we make a decision here today, we will tie the hands of local authorities, which will not be able to engage in important discussions. We should not, here in London, impose something separate and arbitrary that may not be locally appropriate. When authorities have those conversations with HS2 Ltd, they can make arrangements to receive monthly reports.

Contractors working for HS2 Ltd will be required to comply with the measures in the local environmental management plans in order to meet the environmental minimum requirements. HS2 Ltd will also consult statutory agencies and independent experts, such as the HS2 ecological review group, which will advise on the monitoring regime and report impacts on ecology and biodiversity. The hon. Lady said a lot about the need for local engagement, local empowerment and monthly reports. All that can and will take place if we allow it to happen, as it has in relation to other parts of the line. She may not have been aware that that was happening, but I think she will agree that if we accept her new clause we will not only increase costs, but create an unintended consequence whereby local authorities will lose their monthly reporting.

New clause 2 proposes a compensation scheme for tenants. We discussed that in the Public Bill Committee on 25 June, when I responded to a similar proposal. As I said then, the starting point is that the land compensation code does not shut out those who hold land, whatever the duration of their tenancies. It does not bar them from compensation. We have a responsibility to be absolutely accurate when we are talking about policies and the support that is provided. We may make people even more nervous about coming forward if they do not know what measures are available.

Most types of tenancy are already provided for under existing compensation, if they are impacted by the scheme. When they are not, the Government can use their flexible,

non-statutory compensation arrangements to provide support where appropriate in a typical case, which is the category into which most of these cases will fall. The amount of compensation payable is set by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. It applies to all Government-led infrastructure projects, and not just to HS2. Those arrangements have been debated, agreed and set by Parliament, together with a vast body of case law on the subject.

The hon. Lady may not be aware that HS2 Ltd has published a useful information note—"C15: guide to compensation for short term residential tenants"—which covers atypical cases. I am more than happy to sit down with her and explain it. I am also more than happy to ensure that, if necessary, the position is communicated to local community engagement forums as effectively as possible. I have previously hosted events in the House to enable Members on both sides of the House to manage particular scenarios with their constituents.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: I apologise for missing the start of the Minister's speech. I was chairing a debate in Westminster Hall.

Can the Minister assure me that the property registers and the holdings of properties will be accurate? I was recently given two lists of properties in my constituency that had been bought by HS2 Ltd, and they did not match. Properties that were missing from the second list had appeared on another list some years earlier. Can the Minister assure me that she will update the property registers, and will ensure that they are accurate in the first place?

Ms Ghani: My right hon. Friend has raised the important issue of transparency and the need for data to be up to date. Members of Parliament who are working hard for their constituents need to know exactly what data they are speaking about. I shall be happy to ensure that any case that my right hon. Friend raises is dealt with by HS2 Ltd, and also to ensure that there is even greater clarity about the compensation packages that are available.

Let me now deal with new clause 4. Phase 2a has been under independent scrutiny since its conception. All elements of high-speed rail have been subject to scrutiny since the outset, not least in the House, through the petitioning process, through Public Bill Committee scrutiny and debate, and also through independent scrutiny conducted by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority and the National Audit Office.

Let me assure the House that, while HS2 is making huge progress in supporting 9,000 jobs across the country and being backed by businesses and business leaders in the midlands and the north, we will continue to scrutinise the project. HS2 will boost economic growth across the UK, and we are already seeing the benefits in the midlands and the north. However, I do not see the benefits of a further environmental assessment, given that we have already consulted extensively. That includes a seven-month consultation on the route back in 2013, a scope and methodology consultation in preparation for the environmental impact assessment in 2016, a consultation on the working draft of the environmental impact assessment—also in 2016—a consultation on the environmental statement deposited alongside the Bill in 2017, and two more consultations on the environmental statement and supplementary environmental statement alongside the additional Bill provisions in 2018 and 2019.

[Ms Ghani]

I hope Members agree that a huge amount of scrutiny has already taken place. There is also a board, which was strengthened last year by a new chairman, Allan Cook, who works closely with the executive to review the capability and capacity of HS2. It is the job of the chair and the board to ensure that the entire programme continues under scrutiny. I do not see what more another review will achieve, apart from adding another layer of bureaucracy and another cost, given that there have already been so many.

Let me now deal briefly with new clause 5. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) for being so patient. She has cited some very complicated cases, some of which have taken a long time to resolve. I can only apologise on behalf of HS2 Ltd if it has not worked as efficiently as possible with her constituents, or in providing information about local schools.

Mr Paterson: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Ghani: Very briefly.

Mr Paterson: If my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) presses her new clause, will the Government encourage other Members to support it? While I have the Minister's attention, may I also ask her to address my point about schedule 17, which deals with the Town and Country Planning Act 1990? The local council must give permission for more than 24 heavy vehicles per day to travel down a route. My constituents in Woore will be afflicted by 300 per day.

Ms Ghani: I completely understand my right hon. Friend's frustration with the impact that the build is having on his constituency, but I am sure that he and his council would agree that this is better done sooner rather than later. I am more than happy to sit down with him to go through the lorry movements in his constituency.

On new clause 5, I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury that non-disclosure agreements are used for good reason, and not for any underhand purposes. I hope that when I list some of the good reasons for their use, she will understand—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. The Minister is trying to address points made in the debate, so it would be appreciated if we could listen to what the Minister is saying; there is a lot of chatter.

7.30 pm

Ms Ghani: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The NDAs that HS2 has are fundamentally to ensure that it can continue to work with businesses, communities and local authorities on issues that are competitive and sensitive. They enable conversations with companies and local authorities about options under consideration. They allow HS2 Ltd to make better recommendations to Government, and to develop better proposals, because it has had access to the right information when making decisions.

We must not forget that NDAs provide value to the taxpayer by reducing uncertainty and by helping to reduce generalised blight. For example, HS2 Ltd entered into such agreements with local authorities in the early stages of exploring route options. I am more than

prepared to ensure that HS2 Ltd, if it is able to, sits down with my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury and goes through every NDA case that she wants to bring forward. HS2 Ltd is not exempt from the national whistleblowing policy in primary legislation. It has not entered into any NDAs with any HS2 staff.

Antoinette Sandbach: HS2 has a number of subcontractors and contractors, and it has entered into NDAs with them. Under my new clause, an independent assessor would assess past NDAs. HS2 is incapable of even saying, in reply to a freedom of information request, how many NDAs it has. Given that it cannot comply with that request, I am concerned that the Minister is not in receipt of full, accurate information.

Ms Ghani: I would uphold my hon. Friend's concerns if they were valid. As I have said to her, HS2 Ltd has not entered into any non-disclosure agreements with HS2 staff, but when it is business-critical, it needs to be able to have confidential conversations. Agencies have to agree to NDAs. There are also processes in place; two sets of legal teams provide review. I am not sure that my hon. Friend wants an outcome in which a third legal team is put in place. That will not really help what she is trying to achieve, which is ensuring that HS2 does not have one-on-one NDAs; there are none of those with staff on the project.

Mr Ivan Lewis: Will the Minister confirm that what she said to the House a few moments ago is true—that no former member of HS2 staff has an element of non-disclosure in their redundancy package?

Ms Ghani: I cannot speculate on why people are made redundant. I can confirm that no member of staff is subject to a non-disclosure agreement.

Antoinette Sandbach: The Minister has explained why it is important for the efficiency of HS2 that it should have NDAs, but does she think that is right if it comes at the cost of constituents being able to respond to consultations? What if, for example, a council is withholding information under an NDA, or if employees who are at risk of losing their jobs at an affected site find that their company is covered by an NDA, and information cannot be disclosed to them? The NDA must surely be subject to a public interest test.

Ms Ghani: I feel that my hon. Friend is talking about particular cases in her constituency, on which I am more than happy to provide further information. I will work with her to ensure that she is able to represent her constituents, and that they get satisfactory responses from HS2 Ltd. It takes part in many local engagement events; it has met several thousand residents up and down the country. I do not believe that new clause 5 will deliver what she is asking for.

John Redwood: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Ms Ghani: I am running out of time; forgive me.

New clause 5 would slow down the process, and I do not think that it would work effectively. There is already a statutory framework in place for HS2, which includes the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. The new clause is designed to prevent HS2 Ltd from acting as a commercial organisation, and tries to prevent it allocating most of its money, which, I remind everyone in the

House, is from the public purse, directly to the programme. Unfortunately, I therefore cannot support the new clause tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury.

Rachael Maskell: I have listened carefully to the Minister, and in the light of the power of our new clause 4, I withdraw new clause 1.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 4

INDEPENDENT PEER REVIEW

(1) The Secretary of State must commission an independent peer review of the High Speed Rail (West Midlands to Crewe) project.

(2) The review must include consideration of the project's—

- (a) environmental impact,
- (b) economic impact,
- (c) engineering, and
- (d) governance.

(3) In this section, “independent” means it is carried out by persons who are independent of—

- (a) Government,
- (b) HS2 Ltd, and
- (c) persons contracted or subcontracted to carry out the scheduled works.

(4) In this section, a “peer review” is a review conducted by experts of equivalent professional qualifications, expertise and standing to the persons responsible for each aspect of the project set out in subsection (2).

(5) A report of the review in subsection (1) must be laid before the House of Commons within 12 months of this Act receiving Royal Assent.—(*Rachael Maskell.*)

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 213, Noes 253.

Division No. 433]

[7.36 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Champion, Sarah
Abrahams, Debbie	Chapman, Jenny
Ali, Rushanara	Charalambous, Bambos
Allen, Heidi	Coaker, Vernon
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Cooper, Julie
Amesbury, Mike	Cooper, Rosie
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Cooper, rh Yvette
Ashworth, Jonathan	Coyle, Neil
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Crausby, Sir David
Barron, rh Sir Kevin	Creagh, Mary
Beckett, rh Margaret	Creasy, Stella
Benn, rh Hilary	Cruddas, Jon
Berger, Luciana (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Gavin Shuker</i>)	Cryer, John
Betts, Mr Clive	Cunningham, Alex
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Blomfield, Paul	Daby, Janet
Brabin, Tracy	Dakin, Nic
Brennan, Kevin	De Cordova, Marsha
Brown, Lyn	De Piero, Gloria
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Debbonaire, Thangam
Bryant, Chris	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Burden, Richard	Dodds, Anneliese
Burgon, Richard	Doughty, Stephen
Butler, Dawn	Dowd, Peter
Cable, rh Sir Vince	Dromey, Jack
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Duffield, Rosie
Carden, Dan	Eagle, Ms Angela
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Eagle, Maria
Cash, Sir William	Edwards, Jonathan
	Efford, Clive

Ellman, Dame Louise
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Field, rh Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, rh Caroline
Forbes, Lisa
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Frith, James
Furniss, Gill
Gaffney, Hugh
Gardiner, Barry
George, Ruth
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Glendon, Mary
Goodman, Helen
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Grogan, John
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh David
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hayman, Sue
Hill, Mike
Hillier, Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hoey, Kate
Hollern, Kate
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham P.
Jones, Helen
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Khan, Afzal
Killen, Ged
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lamb, rh Norman
Lavery, Ian
Lee, Karen
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leslie, Mr Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon
Martin, Sandy

Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Mearns, Ian
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Norris, Alex
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pidcock, Laura
Platt, Jo
Pollard, Luke
Pound, Stephen
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rashid, Faisal
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Pat McFadden</i>)
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Ruane, Chris
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sherriff, Paula
Shuker, Mr Gavin
Siddiq, Tulip (<i>Proxy vote cast by Vicky Foxcroft</i>)
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, Cat
Smith, Eleanor
Smith, Laura
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Snell, Gareth
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sweeney, Mr Paul
Tami, rh Mark
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Turner, Karl

Twist, Liz
 Umunna, Chuka
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Thelma
 Watson, Tom
 West, Catherine
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Wilson, Phil

Woodcock, John
 Wragg, Mr William
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:

Jeff Smith and
 Colleen Fletcher

NOES

Afolami, Bim
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Barclay, rh Stephen
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Benyon, rh Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, Suella (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Steve Baker*)
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cartledge, James
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, Colin
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert (*Proxy Vote cast by Tom Pursglove*)
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Mims
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver

Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, rh Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Field, rh Mark
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Glen, John
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Luke
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Bill
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Hair, Kirstene
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Holloway, Adam
 Howell, John
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick
 Jack, Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil

Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kerr, Stephen
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Lancaster, rh Mark
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Masterton, Paul
 Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 Menzies, Mark
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Prisk, Mr Mark

Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Rutley, David
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe (*Proxy vote cast by Jo Churchill*)
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:

Amanda Milling and
 Mike Freer

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 5

NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENTS

(1) The nominated undertaker, or any subcontractors thereof, must not enter into any non-disclosure agreement with any party in connection with the scheduled works unless the assessor of non-disclosure agreements related to the scheduled works (“the assessor”) has certified that it is in the public interest.

(2) The Comptroller and Auditor General must appoint a person to be the assessor.

(3) The assessor must be—

- (a) independent, and
- (b) a current or former high court judge, higher judge or Queen’s Counsel.

(4) In this section, “independent” means independent of—

- (a) Government,
- (b) HS2 Ltd, and
- (c) persons contracted or subcontracted to carry out the scheduled works.

(5) The assessor must undertake his or her work with a presumption in favour of transparency and public accountability in matters connected to the scheduled works.

(6) The assessor must review any non-disclosure agreement between the nominated undertaker, or any subcontractors thereof, and any party in connection with the scheduled works and in place before this section comes into force to certify whether it is—

- (a) in the public interest, or
- (b) not in the public interest.

(7) The assessor may not determine that a non-disclosure agreement is in the public interest for the purposes of subsection (1) or (6) except for the reason that it is justified because of exceptional commercial confidentiality.

(8) If the assessor certifies under subsection (6) that a non-disclosure agreement is not in the public interest that non-disclosure agreement immediately ceases to have effect.

(9) In this section, a “non-disclosure agreement” means any duty of confidentiality or other restriction on disclosure (however imposed).”—(*Antoinette Sandbach.*)

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 217, Noes 246.

Division No. 434]

[7.49 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Heidi
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, Jonathan
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Barron, rh Sir Kevin
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana (*Proxy vote*
cast by Mr Gavin Shuker)
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blomfield, Paul
Brabin, Tracy
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris

Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Cable, rh Sir Vince
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Cash, Sir William
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Jenny
Charalambous, Bambos
Coaker, Vernon
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Coyle, Neil
Crausby, Sir David
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim

Daby, Janet
Dakin, Nic
De Cordova, Marsha
De Piero, Gloria
Debonnaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dodds, Anneliese
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Dromey, Jack
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Dame Louise
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Field, rh Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, rh Caroline
Forbes, Lisa
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Frith, James
Furniss, Gill
Gaffney, Hugh
Gardiner, Barry
George, Ruth
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Glindon, Mary
Goodman, Helen
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Grogan, John
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh David
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hayman, Sue
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Hill, Mike
Hillier, Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hoey, Kate
Hollern, Kate
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Darren
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham P.
Jones, Helen
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Khan, Afzal

Killen, Ged
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lamb, rh Norman
Lavery, Ian
Lee, Karen
Lefroy, Jeremy
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Loughton, Tim
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon
Martin, Sandy
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Mearns, Ian
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Moran, Layla
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Norris, Alex
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pidcock, Laura
Platt, Jo
Pollard, Luke
Pound, Stephen
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rashid, Faisal
Rayner, Angela
Redwood, rh John
Reed, Mr Steve
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma (*Proxy vote*
cast by Mr Pat McFadden)
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Ruane, Chris
Sandbach, Antoinette
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Seely, Mr Bob
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sherriff, Paula
Shuker, Mr Gavin
Siddiq, Tulip (*Proxy vote cast*
by Vicky Foxcroft)

Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily

Timms, rh Stephen
 Turner, Karl
 Twist, Liz
 Umunna, Chuka
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Thelma
 Watson, Tom
 West, Catherine
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Wilson, Phil
 Woodcock, John
 Wragg, Mr William
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Colleen Fletcher and
Jeff Smith

NOES

Afolami, Bim
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Barclay, rh Stephen
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Benyon, rh Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Braverman, Suella (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Steve Baker*)
 Brereton, Jack
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cartledge, James
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, Colin
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert (*Proxy vote cast by Tom Pursglove*)
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Mims

Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, rh Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Field, rh Mark
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Glen, John
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Luke
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Bill
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Hair, Kirstene
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy

Hart, Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Holloway, Adam
 Howell, John
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick
 Jack, Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Kennedy, Seema
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Lancaster, rh Mark
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Masterton, Paul
 Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 Menzies, Mark
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, Jesse

O'Brien, Neil
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Rutley, David
 Scully, Paul
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe (*Proxy vote cast by Jo Churchill*)
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John

Wiggin, Bill
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wood, Mike
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Amanda Milling and
Mike Freer

Question accordingly negated.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):

Consideration completed. I will now suspend the House for no more than 10 minutes in order to make a decision about certification. The Division bells will be rung two minutes before the House resumes. Following my certification, the Government will be tabling the appropriate consent motion, copies of which will be available shortly in the Vote Office and will be distributed by Doorkeepers.

8.3 pm

Sitting suspended.

8.7 pm

On resuming—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I can now inform the House that I have completed certification of the Bill, as required by the Standing Order. I have confirmed the view expressed in Mr Speaker's provisional certificate, issued on 24 January 2018. Copies of my final certificate will be made available in the Vote Office and on the parliamentary website.

Under Standing Order No. 83M, a consent motion is therefore required for the Bill to proceed. Copies of the motion are now available. Does the Minister intend to move the consent motion?

Ms Ghani indicated assent.

The House forthwith resolved itself into the Legislative Grand Committee (England) (Standing Order No. 83M(3)).

[DAME ROSIE WINTERTON *in the Chair*]

8.8 pm

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Rosie Winterton): I remind hon. Members that, if there is a Division, only Members representing constituencies in England may vote. I call the Minister to move the consent motion.

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Committee consents to the following certified clauses of, and Schedules to, the High Speed Rail (West Midlands – Crewe) Bill:

Clauses and Schedules certified under SO No. 83J as relating exclusively to England and being within devolved legislative competence

Clauses 1 to 33, 35, 37 and 40 to 62 of, and Schedules 1 to 28 and 30 to 32 to, the Bill (Bill 397).—(*Ms Ghani.*)

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): We should not let these sittings of the English Parliament go completely unremarked. In particular, it is good to see the Secretary of State for Transport in his place because, of course, as Leader of the House he introduced the EVEL—English votes for English laws—processes in which we now rejoice.

As you said, Dame Rosie, as the Member for a Scottish constituency, I am completely diminished in these proceedings, having no opportunity to vote, but I am glad the House had an opportunity to do so earlier. One day, as I have said before, Members from England will speak in the Legislative Grand Committee but, once again, I fear we are to be disappointed this evening.

Question put and agreed to.

The occupant of the Chair left the Chair to report the decision of the Committee (Standing Order No. 83M(6)).

The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair; decision reported.
Third Reading

8.10 pm

Ms Ghani: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

In 2015, the Government decided to accelerate the construction of the section of High Speed 2 between the west midlands and Crewe. This has become known as phase 2a. Our intention is to open this section of railway earlier than the rest of phase 2, to start bringing the benefits of the new railway to the north as soon as we can. Today, we can give an unequivocal statement that we are investing in our rail network, and in the midlands and north of England. This House has already given its backing to the building of phase 1 of High Speed 2, paving the way for the first new railway north of London in more than 100 years. Our creaking rail network, which the Victorians took the bold step of building, has continued to serve us well, perhaps beyond the dreams of the visionaries who brought it to us. However, it is bursting at the seams, with more passengers than ever before, and certainly more than were ever envisioned. We have exhausted the options for just “improving” our existing west coast main line; 60% of the peak capacity from the £9 billion west coast route modernisation project, completed as recently as 2008, had already been used by 2014, so we can have no more sticking plasters.

I am delighted that the Bill for phase 1 received cross-party support. High Speed 2 was a 2017 manifesto commitment of not just my party but Her Majesty's official Opposition. We all recognise that High Speed 2 is needed, not least because it will reduce congestion on our important rail transport arteries—it will also increase capacity. Adding an entirely new line between the west midlands and Crewe will increase capacity elsewhere on our existing rail network.

Michael Fabricant *rose—*

Ms Ghani: I will be delighted to give way to my hon. Friend, as I referenced him earlier, but he was not in the Chamber.

Michael Fabricant: I think that if my hon. Friend, and she is my friend, had been in the Chamber earlier, she would have heard a number of interventions. May I invite her to check *Hansard*? Perhaps she is forgetting that I was in the Chamber. Perhaps now I should ask my question. She will know that there is no direct benefit to Lichfield, because the train does not stop in the area. She will also know, because I gave her a copy of a motion that was passed by Lichfield District Council, that it asks that

“all enabling works for HS2 in Lichfield District should be paused until the notice to proceed to main works...has been approved.”

It has not been approved yet and will not be until December. May I ask her to comment on that and reassure my local council that no works will go on in the district?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Before the Minister replies, I should say that I was in the Chair earlier. The Minister did look around eagerly during her wind-up for the hon. Gentleman and I fear he was not there.

Michael Fabricant: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I did speak to the Minister earlier and she suggested that I intervene only once Third Reading had begun and not during the earlier stages. I only wished to comply with her.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point of order. I think we should now probably just resume the debate.

Ms Ghani: I am not sure who is chastised there, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I am pleased to see that my hon. Friend is in his place. The notice to proceed and the business case will be in the public domain later this year, which is why we need to have enabling works, so that they support the “pre” work that needs to take place before the line can be built. I know that my hon. Friend loves progress and speed, and he would like our country to be seen as a progressive country that connects cities to cities. He will want to see this line built as fast as possible and he would never want to be held responsible for slowing it down.

Steve McCabe: The Minister will no doubt be aware, as are other Members, of how often the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) likes to refer in this Chamber to the wise words of the Mayor for the West Midlands Combined Authority. Does the Minister think he may be interested to know that when I met the Mayor this morning he was extolling the virtues of HS2, and insisting how important it was for his work and for the benefit of the entire region?

Ms Ghani: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, which gives me an opportunity to put on the record the phenomenal support that Andy Street gives this project. I do not doubt that my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield will have to try to deal with that later on.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Ms Ghani: I am afraid that I am going to have speed on and perhaps not take any more interventions.

As I have said before, the intention is to smash the north-south divide. This line is about progress, opportunity and skilled jobs, and radically improving connectivity between not just London and the midlands, but the midlands and the great cities of the north—it is about connecting eight of our 10 largest cities. This is more growth in the UK economy, more skilled jobs and more opportunities. In particular, these new opportunities will be brought to the midlands and the north earlier than before.

We debated the principle of the Bill thoroughly on Second Reading in January 2018, when we voted overwhelmingly for the Bill and commended it to a special Select Committee. As we know, phase 2a will take HS2 to the north. It is the enabler for phase 2b and the northern powerhouse rail. I must take a moment to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge), who ran the Committee

that oversaw that work on this phase of the Bill. The Committee received 302 petitions, which it had to work through. I apologise for not mentioning him during our earlier debate and I hope he will recognise our recognition of and respect for all the work undertaken by him in chairing that Committee.

As we know, the phase 2a Bill will help to take this project even further north and it is the enabler for phase 2b and the northern powerhouse rail. Without this section of the line, we cannot make progress towards a three-hour journey time to Scotland. Colleagues from across the House will know how much support there is for these two projects among business and local authorities.

I have said it before and I will say it again: there is no either/or between the second phase of High Speed 2 and northern powerhouse rail. High Speed 2 is vital to the provision of the network improvements that northern powerhouse rail will build on. I encourage all Members of this House to visit the places benefiting from High Speed 2 to hear the enthusiasm for the project—these include Birmingham, which I have no doubt my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield will be visiting soon—and to hear about the ambitious growth strategies at first hand. Leeds intends to use High Speed 2 to almost double the size of its city centre. The east midlands wants to use Toton to attract new homes and jobs; the Toton innovation campus has the potential for up to 10,000 new jobs to be created. Manchester’s continued prosperity can be ensured by High Speed 2 trains calling at Manchester Airport and Manchester Piccadilly. None of that is possible without the support for this legislation today.

This short section of railway will take trains beyond Birmingham, bringing the High Speed 2 network one step closer and unlocking phase 2b and northern powerhouse rail. We must not forget the two bespoke colleges, one in Doncaster and one in Birmingham, which are enabling more skilled young and older people to continue to build for our country. I do believe that we are responsible for bringing economic growth to our regions, and that is exactly what HS2 does, as well as improving capacity and connectivity between our great cities. I do believe we should be steadfast in unlocking the investment this project will bring. I, for one, want to look forward and be ambitious on behalf of our country. I want us to succeed as a nation, on the back of a high-speed, interconnected railway line. I urge you, Madam Deputy Speaker, my colleagues and the rest of the House to help support the next stage of HS2 railway by positively supporting the Third Reading of this Bill. I commend it to the House.

8.19 pm

Rachael Maskell: We have had an extensive debate on phase 2a of HS2. Although the Bill is not as robust as the Opposition would have wanted it to be, not least in respect of the accountability and transparency that are needed to make the project succeed, it is so important that we press ahead by investing in vital infrastructure that will benefit not only the midlands but the north and beyond.

We look back with nostalgia and admiration at the Victorian rail infrastructure that has served us for 200 years, but it was a very different story in this place at the time. If one reads the debates in which Members tussled over

different routes and projects, it feels like our approach to rail infrastructure has rarely progressed. One of my predecessors as MP for York, George Hudson, took things to the extremes; I assure the House that my dealings seek to achieve consensus and, ultimately, the right infrastructure across the transport network for our long-term future, and to do so transparently.

I formally put on record my thanks to the Clerks who have been so helpful trying to support our efforts to improve the Bill. As ever, we are indebted to their wisdom and advice in ensuring that we can use the mechanisms available to try to improve legislation. I thank all Members who have participated in debates and Committees to ensure that this part of HS2 is given the necessary scrutiny. In particular, I thank my hon. Friends the Members for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield) and for Ipswich (Sandy Martin) for their important role on the petitions Committee, and my hon. Friend the Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda), who kindly stepped in for me in Committee when I totally lost my voice.

It is always hard to pass legislation on infrastructure when many of us may not live to see the project's completion, or may live far from the line; however, HS2 is a vital legacy that we must pass on to the generations to come, because the whole country will benefit from this infrastructure project. We have heard about the power of jobs to transform people's lives. Whether in respect of building the infrastructure or the inward investment that we will see in towns and cities throughout the country, it is such an important project.

As we connect Birmingham to Crewe, over just 37 miles in phase 2a, confidence can start to build and investment can start to flow into places such as Crewe. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) is fighting so hard for that. She will regenerate her community and provide all with new opportunities as a result of the decision taken by the House today. But it does not end there: the rest of the midlands and the north can now be encouraged that they, too, will benefit, as we start the process of debating the next phases, including delivering for Scotland. All we need now is to fully integrate HS2 with the rest of our rail network, to start to see the real benefits.

I am sure the House will not have to wait long, because a Labour Government is in our sights. We will build a public rail service, under the leadership of my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald), that is there to serve towns and cities up and down the country. The power of modern rail services will not only transform communities and people's life chances, but the scale of investment will enhance our environment as we realise the potential of rail to change how we move goods and people across the land. Let us have confidence that, in getting the arteries right to the midlands and the north, we can restart the heart of the economies and communities that have longed to connect to the transformative power that inward investment and jobs will bring. Labour is about transforming lives, and that is why we will support the Bill today.

8.23 pm

Sir William Cash: Having listened to the Front-Bench speeches from both the Government and the Opposition, I could not disagree with both of them more. This Bill is

a travesty. It is an abomination. I heard the Opposition spokesman say just now that it will transform the midlands, providing huge opportunities. I do wish that she would understand from what I said earlier that my constituents most emphatically do not agree with one word that she said—or, for that matter, with what the Minister said, either—because, as far as we are concerned, HS2 is a disaster. It is causing havoc in my constituency, in respect of property ownership, the environment and the economics. The trouble is, as I said earlier, that not a single report is in favour of this monstrosity. This white elephant should be condemned to the rubbish dump.

On the question of highways, let me refer briefly to a meeting that took place only two or three days ago. It was attended by the regional director for Highways England and by my constituents, including the redoubtable Trevor Parkin. The meeting lasted for two hours, and new information emerged. HS2's detailed borrow-pit report, which was prepared for the National Farmers Union and finalised in April, undermines its claims about the 2,500 missing heavy goods vehicles at Hanchurch, as well as the false information regarding its ability to U-turn HGVs at Yarnfield that HS2 presented to Stone Town Council on 23 April. The meeting also covered the question of HS2 Ltd's unsafe and unacceptable proposals for changes to the Hanchurch interchange and the A519.

On 3 July, there was also a meeting in Hanchurch village hall on Whitmore Road with the residents of Newcastle Road, which is on the A519. HS2 Ltd had nothing new to say or to offer, and I am told that its four representatives

"got a very hard time from the local residents. We asked for the designers (Arup) responsible for the shambolic design work, together with the HS2 person overseeing their work, to be made available for a further meeting, but HS2 stonewalled on this saying that these people did not attend meetings."

We need the Minister to intervene to ensure that something actually happens. HS2 is not only an administrative disaster, costing a vast amount of money, with far too many people being hopelessly overpaid, but they just simply do not do their jobs properly.

For practical purposes, the question of lorry movements is a matter of the gravest concern to all my constituents, as, indeed, it is to my neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson).

As far as compensation is concerned, the amount of money made available to recompense people is inadequate. In addition, the way in which the compensation claims have been dealt with is completely unacceptable.

As was said in earlier interventions—my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) and I are completely on the same page on this—the bottom line is that the amount of money that is being spent requires a business case and one has not been provided. I voted for new clause 4 because I had hoped that might give an opportunity for a review, although the Labour party's proposals would take effect only after Royal Assent.

The legislation needs to be repealed. I say, with respect to Ministers, that it is disgraceful that, in the dying days of this Administration, this Bill should complete its procedure when it has been so severely criticised by so many reports. I will not go into them now; I set them out in the Westminster Hall debate, and Ministers know the ones to which I refer. The bottom line is that this is not the time to put this Bill through

[Sir William Cash]

and to give it the final seal of approval from the House of Commons. This should have been deferred until the review, promised by one of the candidates for the Conservative leadership who I hope will become Prime Minister, has had the opportunity to grapple with the terrible anxieties and difficulties that have been inflicted on my constituents. I condemn this Bill. It is a disaster; it is a white elephant; and it deserves to be sent to the graveyard.

The House divided: Ayes 263, Noes 17.

Division No. 435]

[8.29 pm

AYES

Afolami, Bim	Crouch, Tracey
Aldous, Peter	Dakin, Nic
Allan, Lucy	Davies, David T. C.
Andrew, Stuart	Davies, Glyn
Argar, Edward	Davies, Mims
Atkins, Victoria	Dinenage, Caroline
Bacon, Mr Richard	Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi	Docherty, Leo
Baker, Mr Steve	Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Barclay, rh Stephen	Donelan, Michelle
Bellingham, Sir Henry	Double, Steve
Benyon, rh Richard	Dowd, Peter
Beresford, Sir Paul	Doyle-Price, Jackie
Berry, Jake	Duguid, David
Blackman, Bob	Dunne, rh Mr Philip
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Ellis, Michael
Blunt, Crispin	Ellman, Dame Louise
Bowie, Andrew	Elphicke, Charlie
Brabin, Tracy	Eustice, George
Bradley, Ben	Field, rh Mark
Braverman, Suella (<i>Proxy vote</i> <i>cast by Mr Steve Baker</i>)	Fletcher, Colleen
Brereton, Jack	Ford, Vicky
Brokenshire, rh James	Foster, Kevin
Brown, Lyn	Fovargue, Yvonne
Buckland, Robert	Fox, rh Dr Liam
Burden, Richard	Frazer, Lucy
Burghart, Alex	Freeman, George
Burt, rh Alistair	Fysh, Mr Marcus
Butler, Dawn	Gale, rh Sir Roger
Cairns, rh Alun	Gardiner, Barry
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Garnier, Mark
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Gauke, rh Mr David
Carden, Dan	Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Gibb, rh Nick
Cartlidge, James	Glen, John
Caulfield, Maria	Glendon, Mary
Chalk, Alex	Gove, rh Michael
Charalambous, Bambos	Graham, Luke
Chishti, Rehman	Graham, Richard
Churchill, Jo	Grant, Bill
Clark, Colin	Grant, Mrs Helen
Clark, rh Greg	Grayling, rh Chris
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth	Green, Chris
Clarke, Mr Simon	Green, rh Damian
Cleverly, James	Greenwood, Lilian
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Griffiths, Andrew
Coffey, Dr Thérèse	Grogan, John
Collins, Damian	Gwynne, Andrew
Cooper, Rosie	Gyimah, Mr Sam
Costa, Alberto	Hair, Kirstene
Courts, Robert (<i>Proxy vote</i> <i>cast by Tom Pursglove</i>)	Halfon, rh Robert
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey	Hall, Luke
Crausby, Sir David	Hammond, Stephen
	Hands, rh Greg
	Hanson, rh David

Harper, rh Mr Mark	Morton, Wendy
Harris, Carolyn	Mundell, rh David
Harris, Rebecca	Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Harrison, Trudy	Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Hart, Simon	Neill, Robert
Hayes, rh Sir John	Newton, Sarah
Heald, rh Sir Oliver	Nokes, rh Caroline
Heapey, James	Norman, Jesse
Heaton-Jones, Peter	Norris, Alex
Henderson, Gordon	O'Brien, Neil
Herbert, rh Nick	Opperman, Guy
Hinds, rh Damian	Paisley, Ian
Hoare, Simon	Parish, Neil
Hobhouse, Wera	Pawsey, Mark
Hollingbery, George	Penrose, John
Hollinrake, Kevin	Percy, Andrew
Howarth, rh Sir George	Philp, Chris
Howell, John	Pincher, rh Christopher
Huddleston, Nigel	Poulter, Dr Dan
Hughes, Eddie	Prisk, Mr Mark
Hurd, rh Mr Nick	Pursglove, Tom
Jack, Mr Alister	Quin, Jeremy
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Quince, Will
Jenkin, Sir Bernard	Rashid, Faisal
Johnson, Diana	Rayner, Angela
Johnson, Gareth	Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Jones, Andrew	Reynolds, Jonathan
Jones, rh Mr David	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Jones, Gerald	Robinson, Gavin
Jones, Graham P.	Robinson, Mary
Jones, Mr Marcus	Rodda, Matt
Jones, Susan Elan	Ross, Douglas
Kawczynski, Daniel	Rowley, Lee
Keegan, Gillian	Rutley, David
Kennedy, Seema	Scully, Paul
Kerr, Stephen	Shannon, Jim
Knight, Julian	Shapps, rh Grant
Kwarteng, Kwasi	Sharma, Alok
Lamont, John	Shelbrooke, Alec
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver	Simpson, David
Lewer, Andrew	Skidmore, Chris
Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Smith, Cat
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Smith, Chloe (<i>Proxy vote cast</i> <i>by Jo Churchill</i>)
Long Bailey, Rebecca	Smith, Henry
Lopez, Julia	Smith, Laura
Lopresti, Jack	Smith, Royston
Macleane, Rachel	Smyth, Karin
Main, Mrs Anne	Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
Mak, Alan	Spencer, Mark
Malthouse, Kit	Stephenson, Andrew
Mann, Scott	Stewart, Bob
Maskell, Rachael	Stewart, Iain
Masterton, Paul	Streeter, Sir Gary
Maynard, Paul	Stride, rh Mel
McCabe, Steve	Stuart, Graham
McDonald, Andy	Sturdy, Julian
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
McMahon, Jim	Sweeney, Mr Paul
Menzies, Mark	Swire, rh Sir Hugo
Merriman, Huw	Syms, Sir Robert
Metcalfe, Stephen	Tami, rh Mark
Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Thomas, Derek
Mills, Nigel	Thomson, Ross
Milton, rh Anne	Throup, Maggie
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Timms, rh Stephen
Moore, Damien	Tolhurst, Kelly
Mordaunt, rh Penny	Tomlinson, Justin
Morgan, rh Nicky	Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
Morgan, Stephen	Vickers, Martin
Morris, Anne Marie	Villiers, rh Theresa
Morris, David	Walker, Mr Charles
Morris, James	

Walker, Mr Robin
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittaker, Craig

Wiggin, Bill
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wood, Mike
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Amanda Milling and
Mike Freer

NOES

Bone, Mr Peter
Bridgen, Andrew
Bruce, Fiona
Cash, Sir William
Edwards, Jonathan
Fabricant, Michael
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Hoey, Kate
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam

Hopkins, Kelvin
Jones, Helen
Mackinlay, Craig
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Skinner, Mr Dennis

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr William Wragg and
Jeremy Lefroy

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time and passed.

Town and Country Planning

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):

Before I call the Minister to move motion 3 on town and country planning, I should inform the House that the Speaker has certified that, for the purposes of the Standing Order, it relates only to England and is within devolved legislative competence. I remind Members that the statutory instrument must therefore be approved by both a majority of all Members and of those Members representing constituencies in England.

8.42 pm

The Minister for Housing (Kit Malthouse): I beg to move,

That the draft Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications, Deemed Applications, Requests and Site Visits) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 10 June, be approved.

The regulations were laid before the House on 10 June 2019. If approved and made, they will remove a sunset clause in the existing 2012 fees regulations, thereby ensuring that local planning authorities can continue to charge fees for planning applications. Planning fees are an important source of income, supporting local authorities to have the resources and capacity to make effective planning decisions. It is therefore vital that the fees regulations remain in force. The regulations introduce a fee of £96 for prior approval applications for a larger single-storey rear extension to a house. If approved by this House, this new charge will come into effect 28 days after the regulations are made.

Planning application fees are crucial for a well-resourced, effective and efficient planning system. They provide local planning authorities with much-needed income to consider planning applications, which in turn provide new homes and deliver economic growth for our country. In January 2018 we raised planning application fees by 20%—the first uplift since 2012. This has increased income for the planning system and has enabled local planning authorities to improve their performance. We estimate that in England the total income raised through planning applications fees is £450 million. If there was no application fee, this cost would have to be funded by the council taxpayer.

I turn to the details of the regulations. First, the regulations propose to remove the sunset clause of 21 November 2019 contained in the existing 2012 fees regulations, the Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications, Deemed Applications, Requests and Site Visits) (England) Regulations 2012. By removing the sunset clause, local authorities will be able to continue to charge planning application fees, in accordance with the 2012 fees regulations, beyond that date. If the sunset clause were not removed, the fees regulations would cease to have effect after 21 November. This would mean that local planning authorities would no longer be able to charge fees for planning applications.

The 2012 regulations provided that there should be a review of their operation within five years, to ensure that they continued to achieve their objectives. The accompanying sunset clause meant that no action would be required if it was decided that the regulations were no longer necessary. I am pleased to confirm that the review was undertaken in 2017 and the outcome report

[Kit Malthouse]

laid before Parliament in December 2017. The review concluded that the 2012 fees regulations had achieved their objective. It confirmed that they ensured an effective planning application fee regime, which benefited both applicants and local planning authorities in providing for the proper consideration of planning applications. It is therefore appropriate that I bring these regulations before the House, to ensure that the planning application fees regime continues. The regulations will also ensure that those wishing to take forward development pay a fair fee and that local planning authorities have the resource and capacity they need to make high-quality and timely decisions.

Secondly, the regulations introduce a £96 fee for applications for prior approval for existing permitted development rights for a larger single-storey rear extension to a house. The prior approval process means that a developer has to seek approval from the local planning authority that specified elements of the development are acceptable before work can proceed. The matters for prior approval vary depending on the type of development, and those are set out in the relevant part of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015. A local authority cannot consider any other matters when determining a prior approval application.

The permitted development right for a larger single-storey rear extension to a house was made permanent by way of amendments to the general permitted development order on 25 May, but currently the associated application for prior approval required to exercise this permitted development right attracts no fee. Now that the right is permanent, it is appropriate that we should enable local planning authorities to charge and receive a fee for the work they undertake to process and determine the applications they receive.

Other comparable applications for prior approval have a £96 fee, and we consider that that would also be an appropriate fee for a larger single-storey rear extension to a house, as the cost to the local planning authority of handling these is similar. Although a fee of £96 is an additional cost on homeowners wanting to extend their homes, it is not considered fair that the cost of the applications should continue to be subsidised by all taxpayers. The fee is modest, at less than half of the £206 fee that would be required for a planning application to carry out works to a house were it not for the permitted development rights. It will provide local planning authorities with resources that may otherwise have been diverted from other planning applications.

In line with existing fees for planning applications to alter or extend a home, the draft regulations provide that the fee will not apply where the application is for development designed to provide means of access for a disabled person or facilities designed to secure that person's greater safety, health or comfort. That will mitigate the potential direct impact of the new fee on disabled persons, who might be considered more likely to make use of the permitted development right for larger home extensions.

We continue to keep the resourcing of local authority planning departments and where fees can be charged under review. We announced in the spring statement

that the accelerated planning Green Paper, to be published later this year, will look at new approaches for local authorities to meeting the costs of their planning service and delivering improved performance. In the meantime, the draft regulations will ensure that local authorities can continue to charge planning fees after 21 November, including the new prior approval fee, thus providing them with the important resources they need to consider such applications. I commend the regulations to the House.

8.47 pm

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his outline of this statutory instrument. The important first part of the SI ensures that the fee regime set out in the 2012 regulations is able to continue. Secondly, and perhaps more controversially, the SI amends regulation 14 of the 2012 regulations to include a £96 fee for an application for prior approval to build a larger rear extension to a dwelling house without the need for a full planning application to be made.

The Opposition do not seek to prevent the 2012 regulations from continuing, but we point the Government to their own consultation on devolving fee setting to local authorities. It would be good to have an explanation as to why the Government have failed to act on the outcome of their planning consultation, particularly on full cost recovery. As the Minister will know, the consultation found that there were substantial cross-party concerns that local authority planning departments do not have sufficient resources to provide an effective and wide-ranging service. The majority of respondents from all sectors supported increasing planning fees beyond the 20% increase already given by Government, often citing concerns about the low level of resourcing in local authority planning departments.

There are issues with local fee setting, as it may help resource planning departments better in areas of high growth but does little for those where development is more difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, the issue of getting more money to planning needs to be resolved urgently. Labour's planning commission has found that poor resourcing of planning departments is the most significant issue raised by communities, planners and developers alike. The Government need to set out clearly what they are going to do to ensure that all planning departments are properly funded.

Total expenditure on planning has fallen by almost 20% since 2010. That fall would be far higher were it not for the fact that spending has been propped up by a 50% rise in planning income. If we remove income from the equation, total net expenditure on planning has fallen by 42% on average, and by up to 60% in some regions, and that of course has led to a huge reduction in the number of public sector planners. In a recent report, the Royal Town Planning Institute showed that when a high number of applications are permitted, with fewer resources committed to each, the main loser may be local communities. Another crucial issue is that planning officers may, as a consequence, have less time truly to engage communities. The impact of austerity on planning is felt keenly by planning officers, who have to operate with fewer resources and to deal with the public dissatisfaction that can arise from that. It would be useful to hear how the Minister intends to address that issue.

The second part of the SI causes significant problems for us and, we think, for the country at large. Since 2013 Labour has been consistently against the ever increasing moves by the Government to replace proper planning permission with permitted development. The fee proposed here, £96 for prior approval for a large extension, is derisory. Large extensions, as the Minister should know from his mailbag, often cause considerable problems for neighbours and the issues involved can be complex, necessitating a great deal of work by local planning officers which will not be covered by the £96 fee by any stretch of the imagination. Large extensions should have to obtain planning permission, and bypassing communities with greater use of permitted development is just wrong.

A recent report from Shelter has made clear the enormous damage the ever increasing use of permitted development has had on the quality of our built environment, highlighting that local authorities can turn down PDR developments only in very limited circumstances, and cannot require social housing contributions or enforce space standards covering minimum sizes, leading to the delivery of rabbit-hutch homes. PDR allows developers to build the slums of the future.

An open letter from the Local Government Association in January 2019 made clear the extensive problems caused by permitted development, as did the large number of people who responded to the Government's consultation on the extension to permitted development rights just recently. That includes the loss of more than 10,000 affordable homes in the last three years.

We think that the time is long overdue for the Government to get rid of permitted development and ensure proper planning and decent quality homes through the planning determination system and enabling local authorities to charge on a cost-recovery basis. Planners do a difficult and at times a controversial job, and it is time for the Government to resource the system properly.

8.53 pm

Kit Malthouse: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her remarks. I accept the challenge that if we are to hit 300,000 homes a year by the mid-2020s we need to find a way to get more resources into local planning departments. It will be one of the constraints on volume, and we are looking at what we can do to enhance their ability to deal with planning applications swiftly and in volume. When we bring out the accelerated planning Green Paper later in the year, no doubt that will be included.

I also recognise the hon. Lady's longstanding opposition to permitted development rights, although I fear she may be wrapping what is generally a domestic extension by a householder—normally in non-contentious situations—into her general opposition to PDR across the piece. The PD rights for domestic extensions have proved to be successful, and of course we made them permanent

earlier this year. I note that when we did so—the hon. Lady and I were both present for that SI—she did not divide the Committee and oppose it.

I recognise the issues that the hon. Lady raises, but £96 will help to mitigate some of the impact of PDR on local authorities and we therefore think it judicious to introduce it in line with many other PDR charges that local authorities are interested in. I commend the regulations to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications, Deemed Applications, Requests and Site Visits) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 10 June, be approved.

Business without Debate

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 17 July,

(1) proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mel Stride relating to the Gemma White report may continue, though opposed, for three hours after their commencement, and shall then lapse if not previously disposed of; and

(2) proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mel Stride relating to the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme may be entered upon at or after the moment of interruption and may continue, though opposed, for one hour after their commencement, whereupon the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion if not previously disposed of; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Iain Stewart.*)

COMMITTEES

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): With the leave of the House, I will take motions 5 to 8 together.

Ordered,

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT COMMITTEE

That Rebecca Pow be discharged from the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee and Philip Davies be added.

ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT COMMITTEE

That Dan Poulter be discharged from the Environmental Audit Committee and Jeremy Lefroy be added.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE COMMITTEE

That Martin Vickers be discharged from the Health and Social Care Committee and Anne Marie Morris be added.

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

That Kemi Badenoch be discharged from the Justice Committee and Andrew Griffiths be added.—(*Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

Northern Ireland Motorsport Taskforce Report

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Iain Stewart.)

8.55 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I wish to bring to the attention of the House the Northern Ireland motorsport taskforce report. I do so 24 hours after the historic victory by Lewis Hamilton—a wonderful British racer and a wonderful ambassador for motorsport across the United Kingdom and across the world—who achieved his sixth victory at Silverstone. We wish him and his family well as they enjoy the celebration of that event.

Northern Ireland, and indeed Ireland, boasts a rich history of motorsport prowess. It was Ireland in 1903 that gave British racing teams their green colour. Motorised transport was compelled not to exceed 20 mph on British roads, but the then Gordon Bennett cup—held in Ireland, which was part of the Union, and a very happy part of the Union, I might add—had no such restrictions on speed, and British teams painted their motor vehicles green out of respect for the roads they were racing on.

Today, Northern Ireland continues that rich history of motorsport. Jonny Rea, who is the four times world superbike champion, hails from just outside my constituency, and he is on his way to his fifth world championship. He is better than any other racer from these islands in terms of the history he has given us. Indeed, even Carl Fogarty, a wonderful British racer, was not able to exceed the record of Jonny Rea.

The Dunlop family hail from my constituency. There is no better name in motorsport racing than Joey Dunlop. He, his brother Robert Dunlop, and Robert's sons William and Michael all competed on the roads and on some of the tracks, winning Formula 1 medals for their prowess. Sadly, of course, Joey, Robert and William all lost their lives to the sport they loved.

Brian Reid is a Formula 2 champion from Northern Ireland, although on four wheels, not two. Colin Turkington, from Portadown, is the current British touring car champion, followed quickly behind by Chris Smiley from Carrickfergus. In Formula 1, we have also had the honours of Eddie Irvine, John Watson and many more. It tells us a bit about the history of motorsport that it beats through the veins of many people in Northern Ireland. Indeed, world rally teams have not only co-drivers but engineers from Northern Ireland developing the sport.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Obviously, North Antrim features highly in what my hon. Friend has said. However, my constituency also features highly when it comes to motorsport. At Kirkistown, we have motorbikes, racing cars and other vehicles. That is an important part of our history. Does my hon. Friend agree that, in the future, there needs to be an opportunity for a major motorsports event for Northern Ireland—something special that could set the sport off?

Ian Paisley: I really appreciate my hon. Friend intervening when he did. He is absolutely right. There has been some investment in Northern Ireland in local tracks such as Kirkistown in his constituency. Other tracks should be developed and encouraged to be developed,

and they should also be resourced. Of course, they enhance the development of motorsport in Northern Ireland. If young kids who are starting off go karting do not have the tracks available, they will not be able to race and to develop their skill. Indeed, many of them have to come across to tracks on the mainland, and their talent is lost to Northern Ireland. I will come on to the point my hon. Friend raises about a major motor event. I think he is on to something important.

The motorsport taskforce was announced in January 2017, after a fatality at a road race on 14 May 2016 where a young man called Malachi Mitchell lost his life. The then Northern Ireland Minister at the Department for Communities, Mr Paul Givan MLA, established a taskforce to examine safety measures in motorsport and the contribution motorsport makes to Northern Ireland's economy. It was a visionary decision by the then Minister, as no serious research had been carried out into the contribution of motorsport to the Northern Ireland economy up to that point. It also set in place a major contribution to road racing safety. In fact, the Minister's intervention resulted in the highest spend ever on road racing safety measures in Northern Ireland: the Department for Communities contributed over £500,000 to road safety measures.

Racing on our roads can never be entirely safe. It can never be without challenges. It will always be a high-octane, high-risk sport, but there are measures that can mitigate the risks for both competitors and spectators alike. The Minister's intervention and his Department's spend on special safety bales, special lights and other measures, which can be shared around race tracks and other race events, has been critical in ensuring that safety has become a priority on our road circuits. In two weeks' time the Armoy road race will take place, and it will be able to share with other road race events some of the special safety equipment that is now available. That will improve safety. Out of a tragedy, that major spend has been allowed to take place.

Jim Shannon: My hon. Friend will of course know that my brother Keith raced motorbikes. Sixteen years ago this August, he had a very serious accident. He came off his bike and was seriously injured both physically and mentally. It will stay with him for the rest of his life. He is still madly keen and interested in motorbikes. It is very important that we make the improvements my hon. Friend refers to, so that racing can continue on the roads of Northern Ireland.

Ian Paisley: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I remember watching his brother race. He was a brave rider and he thoroughly enjoyed the sport he participated in. The ability to spend significant money on safety measures is a way to develop the sport and to encourage people to come into the sport in the knowledge that they will be as protected as much as possible.

The taskforce was announced in January 2017. Its terms of reference were to examine the potential contribution of motorsport to Northern Ireland in the context of its being a culturally significant sport; to determine how motorsport can best address sports development, safety, marketing and tourism; and to engage as widely as possible with all those with an interest in the sport to inform its findings and to develop an action plan to ensure that the potential of motorsport is maximised in all its aspects.

I was given the honour of being asked to be the independent chairman of the taskforce. We brought together organisations and various Government Departments to be a part of the taskforce. The Department for Communities, the Department for Infrastructure, which is responsible for our road service in Northern Ireland, Invest Northern Ireland, Tourism Northern Ireland, Sport Northern Ireland and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives all contributed and have been full-time members of the taskforce for the past two years. We also drew on the secretariat from the Department for Communities, and I pay tribute to Government Departments in Northern Ireland. They stepped up to the plate and gave their very best people to the taskforce, allowing me as chairman to have at my fingertips the best people to discuss the development and future of a very important sport in Northern Ireland. I pay tribute in particular to the Department for Communities for the way in which it organised the secretariat for the last two years of the taskforce.

We were able to bring to the taskforce the various governing bodies that organise motorsport in Northern Ireland. The 2 & 4 Wheel Motorsport Steering Group, which is the overall umbrella group, the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland (Ulster Centre) Limited, the North of Ireland Karting Association, the Association of Northern Ireland Car Clubs and the Motorcycle Racing Association Ireland Limited all made major contributions to the taskforce report. They made themselves freely available and allowed us to cross-examine them and go through the evidence of the motorsport organisations.

We also heard from key event organisers. We have some major racing events, none more so than the Ulster grand prix. We also have major motocross events and, of course, the North West 200. The organisers of those privateer events also gave us evidence.

The most compelling evidence that we received was from the men and women behind the visor—the people who champion and participate in the sport. They included Maria Costello MBE, the late William Dunlop, Alastair Seeley, Chris Smiley, Colin Turkington and Graeme Irwin, all of them involved in either motocross, four-wheel racing, road racing or on-track racing. Each of them gave us a contribution that was unparalleled in terms of what they really need as competitors. They demonstrated to us the gaps that exist and how they need total confidence in the people around them, in the marshalling of races and in the many volunteers who contribute to motorsport. Motorsport relies on an army of volunteers to allow it to carry out the very best races. I mentioned William Dunlop, who made a major contribution to us. A few weeks later, unfortunately, he lost his life in the Republic of Ireland participating in the sport that he loved. The entire taskforce was moved by the contribution that he made and by him telling us about what he required as a participant and what he would like to see happening. The first part of the report was dedicated to William and his family as a mark of respect to him.

There are four governing bodies that organise motorsport in Northern Ireland. Together, they have about 80 member clubs and about 6,000 club participants, the vast majority of whom are male. A considerable number of them are in their early 20s and 66% of the membership are involved in four-wheel motorsport, so overwhelmingly it is four-wheel motorsport that Northern Ireland

contributes to. We are often considered to be the country of two-wheel motorsport, but four-wheel motorsport is an area where we make a significant contribution.

We decided to carry out an analysis of how much the sport is worth to Northern Ireland, and it was astounding. After about a year and a half of research—the first time that such research was carried out—we found that the gross annual economic impact of motorsport to the Northern Ireland economy is in excess of £100 million. Each year, about £60 million is spent in the supply chain by people participating in the sport. Major motor events raise about £10 million a year for the economy and minor events contribute about £15 million to it. The promotional benefit in how we are able to market our little country is worth about £20 million to our economy.

Jim Shannon: My hon. Friend is gracious and kind in giving way again. When it comes to the army of volunteers and the thousands of participants in motorsport in Northern Ireland, the spin-off is the tourism potential, which he rightly refers to. Does he agree the bed nights for the local economy, along with the clear potential for more, mean that we should insist on more funding? If we can spend and speculate more for the future, we can reap rewards through the report.

Ian Paisley: My hon. Friend has identified that there is a significant opportunity. The volunteers he mentions need to be properly recognised. The report identifies that this army of volunteers is now so well trained that it could be a provider of training for people wanting to learn about the sport, not only in Northern Ireland but across other parts of the UK. The volunteers could also be used at many other events. As the House knows, later this week we are going to have one of the largest ever events in Northern Ireland: the Open. The volunteer expertise that Northern Ireland now has at its fingertips could be utilised for other similar events.

Earlier, in one of my hon. Friend's interventions, he asked whether there were other events we could be putting on. The Minister will not be surprised to hear me say that yes, there are. I would love to see a world rally championship round coming to Northern Ireland. We have John McGrillen, the head of Tourism Northern Ireland, saying that getting it in Northern Ireland is a real prospect and, importantly, the head of WRC saying he wants to take the sport to Northern Ireland. That is an opportunity that we should not miss. It would make the Open we are about to have in Northern Ireland look like small fry in terms of world marketing opportunities, world access to television rights and, importantly, spectator opportunities. Moreover, it would not just take place in one corner of Northern Ireland; a WRC event would take place not only in the city of Belfast, but in the north of Northern Ireland, and in the east and west. These major events suck in the entire population. The benefit and enjoyment of the event would be for all.

We need these actions to sustain the existing economic impact by improving the viability of major events, we need to review who is best placed to deliver motorsport events in the future, and we need to see improved promotion of motorsport events. By and large, these events just happen in Northern Ireland; they need to be better promoted. I think the organisers recognise that, but they are so busy, wrapped up in delivering their own

[Ian Paisley]

sport to their own sector, that they cannot get off the dance floor, if you like, take the overall view and ask what is the best strategic approach.

The Minister will be pleased with the thrust of the report. We are not asking for money—for a change. We are asking for support to put in place a sustainable strategy for the entire sector, and the Government can help with that by capacity building and by pointing in the right direction. If they then come up with a strategy that requires resourcing—from the private sector as well as the public sector—they could help make sure it is done in a sustainable and beneficial way. The safety of competitors, officials and volunteers is the top priority. It is what we spent most of our time discussing on the taskforce. We cannot ever lose sight of the dangers involved in the sport, but those dangers also give a huge thrill to competitors and observers, and we must be able to marshal and galvanise that for the benefit of the Northern Ireland economy.

The governing bodies should work together to maximise their own capacity. Motorsport clubs should be allowed to generate funding to maximise media coverage and attract new followers and new events. They should be permitted a renewed focus on the marketing of motorsports to a broader audience. For example, we would like to see the delivery of a schools programme to encourage young people to come forward. Lewis Hamilton's story is an amazing one of a young man who contributed everything. His family threw everything at karting and allowed him to come up through the ranks to be probably the world's greatest racing driver of all time. Can that happen again? That is the challenge we have thrown down. If we allow the proper resourcing and help and identify schoolboy and schoolgirl talent, yes it can, and there is no better place for that to come from than the place where petrol seems to flow through people's veins, and that is in Northern Ireland.

The governing bodies should work with the Department for Communities, Sport Northern Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland to develop an agreed partnership model for the delivery of the major motorsport events. I have already mentioned the WRC. Northern Ireland would be very keen to see the Government encouraging that. I am not going to talk about what happened in the House last week, but when it suits the Government, and when it suits this place, they can intervene in Northern Ireland and make things happen, and I appeal to them to give a fair wind to the development of the WRC in Northern Ireland next year. It can happen, and it should happen. I urge the Minister—who, I know, has a personal interest in this subject—to consider the opportunities, and to consider his own legacy: he could be the Minister who laid the foundations that allowed a WRC to happen in Northern Ireland.

The Department for Communities and Sport Northern Ireland should be allowed to promote talent and participation in Northern Ireland. The taskforce and I would like to see the establishment of a motorsport academy in Northern Ireland, and we have already had discussions with Ulster University at its sports excellence centre. Many of our sporting gentlemen and ladies pay for all their sports development. There is a lot of skill out there in our universities, and it ought to be possible

to capture some of the data. That could happen if we had a proper sports academy, dedicated to motorsport and those who engage in it.

The 2 & 4 Wheel Motorsport Steering Group should be allowed to develop a strategic plan to address issues that are of concern to all motorsports. I believe that that is key to the report: we need a strategy for the future of motorsport. I therefore commend the report to the Minister and the Government, and ask the Government to give it a fair wind so that it does not gather dust on a shelf, but gathers pace and achieves its objective.

9.16 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (John Penrose): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) on producing the report, with an awful lot of help from the various bodies that were involved in its creation, and also on organising the debate. He has made it clear just how many people and organisations across Northern Ireland, both in the motorsport racing sector and in industry, have contributed. He has managed to harness their energy and interests.

The hon. Gentleman was also good enough to point out that there had already been extensive involvement on the part of Northern Ireland civil service and Government organisations in and around Stormont. That, too bodes well, both for the quality of the report and for the direction in which the hon. Gentleman is urging not just me but, probably, the whole Stormont organisation—and, perhaps, Northern Ireland society as a whole—to progress.

The hon. Gentleman provided us with a couple of rather choice vignettes. I had no idea that British racing green is, in fact, better described as Northern Ireland racing green. That is the true history of it. I am now better equipped for games of “Trivial Pursuit” than I was before I came into the Chamber this evening.

As the hon. Gentleman said, petrol seems to run in the veins of many people of Northern Ireland, and there is a huge depth and breadth of talent there, not just among riders and drivers. He mentioned Jonny Rea, and then gave a huge list of champions who have hailed from Northern Ireland. He also rightly mentioned the large number of people who have been involved in the technical side of the sport. As I am sure we all know, the side benefits of that pool of skills—that pool of technical understanding and ability—are enormous, because they quickly rub off on other related sectors and supply chains. Manufacturing companies are then attracted to that pool of expertise, because they know that they can readily find high-quality skills in a particular area. That is true of Formula 1, for which the M4 corridor in Great Britain is already famous, but it is also true of a variety of other parts of the motorsport sector in Northern Ireland.

The hon. Gentleman was clear and helpful in listing all the Northern Ireland Departments, and all the organisations, involved in Northern Ireland motorsport that contributed to the report; I will not repeat the list. I am not sure how long it took to produce the report. It is not just a comprehensive piece of work; it is a labour of love, and perhaps not just for the hon. Gentleman. Whenever we meet people from the sector, we find that they are involved because they have a passion for it. It is not just that they like competing, although most of

them do; they love the noise, the smell, the technical mastery of machinery, and the manufacturing involved. There is an entire culture around motorsports that people get hugely immersed in, and which sucks them in. People can spend their entire lives involved with it. It can be an amazingly good career or a fascinating hobby, depending on their level of commitment.

As the hon. Gentleman describes it, a number of organisations in Northern Ireland motorsport have become so engrossed in the culture that, to use his phrase, they have not necessarily had time to get off the dance floor and think about how they might promote what they love to a broader audience. Yesterday's amazing victory in the cricket world cup has probably brought cricket to a wider audience in this country—to many people who would not necessarily have given it the time of day on Saturday, but are newly enthused because they now understand what other people were on about. I think that is the kind of transformation of interest and attention that he is trying to achieve for Northern Ireland motorsport, if I understood him correctly.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the world rally championship. It would be remiss of me not to pay tribute to him for being assiduous in this matter. It is not the first time that he has mentioned this topic to me; his constituents and others in the sector in Northern Ireland should know that he has discussed this with me on numerous occasions. To be fair, he is not the only Democratic Unionist party MP to have done so, but he has been one of the leading lights.

It is clear that an enormous amount of thought has gone into the report. There is an enormous amount of opportunity here as well. What comes across most strongly from the report is the kind of commercial and cultural opportunity that could be grasped. The hon. Gentleman will have hugely endeared himself to the Treasury, because he started off by saying that he was not asking for money, and that is a guaranteed way to get the attention of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and others on the Treasury Bench. Kudos to him for having understood that, and having grabbed our attention immediately. What he is asking for is capacity building; that is the phrase he used. He is asking for support for the principle, and for strategies for developing ideas. He

has got off to a tremendous start, because as I noticed and as he rightly points out, many Departments of the Northern Ireland civil service were involved in producing the report. He has clearly managed to get them engaged, which will be vital to future developments.

My Department and the Northern Ireland Departments will want to remain engaged in the development of any thinking on this issue, because if the opportunities can be developed and grasped, from that will come business cases and investment opportunities—perhaps private instead of public sector; investment opportunities. If we can harness the energy, expertise, and volunteer and commercial involvement that the report makes it manifestly clear are already there, commercial opportunities could very well blossom and develop. I think that is the point that the hon. Gentleman is aiming at.

In summary, we have here an incredibly promising report that shows what might be in Northern Ireland. It shows that we have a very high base and a very high starting point of passion, understanding and involvement, and an opportunity to go further. This could be an opportunity further to expand this part of Northern Ireland's economy and its skills base. As the hon. Gentleman has asked, I am very happy to be part of encouraging the Northern Ireland civil service Departments to remain involved. They are already involved, and I am sure that he will enthuse them still further. I certainly would not want to do anything to undermine that or slow it down. And he certainly has my interest as well.

I would be very happy to encourage him, as these ideas develop, and to provide him with backing in any way that we can, particularly as he started off by saying that he did not need cash, although he does need broader kinds of support. We will see what comes out of this, once those business cases come about and firmer ideas are developed. There may then be further conversations to be had, but in the meantime this is an excellent start in an incredibly promising area in which Northern Ireland already shines very brightly.

Question put and agreed to.

9.25 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 15 July 2019

[PHIL WILSON *in the Chair*]

BBC

4.30 pm

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petitions 234627, 234797 and 235653 relating to the BBC.

It is a great pleasure to be here under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. All three petitions relate to the BBC. One calls for a public inquiry on what the signatories perceive as bias in the BBC, another calls for the abolition of the licence fee, and the third is about the restoration of free TV licences for the over-75s.

As we have previously debated the licence fee, and with it a number of accusations of bias, I do not propose to spend much time on it this afternoon, because lots of people want to speak. But let me be clear: as Harold Wilson said, public inquiries take minutes and last for years, and they seldom solve anything—certainly nothing as subjective as perceived bias. Although the BBC sometimes gets things wrong, as any organisation does, I do not believe it is inherently biased in its news and coverage of current affairs. Indeed, we ought to remember that the BBC's news coverage is looked at around the world as a beacon of straightforward, unbiased news reporting. As a country, we ought to be proud of that. If it has a bias, it is probably towards London, as those of us who have sat through items about London stations on the national news will know. It does not reflect the regions and nations of this country well.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): The hon. Lady just said that we ought to be proud of the BBC. Does she acknowledge that, as a country, we are very proud of it? Not only is it one of this country's most popular institutions, but it is a source of great credit for this country around the world. Whatever mistakes it makes, they should be framed by that overall attitude.

Helen Jones: I agree. The reason for the BBC's popularity is that we maintain the model of public service broadcasting. People who want to get rid of the licence fee ought to remember that a public service broadcaster is free of commercial and sponsorship influence in its news, and that it provides a far wider range of channels and radio stations than that provided by broadcasters that aim at niche markets. In fact, the BBC's output has to cater for a whole range of tastes, including minority interests.

There is no doubt that the decision to end free TV licences for the over-75s, and to restrict them to people in receipt of pension credit, has damaged hugely the BBC's reputation. The decision has been met with almost universal condemnation. In fact, only the Taxpayers Alliance, which seems to get a lot of its funding from people who do not pay British tax, is in favour of it. Nevertheless, the real villain of the piece is not the BBC, but the Government. In 2017 they fought an election on a manifesto that promised to maintain free TV licences

for the duration of this Parliament, knowing full well that in 2015 they had entered into an agreement with the BBC that made it impossible.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that people are rightly outraged by that decision? They voted for the Conservative party because it had that promise in its manifesto. More than 4,000 pensioners in Barnsley are due to lose their TV licences, and a huge number of people have got in touch with me about the issue.

Helen Jones: My hon. Friend is right. The BBC was very foolish to accept that agreement with the Government, who did what we have seen them do so often: devolve the blame for their cuts. We have seen that time and again, particularly in relation to older people. The Government say they want a good system of adult social care, but they have consistently cut the funding for councils to pay for it, especially in the poorest areas and in those with the longest legacy of industrial diseases and ill health.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Have we not found through this that many people who are eligible for pension credit are not getting it? Those who are exempt will not have to pay for TV licences. Some £2,936,000 of pension credit is not being claimed in my constituency, so should we not write to people about that on the back of TV licences? Is it not time that we fixed both the BBC and the issue of pension credit?

Helen Jones: I will come in a moment to that very good point. Let us consider how else the Government have dealt with these issues. All people of pension age are entitled to a free bus pass, which was brought in by the Labour Government in 2001 and extended to cover the whole of England in 2008. The scheme is currently underfunded to the tune of about £652 million, because the Government keep reimbursing people based on 2005-06 fares. How long before it disappears?

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): A manifesto promise broken by this Government reads:

"We will maintain all other pensioner benefits, including free bus passes, eye tests, prescriptions and TV licences, for the duration of this parliament."

Does my hon. Friend agree that this broken promise is letting down not just older people, but trust in politics?

Helen Jones: I absolutely agree. We can see a pattern in the agreement with the BBC. The BBC was to take on the funding of free TV licences as the Government gradually withdrew their contribution, and then it would take on all such funding from 2020-21. In 2017-18, the cost of those licences was about £655 million. Last year the Government paid £468 million from the Department for Work and Pensions, and this year they will pay £247 million. That is an unsustainable funding model, and the Government knew that, or at least they ought to have known that—if they did not, then they are even more incompetent than I thought—when they entered into the agreement with the BBC.

To fund the licences, the BBC would need to close down channels or radio stations. A number of columnists have written about the money paid to the BBC's top

[Helen Jones]

earners. Some are grossly overpaid, and in my view—this is entirely subjective—some of the so-called talent are not very talented. However, restricting the top rate of pay to £100,000 would not meet the cost of the licences. Again, the Government must have known that, but they want to deflect the blame. They knew there would have been an outcry had they tried to amend or abolish the scheme, so they sent it off to the BBC. When the changes were made, they said, “Nothing to do with us, mate.” They are the “not me, guv” Government—the Arthur Daleys of public administration.

It is the Government who made the decision on TV licences, and it will be really damaging to older people in this country. If someone cannot get out and about, and no one visits them, the TV is their companion. If someone cannot afford to go out and socialise, the TV is their entertainment, their window on the world and a way of keeping their mind active. Unfortunately, that is the lot of many older people in this country. We do not respect or value our older people as we should. I declare an interest, because I am heading that way myself.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): As the hon. Lady will know, people of my generation always used to say, “Well, this is the BBC. It’s gospel. It’s the truth.” Does she share my concern that the BBC is not now as impartial as it should be and that we need to instigate reform in order to alter that perception, so that we can go back to the good old days of unbiased reporting of fact rather than personal perceptions and opinions?

Helen Jones: I am afraid that I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman—the BBC produces very good news coverage. People sometimes see bias when they are being told things that they do not want to hear—we must remember that.

Many older people—half of over-75s, in fact—are disabled. Age UK estimates that three in 10 are living in poverty or just above the poverty line. For those people, TV is a lifeline. Many of them live alone. I have one elderly friend who leaves the TV on almost all the time because it is another voice in the house.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Helen Jones: Not yet. I need to make some progress, as many hon. Members are waiting to speak.

The TV is another voice in a house that was once full of people and very active but is now silent. To remove free TV licences from such people is the most mean-spirited of Government cuts. It will make lonely people lonelier—15% of our older people are lonely—and it will further isolate those who are already isolated.

It has been argued that restricting free TV licences to those in receipt of pension credit is somehow fairer because they are more deserving—the idea of the deserving and the undeserving is very 19th century—but there are several answers to that proposal. First, by the time someone is 75, they have paid their dues to society: they have worked, paid their taxes, and many have brought up children. Giving those people a free TV licence is a way to give something back as a small recognition of their past contribution.

Another argument is that we need a mix of targeted and universal benefits, but the latter—as the Government are discovering—are much harder to cut, because most of the time they are a guarantee of continuance. That argument is based on the myth that there are lots of wealthy pensioners. Recently, a lot of publicity was given to research claiming to show that older people were on average £20 a week better off than those in work, but much of the coverage did not mention that those were the figures after housing costs. If we look at the figures before housing costs, we see that people in work are better off.

Yes, many people in the older age groups own their own homes outright—the figure is about 40% of those born between 1945 and 1965—but that leaves a lot of people paying rent. Some 30% are still paying mortgages, while those who own their homes outright have forgone other spending to pay for them. What do we have now—a Tory Government punishing thrift?

Those who attended the public consultation pointed out very forcibly that in many areas older people have more expenses than younger people. Their heating bills are bigger because they are often at home all day and feel the cold more. Many pay for social care; one lady, whose husband is in a nursing home, is seeing her savings disappear before her eyes because of that expense.

Those figures are for those on median incomes, which means that half of all pensioners are below that level. Age UK states that three in 10 over-75s are in poverty or just above the poverty line—that means 1.9 million people—and 20% cannot afford to go out and socialise even once a month, while 37% cannot afford a holiday away from home.

One reason not to tie TV licences to pension credit is that pension credit uptake has been stuck at 63% for years. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) said, that means that a lot of money goes unclaimed, including more than £4 million in my constituency and £3.5 billion nationally. The Government could have done something about that—an uptake campaign, for instance, or a simplification of the application process—but they have not done so because the lack of uptake means that they save not only on pension credit, but on the benefits that come with it.

Another reason not to tie free TV licences to pension credit is that those who will be hit hardest are just above the level for claiming pension credit and will lose far more of their income than wealthier people. Age UK estimates that 40% of over-75s would either not be able to afford a TV licence or could afford it only by cutting back on food or heating, for example. Those to whom we spoke made it clear that their generation were brought up to pay their bills and that they will pay them even if they have to cut back on something else. Letters from the licensing authority are already dropping through people’s letterboxes a year in advance, telling them that they will have to pay and causing real worry to many people. I wonder how long it will be until the scammers appear, ringing people and sending emails to say, “We are just checking your television licence. Give us your bank details.” That will happen—in fact, I am told that it is already happening in some areas.

Do we really want to live in the kind of country where pensioners go without food to pay for a TV licence, or go to jail for not having one? We recently celebrated our D-day veterans and quite rightly reflected

on the debt that the country owes that generation. We cannot repay that debt by taking away free television licences. What will happen to those in care? At the moment, people in care homes get a discounted licence, but the regulations refer specifically to those under-75 because the over-75s were already deemed to receive free licences.

The BBC probably did not know that, which brings me to the important question of who should decide social policy. I cannot think of any way to frame that question such that the BBC is the answer. The BBC is not equipped to do it, does not have enough information to do it, and should not have to do it. It is a matter for Government and for Parliament.

Andrew Bridgen: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Helen Jones: I will as the hon. Gentleman has been bobbing up and down.

Andrew Bridgen: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way. She makes some very valid points, but she is letting the BBC off the hook and acting as an apologist for it. Does she recall that at the 2015 charter renewal, the BBC said that it was delighted with the terms of the charter; delighted about getting an inflation-linked increase to the licence fee; and delighted about being let off having to fund the roll-out of superfast broadband? It is now reneging on its commitment to the over-75s.

Helen Jones: It is not the BBC but the Government who are reneging on their promises to the electorate, which were made as recently as 2017—it is as simple as that.

The Government should consider taking back responsibility for funding free licences. That would cost £740 million by 2020-21, which sounds like a lot, but is a drop in the ocean compared with most Government expenditure and with the spending proposals made by the Conservative leadership candidates. The right hon. Member for South West Surrey (Mr Hunt) says that he will cut corporation tax to 12.5%, which would be one of the lowest rates in the developed world and would cost £13 billion. The right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson)—I was going to say “for Henley,” but he does move about a lot. *[Interruption.]* I apologise to the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell). The right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip says that he will raise the threshold for the 40% rate of tax. That would cost £9 billion, and the Institute for Fiscal Studies says most of the benefit will go to the top 10% of earners. I have heard those on the Government Benches say that change would protect those on middle incomes. They need to get real. The median income in this country is not £50,000. It is not even £40,000. Last year it was £28,400, and that is hugely inflated because incomes at the top end include large bonuses. There is a choice. Does anyone in this Chamber need a tax cut? We might like one—

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Helen Jones: I am about to wind up, so no.

We might like a tax cut, but we do not need one. There is a choice. Tax is the price we pay for being in a civilised society. Speaking personally, I would rather forgo a tax cut and protect our older people properly. I

know what side I am on, and I know what side my hon. Friends are on. In fact, I know what side all the Opposition parties are on. The question is for those on the Government Benches.

If Government Members want to stop this happening—I think some of them genuinely do—they have to pressurise their own Ministers to stop this nonsense, take control of free TV licences, amend the legislation and look after our older people properly. They should do it because that is what they promised to do and because, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson) has said, we cannot means-test for loneliness and disability. But most of all, they should do it because it is the right thing to do. They will be judged on whether they keep their promises, and this is one they certainly have not kept. The blame is not with the BBC, which, as I have said, was crass to accept the settlement in the first place. The blame lies firmly with the Government.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Phil Wilson (in the Chair): Order. A number of people want to take part in the debate. I know we have three hours, but I want the winding-up speeches to begin at about two minutes to 7. I will not impose a time limit, but I say to hon. Members: bear that in mind and consider your colleagues. I call John Howell.

4.52 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Thank you, Mr Wilson. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship.

I suppose I should start by declaring an interest. For a number of years I worked as a presenter for BBC World Service television. I presented such well-known programmes as “World Business Report” and “World Business Review”, which I am sure trip off the memory of those who managed to catch them. I was not one of the mega-rich presenters. The hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) spoke of people in the talent pool who do not have much talent. I like to think that I did have the talent but was not paid enough for it. However, anyone who had that role realised that it was a wonderful role to have, because they could walk down any high street in the UK and nobody would recognise them, but when they got off the plane in Delhi they would be mobbed, because that was the distribution of the programme.

As a presenter at the BBC, I was made very aware of its editorial policies. I like to think that I did not infringe those policies at all during my time as a presenter, so I do not think an accusation of bias on my part would have been either made or appropriate. I fully accept that the BBC is not a perfect organisation. I fully accept that it makes mistakes. However, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green) said—he is no longer in his place—it is an enduring British institution that carries much weight and is held in much esteem by people in this country.

When I was a presenter at the BBC, few would have doubted that it was value for money—I cannot recall the issue ever being raised. However, it is raised in the BBC’s annual report for 2018—and it is glossed over somewhat. That report states that, based on the BBC’s survey of people who watch it, its value for money rating was six out of 10. The very next words of the

[John Howell]

report state that that is “within target”. That is an absurd thing to say. It is absurd to describe getting only six out of 10 as remaining “within target”. Far more needs to be done before the BBC can achieve value for money.

I suspect that the value for money argument is influenced principally by three factors. The first is the news coverage and whether there is an appreciation of bias in that. I suppose that comes down mostly to whether the BBC is biased in one way or the other in its coverage of Brexit. Personally, given the way Brexit has divided the country, I think it would be difficult not to see BBC presenters divided in the same way.

The second factor is the range of content. A constituent contacted me to say that he objected to the way a programme he was watching on one BBC channel suddenly switched to another so something else—I think it was the tennis from Wimbledon—could be run. That is not an acceptable way of behaving.

The third factor is the arguments about salaries and the gender pay gap. Going back a few years, the 2013-14 annual report asked for a reduction in the overall cost of talent. I cannot see that any appreciable change took place between the publication of the 2013-14 report and the current year. I happen to know that the director-general is working on that, but we need to see progress pretty quickly.

Looking at the range of content, which is one of the arguments I suspect people may have used to justify the BBC’s value for money, I shall point out two programmes. The first is “Bodyguard”. I thought that was a fantastic programme, and it will have been of interest to all of us in the Chamber, covering the subjects it did, but it was made by a production company owned by ITV. I will say a little more about that, and about how the nature of the media industry is changing, in a minute.

Secondly, in the field of investigative journalism, I praise the “Panorama” programme that covered the issue of antisemitism. I watched it from end to end and became more and more disturbed as I watched. I noticed that the hon. Member for Warrington North said bias can be seen when we hear what we do not want to hear. That is a prime example of bias being shown, because it is clearly something that people do not want to hear. I thought that was a very good programme, and it is one that I have recommended that people should watch on iPlayer.

I mentioned that “Bodyguard” was produced by an ITV production company. That illustrates in part the changing nature of the media industry. When I was the chief executive of a production company, I went over to New York to see the foreign editor of Fox. I said to him, “I’ve come here to sell you some lovely programmes that I’ve made about foreign and interesting places”—places such as Mongolia. I was the first journalist into Mongolia to interview the new democratically elected president. He looked at me and said, “Foreign—you mean Californian?” That line would not be appropriate today. The world has changed, and the media world has completely changed.

One area in which the BBC competes is online programming. We have seen it compete fully against Netflix, with quite a lot of dissatisfaction in working

out the value for money score from Netflix. BritBox is coming online shortly from ITV, so there will be even more competition in this area. Whether in such circumstances the BBC can maintain its position on the licence fee is certainly open to question.

The commercial element in the BBC is not new. We tend to think of the BBC as having no commercial advertising. That is simply wrong. BBC World Service television carried substantial commercial advertising, and I did not find that it interrupted the flow of my presenting in the slightest, and nor did viewers find that it interrupted their enjoyment of the programmes.

Andrew Bridgen: Would my hon. Friend note that Channel 4 is also a public service broadcaster but it is not in receipt of any of the licence fee? It funds itself completely from advertising.

John Howell: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment. The idea of keeping out commercial advertising was fine 50 years ago, and even 20 years ago, but in today’s world it needs to be looked at again in the context of how the BBC will function.

I was going to say a few things about free TV licences, but the hon. Member for Warrington North has said many of them already, so I will not comment.

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Con): Do you agree with her? That is what we want to know.

John Howell: I think this is a fault of both the Government and the BBC. I have told the director-general that—he happens to be a constituent of mine—and that is the position I will take. Just before my right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) comes in with a witty comment, that is not sitting on the fence; it is a position that I fully hold. The BBC has done itself no good at all in how it is has gone about dealing with the TV licence.

5.2 pm

Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. I recently wrote to 10,000 constituents to ask for their thoughts on the free TV licence. I will read out some of their replies:

“I lost my wife in January and now I spent a lot of time alone. Having the TV on in the background is like having someone with me. I do not know what I would do without it.”

“My husband died two years ago. I can’t move well enough to leave the house on my own. TV is the only company I have. Why are they going to take it away from me?”

“Lindsay has dementia and is unable to read or write anymore. TV is vital stimulation, otherwise she sits staring into space. No way could she afford to pay for a licence on a state pension.”

Ged Killen (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way so early in his remarks. Age UK has said that 850,000 people in the UK have dementia and that by 2025 the figure will be 1 million. Of course, many of them will be over 75. Is not the cruellest thing about this change the idea that people with dementia might be pursued by the BBC for payment for a TV licence?

Stephen Morgan: My hon. Friend is right. We must think about the most vulnerable in our society whom this decision will affect. I received a steady stream of correspondence in letters, emails, phone calls and office visits in response to my letter—the figure is in the hundreds. While each person conveyed a heartbreaking account of how they would be affected by this Government U-turn, the collective responses are a powerful testament to how important the free TV licence is.

In Portsmouth South, 300 people got in touch, and nearly 90% of them supported the continuation of the free TV licence. Nearly 70% cited loneliness as their main concern if their licence were to be revoked.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): My hon. Friend's testimony is really powerful. Some 3,000 households in Blaenau Gwent could lose their free TV licences. Crucially, while TV is a source of entertainment, it is also often a form of companionship. Does he agree that the Government should reconsider their decision and restore this important benefit for older people?

Stephen Morgan: I absolutely agree. I think that Age UK has said that four in 10 people say that TV is their only company. The free licence is therefore a social policy that the Government should retain.

The repercussions of the Government's decision will not be felt in Whitehall; it is people in my constituency who will suffer—people in Portsea, Fratton and Southsea; Portsmouth people who I grew up living next door to. Actions speak louder than words. The Government have snatched a vital benefit from the demographic group who need it most: the most vulnerable in our society. They are owed it by the Government.

Karen Lee: I have had a busy weekend, with two day-long galas in Lincoln—Boultham Park on Saturday and Lincoln Arboretum on Sunday. We had a petition about TV licences and were mobbed by people wanting to sign it. Everyone cross-party seems to agree, and in Lincoln I think 4,400 households will be affected. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is totally and utterly morally wrong to withdraw something so important, particularly when maintaining it was an election promise?

Stephen Morgan: I absolutely agree, and I echo the comments from my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) about our D-day veterans. I am proud that my grandfather was a D-day veteran from Southsea. I got into politics because towards the end of his life he needed services that, because of austerity, were not there for him. This change will affect so many people in our society.

Offering a free TV licence only to those in receipt of pension credit is an ill thought through plan that leaves the door open to injustice. We know that about 1.3 million over-75s are eligible for pension credit but do not or cannot claim it. When I met Age UK in Parliament to discuss that, it said that many older people struggle to self-validate that they are in receipt of pension credit, however straightforward the process is, because they are living with some loss of cognitive function or chronic illness. Therefore, those who are most vulnerable are set to lose the most.

This policy change means that at least 650,000 of our poorest pensioners face a new annual bill that they cannot afford. What does the Minister have to say

about that silent segment of vulnerable pensioners who have fallen through the cracks in our welfare system and now face further financial turmoil because of a poorly thought through Government policy?

In response to my countless letters and numerous written questions, including a joint letter I wrote with the Portsmouth Pensioners Association to the Prime Minister, I have consistently been told that this decision was made by the BBC. Since when did a broadcasting organisation begin administering welfare? Will Marks & Spencer or Tesco be responsible for delivering universal credit? Should we expect National Express to begin dishing out free bus passes for the over-75s? As a colleague said, the BBC is not the Department for Work and Pensions. Any attempt made by the Government to palm off responsibility is cowardly, unconvincing and spineless.

Make no mistake: this is a Government decision. It is up to us to be the voice of our constituents, and my constituents have spoken. The TV licence must remain free for the over-75s.

Andrew Bridgen: May I press the hon. Gentleman further on the BBC and the TV licence? What about over-75s who want to watch ITV or Channel 4 but, because of the licensing system, have to pay for the BBC? Is it not an anachronism that non-payment of the TV tax remains a criminal offence in this country? How can he possibly defend any of that?

Stephen Morgan: My speech is based on what I hear from my constituents, and the people of Portsmouth have not raised that issue.

The arguments could not be more compelling. I urge the Minister to be bold and not to trot out the usual lines blaming the BBC. We have an opportunity to make a real difference to pensioners' lives, and it must be taken. The universally free TV licence for over-75s must remain free.

5.10 pm

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson, not least because my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) is speaking in the main Chamber, so this is a safe haven for the next 45 minutes, I estimate.

I am an unashamed fan of the BBC. We keep talking about the TV licence fee, but it is worth rehearsing the fact that the BBC provides a huge range of services in at least five or six distinct areas. What I would loosely call the social aspect of the BBC is hard to define, but people forget that it funds five classical music orchestras. We could debate whether that is a good use of licence fee payers' money, but there it is.

I refer hon. Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Last week I hosted an event for the BBC at which it launched a new app called Own It, which is designed to help children to navigate social media. This week, I am hosting an event with the BBC for a scheme it is doing with the Arts and Humanities Research Council to fund doctoral students. Of course, we all celebrate the Proms. The BBC does a lot that no commercial organisation would do, much of which strays into the area of social good or the work of the

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Arts Council England. Frankly, I do not think it spends enough time telling people like us what it does in that field.

We refer to the TV licence fee, and we have heard a lot of citations from pensioners talking about how much they love television, but let us not forget radio. The BBC accounts for about 70% of radio listening. There are not just the national channels that we all listen to—Radio 4 and 5 Live for this demographic, I suspect, and also Radio 1, Radio 2, Radio 3 and 6 Music—but local radio, which is absolutely vital. In my constituency we have BBC Radio Oxford and, nationally, 39 local radio stations provide vital local coverage, in particular local news.

It is often BBC News that gets the BBC into trouble—there is always something for Brexiteers, remainers or Corbynistas to get their teeth into and object to. I thoroughly enjoyed the speech of hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell)—I had no idea about his life as top-flight media executive; he was a star of the BBC World Service. There is also the Parliament channel, local radio news and the BBC's website. However often we disagree at times with how the BBC covers particular aspects of news, we can all agree that in an era of fake and very biased news being disseminated on social media—we see the effect that that has had on politics in the United States—we are lucky to have, broadly speaking, an unbiased and objective news service at the heart of the BBC, which is widely respected in the UK and abroad.

Then there is BBC drama and entertainment, including “Strictly Come Dancing”, “Poldark”, which we all watched last night, and “8 Days”, which I watched this morning with my Cavapoo at home. Quality drama pervades the whole of the drama output of British television. One reason why British television is so respected around the world is because the BBC sets a quality anchor—a quality level—that everyone else aspires to, which would not be there without it.

Then there is the BBC's foray into the world of commerce. It generates its own revenue to keep the licence fee within reason and sells its programmes all over the world. BBC Studios, which makes programmes, is now in profit. The BBC has made a foray into commercial television with UKTV, to which I shall return.

The BBC does much work to make itself as accessible as possible. The iPlayer is probably the most user-friendly TV platform—I include Netflix in that. The BBC has also supported the roll-out of digital radio, and it has constantly innovated in relation to apps, as more and more people are obviously accessing content on smartphones. As my hon. Friend the Member for Henley said, BritBox, which it launched in the US with other commercial players, is now potentially being launched in the UK.

It is important to remember that there is a lot going on in the BBC. When people criticise it, they should ask themselves what we would do without it. I have to admit that it is a bit like the royal family—it is a bit of an anomaly. I am not sure whether we would invent it if we were starting from scratch, but it permeates our culture

and I could not imagine a life without it, even though, as my hon. Friend said, it is not perfect and gets things wrong.

The issues facing the BBC include the licence fee itself, which we looked at when we undertook the charter review. We concluded that, rather like democracy, it is the least-worst option of funding the BBC. It maintains a level of independence from the Government and gives the BBC a secure income. By and large, it still works. It is not destined to last forever. It may be that the BBC eventually moves to a subscription model—we will have to wait and see. Let us not forget that the licence fee has evolved. There used to be a radio licence fee that people took out separately from the TV licence. There may be debates about whether there is a licence fee aspect of funding the BBC and a subscription aspect.

The BBC will continue to look at savings. It has taken about £1 billion in costs out of the organisation over the past 10 years, and it is right that it has done so. It has an existential challenge, in terms of competing with the commercial sector. It is a big elephant in the room, in so far as the UK media scene is concerned. Ten years ago, we could not move without every media organisation, including, funnily enough, *The Guardian*, complaining about its reach and scope. That has been dwarfed by the advent of Netflix, the resources that Sky will have following its takeover by Comcast, and Disney. The competition to fund content, and for eyeballs—not least given the changing ways that people are consuming content—will present real challenges to the BBC to remain relevant, particularly to a younger demographic. I do not envy it that.

The BBC faces challenges on which it can lead the way. It focuses far too much—this slightly contradicts what I just said—on saying, “How do I compete against ITV or Netflix?” and not enough on saying, “What does the privilege of a secure income from the licence fee allow me to do for the UK as a whole?”

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): The right hon. Gentleman is giving very compelling testimony about the value that the BBC adds to this country. I wholeheartedly endorse everything he has said. He is getting into the wider issue of the social value that the BBC adds. Elderly people frequently suffer from isolation and are unable to get out of the house. One of my constituents has said:

“I am disabled. I cannot go outside without my carer or my wheelchair. The television is my friend and companion.”

Does that not back up what the right hon. Gentleman has said? The BBC is about more than just entertainment; it adds social value over and above that.

Mr Vaizey: It certainly is. If I knew about the services that the BBC provides in greater depth, I could probably rattle off five or six others, beyond simply the television, that it provides for the hon. Lady's constituent.

Perhaps this sounds like navel-gazing—I am coming to my conclusion—but I think the BBC could take a massive lead in supporting much greater diversity, including with disabled people and black and minority ethnic people, not just in front of the camera but behind it. It really could invest in that. That is not to say that, over

the past 30 or 40 years, it has not been at the centre of training legions of people who now work across the media.

The issue that concerns MPs at the moment, however, is the BBC's struggle with having the free TV licence foisted upon it. As I have said already in the main Chamber, that policy was forced on the BBC by the Government, by the Treasury. There was no negotiation—the BBC was going to take the free TV licence, whether it liked it or not, as far as the Treasury was concerned. The only room for negotiation was what the BBC might be able to claw back in order to mitigate the financial impact.

The decision was wrong, and it was made because the then Government had to meet their manifesto commitment—ironically—of making £12 billion in welfare cuts. It was the wrong decision to impose on the BBC, and this Government compounded it. Having forced it on the BBC, they are disgracefully trying to have their cake and eat it, saying, “It's the BBC's decision but we disagree with it.” If they are going to force the policy on the BBC, they should support its decision. If we could roll it back, an honest Government would take the policy back from the BBC, engage with the public and decide whether free TV licences are affordable.

My personal view—this is where I will lose the support of Opposition MPs—is that the free TV licences were a gift given by a previous Government without thinking whether it was financially sustainable. Reform of free TV licences is a perfectly sensible position to look at, and it seems to me that the BBC, after careful analysis, has come up with a sensible reform policy. However, the question is whether that should be the BBC's role, and the answer to that is no.

5.21 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): Thank you for your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. I, too, thank my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) for opening the debate.

In the UK, 3.6 million older people live alone, of whom more than 2 million are aged 75 and over. A huge proportion of those individuals rely on their television to alleviate the loneliness that often comes when people live by themselves. Taking away free TV licences for the over-75s who are not in receipt of pension credit will detrimentally affect people who have worked hard all their lives. It will affect working-class areas, such as my constituency, the most—more than 3,000 households in Swansea East could lose their free TV licence.

The change will affect people such as my dad, who is in the excellent care of Anglesey ward in Morriston Hospital, no doubt watching television with his fellow patients. My dad worked hard all his life as a bus driver. He is now 89 years of age, with a small pension as well as a state pension to live on. He lives alone, since my mum passed away, and he relies a lot on his television to ease the common loneliness that can occur when older people live by themselves. He will now have to stretch his pension to pay for his TV licence—something that he had not planned for.

My dad is just one story, but one that will be common across the UK among those affected by the change. When the news broke that the free TV licence was ending, my neighbours Merv and Kitty, an elderly

couple, immediately called my husband to ask him if it was true that they would now have to pay for a licence. Merv's reaction was, “Stuff 'em. We won't bother putting the TV on,” while Kitty's was, “I can't get out of the house and I really need my TV.” Immediately, therefore, a domestic started about whether they kept the TV or paid the licence.

Merv and Kitty worked all their lives saving for their pension—a small pension, but one that makes them ineligible for a free licence. Neither my Dad, nor Kitty and Merv are well off, and they are certainly not rich, but they are being treated as such. They now face an extra annual cost that is without doubt unfair and unnecessary. At their age, and with the contribution that they have made to this country over many years, a free TV licence is the least that we can give them.

Linking the over-75s' free TV licence to pension credit is cruel. Pension credit is widely underclaimed by older people. In Swansea East alone, each year more than £6.5 million in pension credit does not reach the people who are entitled to it. So what about those who will not get their free TV licence because they are unaware that they are entitled to pension credit or, for whatever reason, have been unable to access it?

The decision to end free TV licences for the most vulnerable is shocking. For the sake of people out there such as my dad, Kitty and Merv, and all our elderly population, the least we can do to show them respect is to give them a free TV licence.

5.24 pm

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): I particularly wanted to speak in this debate because I am a fan of the BBC and I value it as a national institution. However, I fear that it is being held back by its outdated funding mechanism. For the BBC's own good, I want to outline why new avenues of funding need to be explored.

I fear that, by seeking to maintain its outdated funding mechanism, the BBC is handing its critics a big stick with which to beat it increasingly hard, especially following the most recent decision on free TV licences for the over-75s. A television licence designed for the tiny market for TV broadcasting in the 1920s is utterly at odds with the staggering array of live, online and recorded broadcasting market options now available, as well as with the ever-growing and emerging technologies in the sector as we enter the 2020s. The television licence is nearly an antique. It is a punitive tax that belongs in the past if the BBC is to survive and thrive as a public service and as a worldwide entertainment broadcaster into the future.

The BBC has an enviable international reputation for excellence, and one that we must celebrate in this House and not begrudge. In an opinion poll last year, the BBC was rated the most trusted news brand in America, with a staggering 90%, beating Fox, CBS, CNN, Bloomberg and others. I was not surprised to see, in line with that finding from overseas, that while many hundreds of my constituents signed the petition to abolish the TV licence, barely 100 signed the petition for an inquiry into alleged bias—a point that the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones), who introduced the debate, touched on. To have been trained by or gained experience in the BBC is a world-class addition to any broadcaster or producer's CV, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) knows only too well.

[Jack Brereton]

All that is good about the BBC needs to be preserved and refreshed. We must support the BBC as an institution for the important value—in the widest sense of the word—that it adds to our national life and our international soft power, cultural standing and esteem. In that vein, as a friend of the BBC, I wish it would embrace the possibility of securing alternative funding to the anachronistic and criminalising television licence regime.

In the days when the BBC was the only broadcaster available in the UK, the licence would have seemed an obvious choice of funding, but the world has changed. We can receive a great number of television channels, not only from the UK but from overseas. Now, many people can record, pause and rewind live TV as part of their subscription, and a significant proportion subscribe to a number of pay-TV services in the UK. The figure was 15.1 million in the first quarter of 2018, while online subscriptions to Netflix, Amazon and Now TV combined totalled 15.4 million.

That state of affairs, as the Institute of Economic Affairs has pointed out, acts as a perverse incentive for television makers not to make televisions multifunctional. We do not need a television licence to own a phone that could be used to watch television programmes, but we do need a television licence to own a television that can be used as a phone. As we enter the 2020s, mobile multifunctional devices are ever more ubiquitous, and we cannot uninvent them, any more than we could uninvent the transistor radios that made the old radio licence an unsustainable nonsense, finally leading to the abolition of the radio-only licence in 1971. We need to look at all possible means of financing the BBC that do not involve any kind of archaic household licence to own an everyday consumer good.

Helen Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman outline for us how he proposes that we should fund those channels and programmes that appeal only to minorities and would never attract a commercial sponsor? Also, how would he fund other aspects of the BBC, such as the Proms, its classical orchestras and so on?

Jack Brereton: I am about to get to that point. We need to do away with the inspectors and the prosecutions to enforce the licence. That might mean looking at the potential for paid on-demand digital broadcasting, or some form of subscription package, as we see with Sky, Netflix, Virgin, Amazon Prime and others. That might mean allowing programme sponsorship and advertising, as we see on most channels, such as ITV and, of course, Channel 4. As has been referred to, Channel 4 is a public service broadcaster. Unfortunately, the hon. Lady was wrong when she said that there is only one channel—Channel 4 has a number of channels, including E4 and others.

Helen Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Jack Brereton: No, I have already given way to the hon. Lady.

I thank Channel 4 for taking on the BBC hit pottery programme, Stoke-on-Trent's own "The Great Pottery Throw Down", following the BBC's unfortunate and, frankly, wrong decision not to commission a new series.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Channel 4 is a public sector broadcaster and receives subsidies, as my hon. Friend mentioned, but Channel 4 outbid the BBC for one of its own programmes, "The Great British Bake Off". Channel 4 behaves like a commercial organisation, whereas the BBC does not—it grows organically and then, unfortunately, gets taken advantage of.

Jack Brereton: I recognise my hon. Friend's point, but I suggest that a number of the programmes on Channel 4 add a huge amount of good to the country and beyond, as do many commercial stations. Many of the programmes that I enjoy on Channel 4 are factual and not just entertainment.

For programmes in the arts, crafts and culture sphere, perhaps there could be Arts Council-style grants, particularly for the purest of public good, public service broadcasts, if appropriate safeguards against interest group capture can be devised. They would not necessarily have to be made by the BBC, but could be funded by competitive tender through the BBC as a grant-awarding body. There could be more collaborative work with educational institutions, such as the Open University or others, to finance certain programme output.

It is certainly worth looking at the potential for purchased ticketing for BBC recordings. BBC shows are free to attend, but BBC tours are paid ticketed. There is clearly sufficient demand for those tours to make charges sustainable and to raise revenue. I wonder, too, given the huge waiting list and interest in shows such as "Strictly Come Dancing", whether the market mechanism of paid ticketing might be an option to manage that demand. I have heard it said that at one point the waiting list for audience tickets to "Top Gear" was measured in decades. What an incentive it would be for the BBC to keep producing compelling programmes if it made audience ticket revenue.

At the moment, tickets to BBC shows are available to anyone with a UK postcode. There is clearly some kind of ticket pricing to be explored, perhaps even differential ticket pricing where a tour is included, or hospitality and so on. There is certainly a chance for some entrepreneurialism. I do not pretend for a moment that ticket sales would ever raise the sums raised by the TV licence, but they could be one of a number of streams that the BBC could pursue for certain programmes.

Andrew Bridgen: My hon. Friend is making some important points. BBC iPlayer is inaccessible outside the UK but it hosts the BBC's back catalogue, which the licence fee payers have funded over decades. Surely a huge source of income for the BBC would be to allow people in the English-speaking world access, for a cost, to the BBC's back catalogue through BBC iPlayer.

Jack Brereton: I entirely agree. It has been mentioned that the BBC seeks quite a significant income from international broadcast rights, and it could build on that substantially if it used the BBC iPlayer brand more effectively overseas.

The future of broadcasting, and of the BBC, is exciting. The BBC must not allow itself to stay in the past. I fear that the licence fee has become a comfort blanket that threatens to be a deadweight as other broadcasters move forward in the international market.

As an admirer of the BBC, and as someone who values it as a vital institution for our country, I hope that it will enthusiastically embrace the opportunities for alternative funding streams that must be explored now that the television licence is all but antique.

5.34 pm

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. I will speak briefly on behalf of the 570 people in my constituency who signed the petition calling on the Government to continue funding free TV licences for the over-75s. I mentioned in my intervention that at the weekend we were out as a party collecting signatures, and I imagine we got at least another couple of hundred more.

I am proud that we were in the top 50 constituencies to oppose this unjust and mean-spirited policy. It is totally unacceptable that over 4,400 households in Lincoln could lose their free TV licence under the plans. A recent survey found that 40% of older people say the television is their main source of company, and the Government seem determined to means-test loneliness and isolation. Nationally, it is estimated that over 1.6 million pensioners living alone will lose their free licence in a means-tested system. That is symptomatic of the Government's whole approach. They should not offload responsibility for funding free TV licences on to the BBC. In fact, it seems that whatever question we ask in the Chamber, the responsibility is always pushed to somebody else.

It is particularly worrying that a further 1.3 million poorer over-75s who are eligible for pension credit but do not claim it are projected to lose their TV licence. That is one reason I will launch a campaign in Lincoln to end the pension credit scandal. More than 1 million pensioners in the UK do not get the pension credit they are entitled to. Those people generally have worked all their lives—they should get those benefits. My campaign will seek to raise awareness and offer support to those who are missing out on that crucial support.

I am aware that many hon. Members still want to speak, and we are all speaking along the same lines, so let me end by saying that it is typical of this Government to choose to cut taxes for corporations and the highest earners, while targeting their spending cuts on vulnerable older people who are struggling to make ends meet. That is morally wrong.

5.36 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. I congratulate all the petitioners who have made this debate happen. I declare an interest as the chair of the all-party parliamentary BBC group, which seeks to support the BBC but also to be a critical friend when required. I was going to speak about the real positives that the BBC delivers, but my right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) did just that. I am reminded of Lord Patten, who said:

"No-one would invent the BBC today. But thank God our predecessors did."

In many ways the BBC is an anomaly, but it is much loved. As my right hon. Friend made clear, in an era when we have much to be concerned about—bias, influence, commercialisation and exposure to young audience

members—it is fantastic that the BBC still stands for independence, impartiality, entertainment, excellence and education. We would lose that at our peril. Indeed, one need only speak to friends and colleagues who have moved abroad, and they all say that the one thing they miss greatly is watching the BBC.

I want to pick up on a point raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) and for North West Leicestershire (Andrew Bridgen) about the BBC's ability to sell more of its content abroad. BritBox, which is being piloted by the BBC and ITV, is a good example of where the BBC does innovate. It will allow audiences from outside the UK to view its content, at a charge. That is a good example of where the BBC is trying to make money from its own content.

I want to focus my remarks on the decision that the BBC has been required to take. I say "required" because I do not care what anyone says; there is no way that the BBC will be able to use 20% of its budget to carry on with the current position. The BBC did consult widely—I remember back in February inviting all MPs to come and hear about the proposals and what they would mean, and to get involved and get their constituents involved. The options were as follows: it could copy the current scheme, which means that 4.64 million over-75s would continue as is, but that would cost £745 million, rising to £1 billion by the end of 2030 because we are all living longer—that is to be celebrated, but it pushes up the cost. That would be equivalent to the funding for BBC 2, BBC 3, BBC 4, BBC News and all the BBC's output for children, so it is clearly not sustainable.

Those who say, "Well, what about Gary Lineker's salary?" should bear in mind that if the BBC axed the pay for all the talent earning above £150,000 it would save £20 million, so there would still be a long way to go to reach the £745 million. By the way, I am a big fan of Gary Lineker and think he gives value for money. *[Interruption.]* I have lost some hon. Members on that point. I am surprised to hear that from my hon. Friend the Member for North West Leicestershire, with Gary Lineker being a great Leicester player. Brexit has obviously ended that relationship.

The second option was removing the benefit altogether, which would mean that the poorest over-75s would have no option at all. I know that the Government would say that they funded the BBC to some regard, but to a degree I am surprised that the BBC has not chosen that option. The third option was a 50% discount, so everyone over the age of 75 gets the benefit, but only 50% of it. That would still cost £415 million, which is equivalent to the entire BBC 2 budget. The other option was raising the threshold to the age of 80, which would cost £481 million and be equivalent to BBC 2's budget or BBC 4.

Of all the options, the one that we have landed on was the one that found most favour. I will not say that it was liked, because I do not think that anyone liked it, but linking the benefit to pension credit means that 900,000 over-75s will still benefit. It will cost £209 million, which the BBC will still have to bear, and that is greater than the funding it was given to take it on. That amount is still the same as the cost of Radio 1, Radio 2, Radio 3, Radio 4 and Radio 5. That is where the BBC has found itself.

[*Huw Merriman*]

I believe in telling it as it is. The BBC has agreed to this, but I do not think it was given much option—it was either agree to this or to something else. The BBC was not funded for it. Probably due to a copy and paste mechanism, our last manifesto said that we would guarantee free TV licences for the over-75s for the term of this Parliament. I am not confident that that means 2022.

Helen Jones: Does the hon. Gentleman know something we do not?

Huw Merriman: I certainly do not know something that the hon. Lady does not know.

We made a manifesto commitment that now puts us in a difficult position, if the BBC is going to take away the licence fee for those outside the means test from 2020 to 2022. It leads to an argument for the Government Benches that the Government would need to carry on funding it, at least for that two-year period.

I take issue with the petitions—like my right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey), I will now lose part of the room, or perhaps all of it. Although I understand the cost implication for those who cannot afford the licence fee—I absolutely recognise that pension credit is at its lowest level and that those just outside the pension credit boundary will struggle to meet this cost—I have a fundamental problem, which I am surprised that Opposition Members do not share. If a multi-millionaire happens to be over the age of 75, they receive a free universal benefit that is effectively being subsidised by someone in their early 20s who is renting and cannot afford to buy a property of their own.

I believe that there is a cost to everything and there are choices. The Government spend £800 billion each year on our public services. If we are spending money on people who can afford to pay, ultimately that means either that somebody else has got to pay for it or that somebody else will not receive the same benefit.

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman has made some interesting points. Earlier in the debate reference was made to a public good. A public good is defined as a service, such as healthcare or education, that we feel is so important to us as a society that we collectively provide it. The BBC is a public good; it has a value for our democracy, for our community cohesion and for society generally. Therefore, we should pay for it collectively and not leave people who are over 75, and who cannot afford to pay for it themselves because they have no means, to pay for it. We should provide it collectively, as a public good.

Huw Merriman: The hon. Gentleman, who I know worked for the BBC, makes a good point. I agree that the BBC is a public good, but there are other public goods that one can think of where we require people to pay or we means-test them.

I have a fundamental issue with it. I am sorry to use these words, but I think it was an election bribe. Once something is given for free, it is difficult to ask people to start paying for it. I recognise that challenge. I ask all right hon. and hon. Members to consider this: if this is always going to be a cost, and we have to make decisions, then should the welfare state be providing something

for people who can readily afford it, so that we are unable to spend more on those who really are at the borderline? I say that not to get electoral gain; I represent a constituency that has the second highest proportion of over-75s in the country, so I commit electoral suicide. It is important that we address this; if we do not, we will find that other decisions will be made or will not be reviewed. I am particularly worried about inter-generational fairness; people are missing out because we preserve benefits for people on the basis of age rather than means.

My last point is to the Minister. She is an excellent Minister and she has inherited this package, if I can call it that, from predecessors in the Treasury. I believe that we need to look at this again. It is a big challenge. We made a commitment in our manifesto that we should stick by it. As for the future—and that gives us time to think about the future—I would like us to address whether it is affordable to give people a benefit that they would be able to pay for themselves.

5.46 pm

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): I too will speak in support of the petition for the restoration of TV licences for the over-75s. Like many other hon. Members, I was deeply concerned by the announcement that the TV licence concessions for the over-75s would now be linked to pension credit. As many hon. Members have said, this is a problem of the Government's own making. Ministers cannot hide behind the BBC, because it was their decision to outsource responsibility for TV licences, despite the manifesto pledge to maintain the benefit. As my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) said, they have been devolving the blame.

Some 3,770 households in Newport East are set to lose their licences under the changes, and across the wider Gwent region that rises to 23,450 households, with a total annual cost across all households of over £567,000. As other hon. Members have said, TV licences are an important benefit for older people, who suffer disproportionately from isolation and loneliness. As the excellent Age Cymru has said, for millions of over-75s the TV is not just the box in the corner; it is their constant companion, their window on the world and their main form of company.

TV is also an essential source of information for people who are not online, and it plays a crucial role in their ability to be an active citizen in our democracy. Research from Age Cymru shows that only 29% of over-75s in Wales use the internet. The shift to information being online has already made it more difficult for older people to keep informed and to access key services. Removing the entitlement to a free TV licence would add substantially to these difficulties.

Linking the concession to pension credit is also hugely problematic. Estimates by the Department for Work and Pensions suggest that two in every five people eligible for pension credit are not claiming the benefit. In Newport East alone that is almost £5 million of unclaimed pension credit that is not reaching the people who need it each year. Until the Government act to ensure that everyone who is entitled to pension credit receives it, a huge number of older people risk losing out on two benefits at once if the TV licence proposals go ahead. That is the problem with it not being universal.

As Age Cymru has highlighted, there are many reasons why older people do not claim pension credit: they may not know the benefit exists; they may feel they are not entitled to any help; they may be put off by the process of claiming; they may struggle on alone, assuming that others are worse off than them; or they may be living with dementia, as other hon. Members have mentioned. In practical terms, there are serious questions to ask about how the BBC will ensure that people with dementia will be able to pay their licence fee and, if they do not, how non-payment will be enforced. It does not bear thinking about. Age Cymru has said that there may be 850,000 people affected by that.

I want to finish by citing an example from my constituency. In the week that the licence fee proposals were outlined, candidates in the Conservative leadership election began to outline their plans to cut taxes for the wealthiest in society. Days later I was contacted by the neighbour of an 86-year-old armed forces veteran in Newport who is set to lose his TV licence under the new proposal. I know that Defence Ministers are concerned about that. The contrast underlines and amplifies the fact that the Conservative party has a serious question to answer about where its priorities lie and the kind of country it wants us to live in. I echo the calls from campaigners and charities such as Age Cymru for the UK Government to take back the funding and administration fee for the free TV licence scheme and let the BBC focus on its job of being a brilliant national broadcaster. TV licences are a social benefit that should not have been outsourced.

5.50 pm

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in the debate under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. Like some of my Conservative colleagues, I am, broadly speaking, a supporter of the BBC, but I readily admit that that is weakening somewhat. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) and my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) outlined some of the great benefits of the BBC, ranging from support for the Proms and orchestras to, of course, the BBC World Service, where my hon. Friend was an eminent producer, or perhaps director. I would happily pay the licence fee for Radio 4, local radio and “Test Match Special”, to name just three—but, as has been pointed out, we can afford it. I rather wish that Radio 4 would go silent at 6.30 pm, when it broadcasts inane comedies, but that is just a personal opinion.

On the question of celebrity and sports star pay, I am sorry that Gary Lineker and the £1.75 million paid to him keep coming up in the debate, but the BBC, which is a public sector organisation, needs to reflect that that amount of money is out of bounds to most people. Those I represent would not earn that in their lifetime, working over 40 to 50 years. Would I still watch “Match of the Day” if it was presented by some unknown? Yes, because I do not watch it to hear the gossip; I watch it to see the action.

As for the decision about the over-75s, this day was certain to come. As we heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage, the policy was foisted on the BBC by the Treasury. It was inevitable that it would opt out at the first possible opportunity and cause embarrassment to the Administration in office at the

time. So it has, and it is a great opportunity for Opposition Members to have a go at the Government, when they did little on their own in this respect.

The hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) moved on from arguments about the licence fee to discuss the leadership of the Conservative party and reflect on some of the policies put forward by my right hon. Friends the Members for South West Surrey (Mr Hunt), and for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson). She talked about tax cuts and said that we in this Chamber do not need them. Perhaps so, but we do not need free TV licences either. The sustainability of such universal benefits must be looked at, whether they are TV licences, bus passes or whatever. They cannot go on draining the taxpayer when so many essential services are needed. The hon. Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee), who is no longer in her place, referred to a survey. If people on the streets of Cleethorpes were asked whether they would rather pay for something or have it for free, just as in Lincoln it would be no surprise if they said, “We would rather have it for nothing.” The reality is of course different.

With regard to news bias, there is no doubt that the BBC is, in effect, *The Guardian* of the airwaves, rather than the *Daily Express*. It is perhaps not so much that there is bias; of course the BBC will say that it gets as many complaints from one side as the other, so it must therefore be getting things right. However, there is a rather superior intonation in some of the questions from interviewers, as if to say, “Do you really think that people would vote for Brexit?” That is an insult to the 70% of my electorate who voted for Brexit—and very wise they are too.

Andrew Bridgen: Does my hon. Friend agree that the potential for BBC bias is not only in how it reports what it reports, but in the fact that 70% of the public rely on it for much of their news, and the BBC has the power to decide what is or is not reported in the news?

Martin Vickers: My hon. Friend makes a good point. There is no doubt that many important events in this country and around the world go unreported, when items that in the great scheme of things are perhaps more trivial find their way on to the airwaves, and perhaps that is a reflection of the organisation itself.

I am still, broadly speaking, a supporter of the BBC. I should like it to continue in some shape or form, if that is realistic in this multi-channel age when sports rights, for example, cost the earth. Lesser sports, shall we say, are now coming on to the BBC, and I have no problem with that. It is only right that they should get an airing. However, after the success of the Lionesses in the recent women’s World cup, there is no doubt that Sky, BT or someone else will come sniffing around by the time of the next women’s World cup, and it will be lost to the great majority. We saw only yesterday, with the cricket world cup, how free-to-air brings the country together on great sporting occasions.

I suspect that if I am home by 10 o’clock tonight I shall watch the 10 o’clock news on the BBC rather than any of the other offerings, but I think that the BBC needs to reflect. I am content with the present system continuing for at least the foreseeable future. I am not entirely convinced that the majority of my constituents would agree. That should cause the BBC and the Minister to reflect on the present structure and whether it can continue.

5.57 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson, and to take part in the debate opened by my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones), who gave an outstanding introduction, as usual. She talked about the “not me, guv” Government, and she is right, because their consistent *modus operandi* with public services is to slash a public authority’s funding and blame it when it is unable to deliver the service. Alternatively, when the public authority has to put up its prices to compensate for the lack of money from central Government, they will attack it politically for doing so. We have seen that happen with failures of local government services, such as the fire service and the police. The epidemic horror of knife crime is apparently nothing to do with the 20,000 fewer police officers, or the cuts to children’s services. Apparently it is all the fault of the Mayor of London. A similar thing can be seen in the debate about the BBC licence fee. The BBC was presented with huge cuts to its budget and was forced to take the blame when it had to charge the licence fee to over-75s. It is part of a consistent practice by the Government that needs to be exposed and resisted.

[DAME CHERYL GILLAN *in the Chair*]

The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) talked about some of the services that would be affected were the BBC to have to take on the whole amount. In total that could be £700 million a year. That would be the cost of BBC 2, BBC 4, BBC News, BBC Scotland and BBC Radio 5 Live and, crucially, local radio stations. Given the crisis in local newspapers, the BBC is in some areas often the only real provider of the quality local news that binds communities together. It can do that because of the licence fee.

There is what is known as an ecosystem in broadcaster funding. Each broadcaster in the UK is funded differently. ITV is funded largely through advertising, with some production work. Sky has a subscription and some production work and advertising. It all knits together particularly well. I must say that, if we move away from the current model to one where the BBC or parts of it had to either use subscription or enter into advertising, I am pretty sure not only that existing channels would be unhappy but that it would damage their operations. That is not to mention the question how we take on the influence of the global giants based on the west coast of the United States.

I, too, have a problem with the size of some of the salaries paid to BBC presenters. I have a particular problem with the use of the word “talent” to describe on-air performers and presenters, whether on radio or TV, because it suggests that the whole attraction of a particular broadcast is based on the individual who presents it. Make-up artists, production designers and junior producers are all talented, and the quality of the programming is vested in all of them and not simply in the person who is in front of the microphone or the camera.

Why on earth did the BBC accept this cut to its budget and the enforced taking on of the licence for over-75s? The simple truth, as other hon. Members have already mentioned, is that it was forced to do so. If we speak to senior BBC management, we hear that they were left in no doubt that this was being forced on them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly), who was on the Select Committee on Digital, Culture, Media and Sport with me, called it a “drive-by shooting”. A Treasury Minister—I think this was while George Osborne was Chancellor—told the BBC, “This is the way it’s going to be, so make the best of it.” When BBC management said that they were quite happy with the solution, that was not the case—but what else could they say when they had a gun to their head?

There is also another, more sinister reason. I was on the DCMS Committee when Rona Fairhead, the then chair of the BBC Trust, attended a pre-appointment scrutiny session for the position of chair of the new BBC board. Before she appeared before us, we were informed that after her meeting at Downing Street with the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, she had a private meeting with him without any civil servants present. That was put to her, and she admitted that it was the case. As it happened, the Committee declined to confirm her appointment, but the situation does give rise to the question why the BBC governors at the time did not resist the idea of the over-75s licence fee being deposited on them. Coincidentally, Rona Fairhead was shortly afterwards appointed to the House of Lords and made a member of the Government. I am not suggesting that those two incidents are linked—

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): But of course you should be.

Christian Matheson: My hon. Friend suggests that I should be. It does not give off a particularly pleasant smell to have a part of the Government giving out favours to get a policy through. It stinks, and it ought not to be allowed. Even the perception that a deal was done—because that is one of the possible perceptions—ought not to be allowed.

The BBC licence fee, as we have heard, represents so much more than simply a broadcasting service for older people in particular. I simply ask: if we do not provide the service and social isolation continues, what is the cost then of having to look after more people with more advanced dementia? What is the cost of having to provide social services elsewhere for older people whose quality of life is deteriorating? There are hidden costs involved, and we find once again that the BBC licence fee gives huge value for money in a much broader context than that of simply listening to the radio or watching television.

6.4 pm

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dame Cheryl. As has already been mentioned, I need to declare an interest; unlike the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell), I rejected the advice of my father, who said I had a great face for radio, and decided to become a BBC TV reporter. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) on securing this crucial debate.

What could be more crucial in this period of political instability than the question of BBC bias, which is what I will address in my speech? I think hon. Members will be pleased to hear that I will not mention “Panorama”. I do not need to. This is a target-rich environment. When it comes to BBC bias, or impartiality and the BBC, we often find, as in this debate, that there are a lot

of contradictory claims and counter-claims. That is partly because the BBC produces a vast amount of content, featuring a range of people and opinions, meaning that everyone will at some point see something to complain about.

Unfortunately, at times that has led representatives and defenders of the BBC to dismiss all criticism of its reporting. "If we are attacked from both sides," the argument goes, "then we must be doing something right." However, when faced with conflicting claims, we cannot just dismiss them all and assume that everything is fine; we must assess which are accurate—or which are more accurate.

When it comes to climate change, there is a weight of evidence among the scientific community, and then there are the ideas put about by right-wing think tanks, newspapers and politicians. Similarly, when it comes to debates about the BBC, there are the allegations of bias advanced by many of those same right-wing interests, and then there are the findings of independent academic research. What does the social scientific evidence tell us about BBC impartiality? One consistent finding is that the BBC allows the press and senior politicians to set the agenda for its reporting. In the BBC's Bridcut report of 2007, it acknowledged that impartiality should mean representing a range of views in society, not just the perceived political centre ground or the balance of opinion in Westminster.

However, research by Cardiff University found that, five years later, BBC News was still dominated by elite sources with—and this is key—an over-representation of Conservative and Eurosceptic views. During the EU referendum, that "impartiality as balance" paradigm, which seems always to lean to the right, was scrupulously applied to the two sides of the referendum campaign, but with the right dominating both. Research by Loughborough University found that Conservative and UK Independence party representatives accounted for 74% of all party political appearances on television news. Cardiff University found an even higher level of prominence, with Conservatives and UKIP together accounting for almost 80% of politicians.

The striking domination of our political debate by the right is exacerbated by the influence of right-wing newspapers. One of the key functions of the BBC should be to act as a bulwark against misinformation and the abuses of private power, but how can it perform that function if its news agenda is set by an often unscrupulous, partisan press, owned by a handful of billionaires, which has spent decades misinforming people on every important issue of the day? Again, we can look at the research: Cardiff University found that more than half of BBC News policy stories during the 2015 general election originated with the press, with *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* leading the pack, and the right, once again, dominating overall.

Another crucial issue on which this has had an impact, alongside reporting on immigration and the EU, is austerity. There is now a fairly substantive body of work examining the reporting of the 2008 financial crisis, including, for example, Mike Berry's recent book. Berry shows that the economic debate, at that crucial time for our country, was skewed toward the right, and that even mainstream economic opinion was marginalised in favour of the disinformation emanating from the Conservative party and its allies in the press.

I could go on, but the overall picture is clear: not only is BBC News overwhelmingly orientated towards the political and economic establishment but, in so far as it exhibits any political bias, it tends to be towards the right. The story behind that pattern of reporting is detailed in Tom Mills's 2016 book on the BBC. The organisation has always been a quasi-state broadcaster, orientated toward officialdom and particularly vulnerable to pressure from the Government of the day, as the last charter renewal process showed.

The situation got much worse from the 1980s onwards, when the BBC became increasingly marketised and politicised. Independent reporting was curtailed as editorial and managerial authority was consolidated, funding was cut and services and programme making were contracted out. In short, the BBC's public service ethos, which was always far too elitist anyway, was steadily eroded while the BBC was slowly privatised. None of that opened it up to a wider range of voices. The privately educated and Oxbridge graduates still dominate—just as they do the press, as a recent Sutton Trust report shows—but the BBC became an elitist organisation more in step with neoliberal Britain.

I have no doubt that the Brexiteers want a BBC that is even more right wing, even more vulnerable to Government pressure and even less economically literate in its reporting—or, alternatively, no BBC at all. Meanwhile, some on the left are so disillusioned with the BBC that they have given up on it altogether. That is a mistake. There are serious problems with the BBC that cannot be ignored, but they can be resolved by making it genuinely independent of Governments—of the left and the right—and accountable not to a narrow elite but to its own staff and to the communities it should represent. The left has always been a friend to the BBC, and should remain so, but securing a public and democratic media system with the BBC at its heart will require radical change.

6.10 pm

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Cheryl, in this important debate for pensioners across the country. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) for securing the debate and the 170,000 people who signed the online petition calling on the Government to protect free TV licences for those aged 75 and over. They join the 600,000 people who signed Age UK's petition calling for the Government to act on this issue.

There is a real sense of public anger at the injustice of the decision to end free TV licences for all those aged 75 and over, with many saying that they will not pay. I have felt that public anger in my constituency. Many of my constituents cannot understand why the Government refuse to stand up for pensioners. I have spoken to constituents who will be directly affected by the Government's inaction, coming from the more than 3,000 local households set to lose a free TV licence.

The Government have betrayed my constituents, along with the pensioners of this country. There was a clear promise in the 2017 Conservative party manifesto that free TV licences would be protected until the end of this Parliament, yet the Government chose to outsource the responsibility and the financial burden of free TV licences

[Hugh Gaffney]

to the BBC. They have successfully shifted the blame on to the BBC for the decision to end free TV licences for all those aged 75 and over. However, the Government must take responsibility. They made a cynical promise to pensioners that they had no intention of keeping. I have repeatedly spoken out in Parliament to highlight the fact that the Government's promise to our pensioners now lies in tatters. When the Labour party held an Opposition day debate on this issue, the Government Benches were all but empty. The Government did not dare vote against Labour's motion, because they know that they have betrayed the trust of pensioners across the country.

When I confronted the Prime Minister on the issue at Prime Minister's questions, her answer could not have been weaker. She told the BBC to "think again", but it is the Prime Minister, whose days are numbered, who must think again. She was the architect of the 2017 Conservative manifesto, which contained a clear promise to protect free TV licences for those aged 75 and over. In one of her last acts as Prime Minister, she should live up to the pledge she gave when she first entered Downing Street to tackle the burning injustices in our society. She should protect our pensioners by ensuring that free TV licences for all those aged 75 and over are maintained.

As things stand, from June 2020 free TV licences will be restricted to those aged 75 and over who claim pension credit. The BBC claims that this will ensure that the poorest pensioners are protected, but its own analysis suggests that just 11% of the poorest households would keep their free TV licence if it was linked to pension credit, and that the poorest 10th of over-75s would have to spend more than 2% of their total income on the TV licence.

There are also clearly issues with the take-up of pension credit. As has been mentioned, the DWP's latest estimates highlight the fact that two out of five people aged 75 and over who should be claiming pension credit have not done so. Independent Age found more than £7 million of pension credit going unclaimed in my constituency of Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill alone. If there is £7 million in my constituency, how much more is out there? However, the Government appear to be doing little to encourage greater take-up of pension credit among those aged 75 and over.

Let us be clear that the decision to restrict free TV licences will increase both poverty and, more importantly, loneliness among our pensioners. One in four over-75s say that the TV is their main source of company, after having brought up their family and then being left alone. I know that. I lost my mother last year, and I know that my dad depends so much on the TV nowadays.

This decision will do nothing to stop the continuing rise of pensioner poverty across the UK. We are often told by the Government that they are on the side of pensioners, yet they still refuse to act to protect pensioners' interests. It is time for the Government to stop blaming the BBC and start taking responsibility. It is time for them to keep their promise and protect the TV licence for the over-75s.

6.16 pm

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in your place, Dame Cheryl—having recently supported HS2, I am sure.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): I think the hon. Gentleman is very much mistaken on my support for HS2. [Laughter.]

Graham Stringer: Right.

David Plowright was one of the great leaders of commercial television. He was the chief executive of Granada Television for many years, where great documentaries and "World in Action" were produced, as well as groundbreaking drama and excellent regional news, and he went on to become the deputy chair of Channel 4. His criteria for the BBC—one of his main competitors—was that it was there to keep the commercial side of television honest. He wanted to support it, and he wanted it to be as good as it possibly could be. It is interesting that, all around this debate, people have to different degrees supported the BBC. Nobody would create it as it is today if we were starting afresh, but there is enormous support, respect and affection for it.

On bias and other aspects of the BBC, my worry is that there is a certain decadence within the organisation, by which I mean a decaying of standards in all sorts of areas of reporting, which, if it continues, might mean that if this debate took place in five or 10 years, there would not be as much support for what is in effect the state broadcaster, supported by a flat-rate tax. I agree partially with my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) that there is one obvious reason for that, although there may well be others: the people who run, report and work for the BBC are primarily drawn from London and Oxbridge, and they have a common view of the world that leads to certain conclusions.

Where I probably disagree with my hon. Friend is my guess that that gives them an almost coherent, homogenous view of the EU and what our relationship with the EU should be. Although this is more difficult to substantiate, I nevertheless think that it also means that, privately, they think they are right and that their view of the world is correct, and that the people who I represent—who are, by and large, not as well educated and do not have the same level of income or educational achievement—are probably wrong.

That is never stated publicly, and I have many friends who are BBC executives and reporters and who do their best. I would never question the integrity of individual BBC reporters. They are doing their best, but it is a fact that there will not be many people working in the BBC who are from the poorest parts of the United Kingdom and would give a different view on the matter. I think that is one reason why we see such high salaries. To someone in the organisation from the background that I have described, having a salary of nearly £2 million might not seem as obscene as it does to most of the people I represent. I do not believe that Gary Lineker was a great footballer; I do not believe that he is—whatever it is—20 or 15 times better at his job than Gabby Logan.

Huw Merriman: The point that I want to make is not so much about Gary Lineker; it is just the fact that the BBC operates in a commercial environment. If it does not pay its talent a commercial wage—many of them actually earn less than the commercial wage—it will lose that talent to other organisations, and then people will switch off the BBC and it will lose viewers.

Graham Stringer: That is a reasonable point as far as it goes. The BBC has not only paid very high salaries in a discriminatory way over the last five years; when it was found to be discriminating, it increased those salaries. It is the case that there are places within the BBC that have to compete commercially, but the fact that it has increased the number of people presenting sports programmes surely shows that there is not a shortage. It could get very high-quality people at a lower rate. Let us say that Gary Lineker goes to BT or Sky; I think that the people at the BBC who are earning a lot less are as good. I understand the argument advanced by the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), but I do not think that it stands up in that case or many others.

I think that John Humphrys is one of the best interviewers there has been on the BBC. He has dropped his salary, but I do not think that he was ever worth more than £600,000 or that the private sector was going to pay that amount of money for him. I have no idea what Andrew Neil gets paid at the moment, but it is a great pity that another great interviewer is leaving the BBC. I do not know whether that is down to commercial pressure or just because he is a bit cheeky and teases the BBC management, but it is a great pity. He gives politicians all round the clock a pretty tough and torrid time when he interviews them, and that is a great thing for democracy. But I think that, from that narrow base, we do get a distorted view.

Incidentally, I take the point made by the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle that £20 million would not pay the licence fees for the over-75s. I accept that; it is just simple arithmetic. But—it is a big but—£20 million is still quite a lot of money, and one of the aspects of the BBC that I appreciate is the quality of regional radio, which is massively underfunded. In regional radio, £20 million would go a long way. Compared with when I started out in politics, which was a long time ago, what is put out by BBC Radio Manchester now—its political coverage and the rest of its coverage—on less resources is not as comprehensive. The quality of the people doing it is excellent, but there simply are not as many of them and there is not as much. That is because of underfunding.

I want to give three or four examples, if I may, of where I think this cohort of south-eastern, Oxbridge-educated people get it wrong. I will say, and the point has already been made, that any organisation with human beings in it is going to make mistakes. The mistakes themselves are mistakes, but they do indicate a larger problem with the BBC.

The BBC procured and presented on BBC Three, when it was a channel, a series of programmes called “People Like Us”. That was based in the ward that I used to represent as a councillor and that is still in the constituency I represent. Frankly, it was poverty porn. It gave the most distorted view of one of the poorest wards in the country. Depending on how we count these things—it is not a competition that any ward or constituency wants to win—Harpurhey is the poorest or the third poorest ward in the country. Cameras went along and the people making the programme pretended—it was a pretence—that they were following how people in Harpurhey lived. They were not; they were distorting it. They paid girls to fight each other. They opened a pub and created a most peculiar party of transvestites. I

have nothing against transvestites, but that kind of situation had never happened in that particular public house, which had been closed for a couple of years. They got a pretend landlord in to talk about how he was very happy for his tenants to take drugs. It was clearly a put-up job. And some of the people who said outrageous things were taken on holiday by the company doing this. It was a shocking and terrible thing, and I do not believe that if people from that kind of background had been part of the BBC, that programme would ever have been made. Fortunately, there was not a second series. The head of BBC Three was good enough to see me and Councillor Karney, who represented the ward. I do not know whether it was down to our lobbying, but there was not a second series.

I want to talk about two other matters. One is bias on the EU. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South made a speech that I half completely agreed with and half completely disagreed with. There is quite a lot of evidence, in terms of the numbers of people interviewed about the European Union, that there are more pro-EU people. In the run-up to the referendum, virtually every business person who was interviewed on the “Today” programme was asked how Brexit was going to damage their business. In fact, it became a standard form of question or statement that “in spite of Brexit”, this benefit or that increase in jobs had happened.

A number of independent research groups have shown the bias in the run-up to the European elections. They have counted the number of people who were pro-EU compared with the number who were anti-EU, and the pros win by about three to one. In fact, one of the senior political journalists said, “We have no need to be balanced in this matter,” which I think is at odds with the BBC’s constitution.

The difference, during the run-up to the referendum campaign, was striking. The BBC did what it does in general elections: it was perfectly well balanced. That was in contrast with what happened afterwards and what happened before the period of the referendum. I think that that is partly because the people who run the BBC in London are essentially all pro-EU and think that there is something peculiar about people who are not.

My background is as a scientist. I believe in the scientific method and I practised for 10 years, running an analytical laboratory, so I am not, in the way some people mean it, a climate sceptic. However, some of the science from the likes of the University of East Anglia and in the leaked emails is a bit dodgy—very dodgy in that case. Some of the policies proposed to deal with climate change are expensive and one needs to be sceptical about the cost of those policies.

Not only is the cohort running the BBC from Oxbridge, but it is happier speaking about the subjunctive than the second law of thermodynamics. They have clear views on what the perception of science and climate change is. I will give an example, which I think is quite extraordinary. I appeared on a programme with Lord Lilley—with whom I disagree with about almost everything—about the Met Office, with Quentin Letts conducting the interview. Lord Lilley has a scientific background. He has a degree from Cambridge in physics. We agreed that climate change is happening and the planet is warming up a bit, but that the response is

[Graham Stringer]

probably overblown. I said that the Met Office was very good at short-term forecasting, but hopeless at medium and long-term forecasts.

It is now impossible to get a recording of that programme, because it is banned, like the Catholic Church in the 16th century. We are on a banned list, because we agreed that the discussion was unbalanced. On the EU, there is no balance, but on a relatively trivial matter, the scientifically illiterate people at the BBC have decided to ban us. There will be real problems in the future if the BBC does not sort these things out.

I have spoken slightly longer than I intended. Finally, I will speak about the issue of free licences. It is not really worth a great deal of further thought. It is quite obvious that the Government—not the BBC—should be responsible for a benefit such as free television licences for the over-75s. The licence fee, however, is worth further consideration—not next week, but in the near future. I find it strange that on my side of the House there is enthusiasm and support for—I could name many such issues, but I will not—flat-rate taxes, which are regressive. If there is a public good and a public benefit from television, which I think there is, it should be funded by progressive taxation coming out of income tax.

The argument against that often put by BBC executives is that it damages the independence of the BBC. My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) knocked that argument on the head on a very specific case. The people running the BBC are part of the informal ruling class in London, and they scratch each other's backs, so there is not complete independence there. Further, Governments have always set the level of the licence fee, so every five years the Government have a say. I do not see why we should not have progressive rather than regressive taxation for what is undoubtedly a public good.

The BBC has had a lot of support, but it has to look at how it funds its regional organisations and how it stops being a cosmopolitan elite, with all the narrow views that that implies.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): I remind colleagues that there is a possibility of votes in the main Chamber during our proceedings, in which case I will suspend and we will have to return. This will be the last speech from hon. Members on the Back Benches, after which we will move on to the Front-Bench spokespeople.

6.34 pm

John Grogan (Keighley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer), who spoke about science, which is an area in which the BBC has improved in recent years. It gives me even greater joy to participate in a debate started by my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones), who always speaks with such style and panache, which we can only envy, whatever the subject.

Given that it is a summers' evening and we have hardly mentioned the great triumph in the cricket world cup yesterday, which was broadcast by "Test Match Special", I want to find reasons to be cheerful, cherish

the BBC and suggest some interventions to help not only the BBC but other public service broadcasters. I will refer to some ideas mentioned by other hon. Members.

The hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers)—by far the best town on the east coast, so I hear—mentioned the loss of sports broadcasting rights for the BBC. We have just had a tremendous weekend for sport. The cricket world cup was watched by a peak audience of 7.9 million on Channel 4 and Sky, but it was beaten by Wimbledon, which was broadcast on the BBC to a peak audience of 9.6 million. That happened not by accident, but because the Wimbledon tennis finals are part of the listed events that must be offered to free-to-air television.

In future, we should not have to rely on the public relations of Comcast or Sky to ensure that we can see those events. The women's world cup attracted more than 11 million viewers. It is no good showing one event every 15 years; the story of a tournament has to be told over a number of months, possibly years. There is a growing call for events such as the women's world cup, and the men's and women's T20 and 50-overs cricket world cups—particularly games involving England, the other home nations and the final—to be broadcast on free-to-air TV. The deputy leader of the Labour party made an interesting but underreported speech on this subject the other day. We should make that intervention.

Ofcom has been looking at the prominence of BBC channels and other public service broadcasting channels. It has made some rather good recommendations, including for public service channels to be prominent not only on traditional TVs, but on set-top boxes, streaming services and smart TV. I hope the Government will find time to put those recommendations into legislation quickly, so that the licence fee payer always finds it easy to see the BBC and other public service broadcaster channels.

Ofcom has said it is minded to allow the BBC to keep programmes on the iPlayer for up to a year. That would be a good thing. It is reflected among some of the BBC's commercial competitors. Equally, I am hopeful that Ofcom will agree to the proposals for BritBox. Such services exist in the United States. It would entail the BBC and ITV, and hopefully other public service broadcasters, after a period, providing streaming packages for their big-hit programmes, providing an additional revenue stream. A similar project, Project Kangaroo, was rejected by Ofcom 10 years ago. I hope that Ofcom will recognise that the BBC is now operating in a completely different market. Netflix spends £8 billion a year on programming. There is also Amazon and Facebook to compete with. The BBC must be allowed to compete with those global media giants.

I have one or two other points to make. We heard about people being jailed for not paying the licence fee. The number of people who have gone to prison has gone down dramatically, from 50 in 2012 to 17 in 2017. They were sent to jail not by the TV licensing authority but by magistrates, often for multiple debts in addition to non-payment of the licence fee. It is wise to keep the issue in context.

The hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) made it clear that he does not like programmes being switched for the tennis, but when it comes to advertising he is rather more pro. As my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) said, allowing widespread advertising on the BBC would totally destabilise

the traditional market. ITV and Channel 4 would lobby very hard against it, because it would destroy a large part of their income stream.

The question of bias was raised. Some hon. Members did not deal with the “Panorama” programme, but I am quite happy to mention it, and indeed the whole series. Recent and forthcoming “Panorama” episodes include one on relationships education, one on abortion in the United States, one on exiting the EU and on what a no-deal Brexit might mean, and one dealing with antisemitism in the Labour party. They are all perfectly legitimate programmes.

There is a gentleman who I think goes by the name of Seumas Milne, who I think works in the Leader of the Opposition’s office, and who I think might fit the public school-educated, south-eastern, Oxbridge profile that some of my hon. Friends are very agitated about. No doubt in all those institutions, as he was growing up, he was advised using a cricket analogy: play the ball, not the man. That is very sensible advice—attacking the credibility of a very distinguished journalist was not my party’s finest moment. I think of another Milne: Alasdair Milne, whose record Seumas should perhaps look back on. He was a man who defended the BBC against the Government, and probably paid for it with his job. That is a far better example to follow.

We have heard a lot about the voice of the BBC and about how its people come from the same background. That may have been true some time ago, but I think it has changed over the past couple of decades. Partly because of the move to Manchester, there is now a range of northern voices across 5 Live and BBC News. It is always a great pleasure to show BBC apprentices around Parliament; they reflect the diversity of our nation.

There is no point in repeating what other hon. Members have said about the substance of the petitions. I certainly think that George Osborne was to blame, but he was not the only Chancellor of the Exchequer who approached TV licence fee negotiations in the same way. I do not think that Gordon Brown, in his time, was particularly more forthcoming with consultation. It is up to this House to put greater rules in place for how the licence fee is determined. There should be more consultation, and everyone should know the time period; it should not just be the Chancellor or the director-general coming out of a meeting and an announcement being made.

The future of the licence fee and of the BBC is a big decision for the country. The BBC belongs to us all, not just to the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the day. That should be reflected in how we award the royal charter to the BBC and in how we set the licence fee.

6.42 pm

Brendan O’Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): As always, Dame Cheryl, it is a pleasure to see you in the Chair. I thank and congratulate all 15 Members who have made speeches in this important debate. In the confessional spirit that has been prevalent this afternoon, I put it on the record that I, too, am a former employee of the BBC—I was there for about a decade. However, I have already spoken extensively about my time at the BBC, so in the time available I will concentrate on the issue that has dominated our debate: the decision to means-test the licence fee for those aged 75 and above.

In the SNP’s opinion, it is absolutely outrageous that the UK Government have sought to shift a welfare policy decision to the BBC, thereby not only shirking their responsibility to support our older citizens, but shamefully breaking their manifesto commitment on TV licences for the over-75s, as we have heard so many times this afternoon. Their 2017 manifesto made an explicit promise—on page 66, to be exact—that they would

“maintain...pensioner benefits, including free bus passes, eye tests, prescriptions and TV licences, for the duration of this parliament.”

I am glad that so many Conservative Members recognise that, particularly the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman).

I urge the Minister to explain why the Government are breaking their promise, and to commit to ensuring that our elderly population will not suffer because of such a damaging and ill-thought-out proposal. SNP Members add our voices to the ever-growing numbers, in all parts of the House and the length and breadth of these islands, who are calling for the UK Government to reverse their decision and stop abdicating responsibility by putting it on the BBC, particularly at this time of rising pensioner poverty. I wholeheartedly agree with the right hon. Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) and the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) that the Government were completely wrong to impose such a deal on the BBC in the first place—but then to criticise the BBC for doing what it was instructed to do simply beggars belief.

At a time when more and more of our older people are struggling to make ends meet, in many cases as a direct result of Tory austerity cuts, it would be a grave injustice to remove the free TV licence and expect older people to conjure up another £150 from somewhere. Scotland’s First Minister recently signed a letter to the Prime Minister urging the UK Government to guarantee that free TV licences for the over-75s would be protected. That letter was signed by every leader of Scotland’s major political parties, with the exception of Ruth Davidson of the Scottish Conservatives. Scotland’s First Minister and the other party leaders signed the letter because they know that the UK Government already provide one of the lowest state pensions in the developed world. Our older people need more financial support, not less, particularly at a time of rising costs.

Following its consultation process, the BBC announced that from June 2020 only those people who are aged 75 or above and in receipt of pension credit will continue to receive free TV licences. However, I argue strongly that means-testing on the basis of pension credit has been shown to be fundamentally flawed. I take issue with the assertion of the corporation’s director-general, Tony Hall, and its chairman, Sir David Clementi, that using pension credit means that the pensioners in most need will be protected. That is simply not the case.

It is currently estimated that four in 10 pensioner households eligible for pension credit do not receive it, for one reason or another. Just last month, the charity Independent Age found that more than 1 million pensioner households across the UK are living in poverty because the Government failed to act on unpaid pension credit, and that since 2017 the Government have benefited from £7 billion in unclaimed pension credit. As a result,

[Brendan O'Hara]

there will be hundreds of thousands of poor pensioners who should qualify but do not, and who will now have to find an extra £150 to pay for a TV licence.

What about those pensioners who just miss out on qualifying for pension credit? They are hardly living the life of Riley, and by no stretch of the imagination could they be considered wealthy, yet they will be hurt most by the decision. Perhaps Lord Hall and Sir David Clementi would care to reflect on the fairness and protection that they argue is being afforded to this group of people. After years of Tory austerity, and the deep financial uncertainty caused by Brexit, the last thing that our older people need is the extra burden of finding the money for a TV licence.

I commend the words of the hon. Members for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan), for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), and for Lincoln (Karen Lee). The testimonies of their constituents could have come from any one of the 650 constituencies across these islands, because that is the reality. They display the depth of feeling among our constituents.

It is estimated that in Scotland this Tory TV licence fee will cost £40 million, with a quarter of a million over-75s set to lose out. Age Scotland also estimates that around 76,000 pensioners in Scotland do not receive pension credit, even though they are eligible for it. We in the SNP wholeheartedly agree with the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union, which has said that the over-75s' licence is a welfare benefit and that it is the Government's responsibility to pay it, and nobody else's. Like BECTU and others, SNP Members will continue to call out this Government and the shameful subcontracting of their welfare responsibility to the BBC.

Stripping pensioners of their free TV licences is unacceptable. It will add pressure to already stretched pensioner budgets, and it will cause worry and angst among our poorest and most vulnerable people, who will be forced to make difficult choices about what they can and cannot afford. The responsibility for the TV licence lies with the UK Government. As we have heard so many times today, welfare policy should not be decided by the BBC and we strongly urge the Government to recognise that it is their responsibility to our older population to fully fund these licences.

I will finish by going right back to the beginning of the debate and the speech by the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones). The words she used really resonate and the Government should reflect on them: she said that what the Government are doing to the over-75s really is the most mean-spirited of Government cuts.

6.51 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): I thank everyone who has spoken in this debate and I join those who have congratulated my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) on her speech. Once again, she gave an object lesson in how to open a debate and how to deliver a parliamentary speech, with her customary lucidity and gusto backing up the powerful facts she cited. She is a wonderful Chair of the Petitions Committee and long may she be able to introduce these debates on our behalf, setting the tone so well.

However, there was something that my hon. Friend said that I disagreed with. She said that she thought that this Government were the Arthur Daley of public administration. That is very unfair on Arthur Daley, Del Boy and others, because I cannot imagine for one moment that they would have tried to pull off a scam such as the over-75s scam that the Government have tried to pull off by outsourcing social policy in this way.

My hon. Friend also pointed out the extra costs that older people face, in relation to extra heating and so on, which I thought was a new and original point in the debate, although it is not often taken into account when discussing the importance of free TV licences for the over-75s. Also—I think people should take note of this—she quite rightly predicted that the scammers, conmen and fraudsters will soon move in on vulnerable older people when free TV licences for the over-75s are ended if the Government do not reverse this very poor decision.

The hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) revealed a new and interesting fact, because we had not known that in years gone by he was part of the BBC's talent, and that he had even been big in India, which I had not anticipated. As for the substance of his speech, he seemed to suggest that advertising should perhaps be more widely used in the BBC as a funding model. I am afraid that is something that Labour Members disagree with.

My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan) quite rightly pointed out that free TV licences for the over-75s is a social policy, and that if the Government want to change a social policy they should have the guts and commitment to make the argument themselves and put it in their manifesto. They should argue the case in Parliament themselves, take it to a vote here, have a consultation with the public—all the things that every Government should do when changing social policy. They should do that themselves, rather than taking BBC executives into a darkened room with a rubber hose and duffing them up until they agree to do this, under the threat of future Treasury cuts to BBC funding.

Even having done that, which was wrong in itself, for the Government subsequently to put into their 2017 general election manifesto the proposition that the free concession would be retained, when they had already outsourced it to the BBC, really was an example of the most egregious misuse of a general election manifesto—no wonder the manifesto went down like a lead balloon.

The right hon. Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey)—unfortunately, he is no longer in his place—who is a distinguished former Minister in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, rightly referred to the wider work that the BBC does in our cultural and social life. To the many things he listed, I would add podcasts, which are becoming more and more important. I have just listened to "Shreds", a brilliant podcast about the so-called Cardiff Three and the murder of Lynette White. I recommend it to right hon. and hon. Members as a fine example of public service broadcasting, as we used to call it, although I suppose in this case it is public service streaming or downloading. Brilliant content is being made available to licence fee payers by the BBC in a way that is new and innovative.

The right hon. Member for Wantage also asked, quite clearly and straightforwardly, whether reforming free TV licences for the over-75s should be the BBC's role, and he said that the answer is no. I therefore say to the Minister who is here today—the Minister for Digital and the Creative Industries, the hon. Member for Stourbridge (Margot James)—that the right hon. Gentleman, a former Minister, made that absolutely clear. He was even a Minister in the Department when this decision was made, but he is absolutely clear that this is not a role that the BBC should play. That is her own right hon. Friend making that statement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), who unfortunately is also no longer in her place, mentioned her own 89-year-old mother—indeed, I have an 89-year-old mother who also relies on her television licence. My hon. Friend pointed out the amount of pension credit that remained unclaimed just in her own constituency of Swansea East, which is one of the more deprived parts of the country. She said that there was £6.5 million of unclaimed pension credit for her constituency alone, which prompts a question: what will happen if pension credit is claimed by a greater proportion of the population, as we all hope it will be, than is the case currently?

If that happens, the Government might find that, as a result of this policy, more people are claiming pension credit, which would be a good thing, but the Government would have to pay it. However, the increase would also mean an extra burden on the BBC, because of the greater number of free TV licences. I put down a written question to the Government to ask what estimate they had made of that effect and the answer was, “None whatsoever”. It is as if they are making all this up on the back of a fag packet as they go along.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) described the TV licence as “archaic”. I simply say to him, because he has obviously read and even swallowed some books on market economics along the way, that there are some things in life that are the opposite to the usual rule: they work in practice but not in theory. That is the case with the TV licence, which works in practice and has broad public support, as is clearly evidenced in the statistics that have been cited. It does not work in any economic theory textbook, but so what? It actually works very well and very effectively.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee), who unfortunately is also not here for the wind-ups, told us about the positive response that there had been to the petition in her constituency. The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), who does a lot of work in this place on issues affecting the BBC, described it as “much-loved” but an “anomaly”. In some ways, he is echoing some of the sentiments that I would like to express from the Opposition Front Bench. However, he also admitted that the BBC had not really been funded to pay for the free TV licence concession and that the commitment in the Government's manifesto up until 2022 should be honoured.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) mentioned, very importantly, the impact that this change could have on people with dementia, and the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) said that it was “inevitable”—I think I am quoting him directly here—that the BBC

“would opt out at the first possible opportunity.”

The Government are trying to maintain the fiction that they did not need to opt out at the first opportunity, and that the BBC should continue to run this concession despite the fact that the funding has not been supplied.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) pointed out that the outsourcing of blame is a speciality of this Government, and that this is a fine example. He also made the very important point that “talent” should not be used to refer just to on-air employees of the BBC. As we in the Opposition like to say, talent is everywhere; opportunity is not. We are here to try to extend opportunity much more widely than it currently is.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) quoted research from Cardiff University, and being from Cardiff, I have to accept it at face value as a very good piece of research. He made some points about BBC bias and so on, but I would say to him that the BBC is still the most trusted source of news among the public, and is also subject to Ofcom regulation and has to meet standards. He is right that we should hold the BBC to account but, imperfect as it is—I know that he accepts this point—it still plays a role in maintaining the gravitational pull of standards in this country's broadcasting that is rarely matched in other parts of the western world.

We all give my hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney) our sympathies for the loss of his mother. He appealed to the Prime Minister, even at this late stage, to act on this matter. I would say to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) that he should not put everybody from Oxbridge in the same category. There are working-class Oxbridge graduates—I include myself in that category, as well as the final speaker, my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (John Grogan). He was at Oxford at the same time as me, and also came from a working-class background, breaking through the typical mould that my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton described. As usual, my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley talked a lot of sense about the future of the BBC.

At the moment, the BBC is under attack from a number of different directions, and it is very sad that on the issue of the over-75s licence fee, the Government are joining that attack. It is sad that they are joining in the predictable attacks that come from some sections of the tabloid press, often owned—as my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South said—by a small number of individuals. The Government should do more to stand up for the BBC and support it, not try to outsource their responsibilities to our national broadcaster. As Joni Mitchell once said,

“you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone.”

We should cherish the BBC as a uniquely British institution that works very effectively. Yes, let us hold it to account and try to improve it, but let us not use it as a whipping boy because of the Government's own failure in their social policies. Finally, the Government's handling of the over-75s licence fee is a disgrace. With the change of leadership, perhaps now is an opportunity for a change of mind.

7.3 pm

The Minister for Digital and the Creative Industries (Margot James): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Cheryl, and I congratulate the

[Margot James]

hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) on securing this important debate on these three petitions. I agree with the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), that the hon. Lady's opening speech was an excellent account of so many of the issues that drove those petitions, and her own response to them.

Before I address some of the issues that have been raised, I will echo the huge positivity from across the Chamber about the role, importance and value of the BBC. We in this country are extremely fortunate to have the BBC, for all the reasons that right hon. and hon. Members have mentioned; it delivers an enormous public service, with hugely successful productions such as "Bodyguard", "Strictly Come Dancing" and the "Today" programme. I would add a recent one, "Gentleman Jack", which is absolutely fantastic.

Mr Vaizey: Oh, I loved that.

Margot James: I am glad my right hon. Friend loved it. It was a series that illustrated the importance of diversity in the BBC: a regional series set in Halifax, written by a BAFTA-winning director and playwright, Sally Wainwright—also from Yorkshire—and co-produced by BBC Studios and Lookout Point. I wish that such a series had been aired when I was growing up in the 1970s.

Of course, it is the licence fee that delivers that public value and allows the BBC to reach UK audiences everywhere, from the TVs in our homes to all the gadgets and devices that we carry around with us. The BBC is also required to represent and cater for all sorts of niche interests that may well not attract the attention of a channel that depends on advertising, or even broad-based subscription revenues, for its identity and position. The BBC received close to £3.7 billion in licence fee income last year, and its unique position of providing distinctive content in under-served genres to under-served audiences is vital.

Right hon. and hon. Members will know that we carefully considered the question of the licence fee as part of the BBC charter review process in 2015 and 2016. We found that independent research demonstrated a great deal of public interest in the licence fee. Some 60% of people surveyed backed it as the least worst option, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) mentioned. For 60%, the licence fee was the mode of payment that they most supported, with fewer than 3% backing either an advertising model or a subscription-based model. Those figures are quite powerful, which is why we have committed to maintaining the licence fee funding model for at least the duration of this new 11-year charter period, which will bring us to the end of 2027. That provides the BBC with the funding certainty that it needs to thrive and deliver its mission and public purposes.

The media landscape is changing all the time, and citizens and consumers have more choice than ever before, particularly in the form of subscription-based services. However, the BBC's content remains hugely popular. Some 91% of adults in the UK use its services each week, spending an average of 18 hours watching, listening to or using those services. Such figures demonstrate

the continuing importance of the BBC in the fast-changing and increasingly competitive media landscape. In addition, the BBC directly invests over £2 billion in the UK's creative industries each year, and invests billions of pounds in the digital and high-tech industries that support content creation and distribution. It is therefore a very important contributor not only to our shared experiences and public life but to the economy.

I now turn to the over-75s' licence fee concession. Of course, the Government recognise the importance of television to people of all ages, particularly older people. We have heard a lot today from Members who, having talked to their constituents, have recounted what we all know: that the television can provide a lifeline to older people, particularly those who are recently bereaved or live alone, as a way of staying connected with the world. Right hon. and hon. Members have made that point clear, and I wholeheartedly agree with those sentiments.

However, if we cast our minds back four or five years to the time of the 2015 funding settlement, the Government had an expectation that all public services and public institutions had to find some economies and play their part in reducing the budget deficit overall and bringing some stability and sense to the public finances. Older people, like everybody else, mostly agreed with the need to do so, although they did not necessarily agree with all the means that were identified as routes towards restoring that stability and sense. However, it was agreed with the BBC that the responsibility for that concession would transfer to the BBC by June 2020.

In return, the Government closed the iPlayer loophole so that more people paid the licence fee. Many more people now pay the licence fee, leading to an uptick in the BBC's revenues. The Government also committed to increase the licence fee in line with inflation during the charter period, which for the first time gave the BBC a more sustainable income for the future. At the time, the Government and the BBC agreed it was a fair deal. Indeed, the director-general said:

"The Government's decision here to put the cost of the over-75s on us has been more than matched by the deal coming back for the BBC."

Parliament debated the issue extensively in passing the Digital Economy Act 2017 and approving the transfer of the legal responsibility for the concession to the BBC. I was a Whip in that Government, and I can tell Members—I am sure you will remember this too, Dame Cheryl—that we had to compromise greatly on a number of very contentious issues, but this was not one of them.

Kevin Brennan: Rubbish!

Margot James: I will take an intervention from the hon. Gentleman if he likes.

Kevin Brennan: I will not let the Minister get away with that absolute rubbish. We tabled extensive amendments in Committee and on Report and opposed the proposal throughout. It was a highly contentious matter.

Margot James: To be fair to the hon. Gentleman, he has a fair point—that the matter was contentious—but the proposal got through without the Government having to make compromises, unlike other things. For example, Members might remember the proposals to change Sunday trading laws. That is one of several examples of

legislation that the Government had to change because opposition was so great. This transfer of responsibility did not attract the same level of opposition. Enough Members voted it through and Parliament therefore approved it, which is something we have to bear in mind. The responsibility was therefore passed to the BBC with parliamentary approval, and it was accepted by BBC governors and the director-general, no less.

I am willing to take more interventions on the other points that I have addressed, but I will turn to perceived bias and the BBC. Under its royal charter, the BBC has a duty to deliver high-quality, impartial and accurate news coverage and content. Members have already mentioned that 90% of the public value the news coverage of the BBC and believe in its impartiality. As with all other broadcasters, the BBC is subject to the Ofcom broadcasting code, which includes requirements on accuracy and impartiality. Ofcom is now firmly established as the new external regulator for the BBC. It will act to safeguard the high standards of impartiality that already exist at the BBC.

The Government are clear that the licence fee is the right funding model. It is clear that Ofcom's robust approach to regulation will safeguard the impartiality that the BBC has a duty to observe. The licence fee concession was passed over, so I do not criticise the BBC for making the decision that it did. The BBC accepted the responsibility, and we should now let it get on and deliver at least a free licence to those over-75s who qualify for pension credit. As the shadow Minister said, the BBC will now write to all people in receipt of a free television licence with the new rules, setting out how they can apply, and I am hopeful that the decision will to a certain extent rectify the underclaiming of

pension credit. Those 37% of people over the age of 75 who are entitled to pension credit will now have another incentive to claim it.

7.14 pm

Helen Jones: This has been an interesting debate. I thank all Members who have spoken on the various petitions that we are discussing. Some extremely interesting points have been made, but time does not allow me to go through them now. I thank the Minister for her sterling defence of the licence fee. In particular, I point out to her that I doubt whether that excellent programme "Gentleman Jack" would ever have been made by a commercial broadcaster. A pitch to a commercial broadcaster for a programme about gay women in early 19th-century Yorkshire would never have got beyond first base. It is an excellent programme.

However, I am sorry that the Minister did not respond—in fact, she probably cannot respond—to the real concern expressed about pensioners who will lose their free TV licence. That matter must be taken up higher up in Government by the Treasury. We need to ensure that our pensioners are protected. We certainly opposed that change at the time, and I know that other Members did too. We must admit that the current situation does not work and that the BBC should not be deciding social policy at all, and we must change the system to protect our pensioners.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petitions 234627, 234797 and 235653 relating to the BBC.

7.16 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 15 July 2019

TREASURY

Public Service Pensions

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Elizabeth Truss):

The Government are committed to providing public service pensions that are fair for public sector workers and for taxpayers. This is why we brought forward reforms in 2015, based on the recommendations of the Hutton report, to ensure that these pensions are sustainable in the future.

The courts have considered cases regarding the implementation of the 2015 reforms. On 27 June 2019 the Supreme Court denied the Government permission to appeal the Court of Appeal's judgment that transitional provisions introduced to the reformed judges and firefighters pension schemes in 2015 gave rise to unlawful age discrimination. The Government respects the Court's decision and will engage fully with the employment tribunal to agree how the discrimination will be remedied.

The ruling relates to the "transitional protection" offered to some members when the reformed schemes were introduced. In order to ensure people close to retirement age were treated fairly, the Government agreed to "transitional protection", which broadly permitted those members who were closest to retirement at the time new pension schemes were introduced to remain members of their respective old schemes. The court has found that those too far away from retirement age to qualify for "transitional protection" have been unfairly discriminated against. As "transitional protection" was offered to members of all the main public service pension schemes, the Government believe that the difference in treatment will need to be remedied across all those schemes. This includes schemes for the NHS, civil service, local government, teachers, police, armed forces, judiciary and fire and rescue workers. Continuing to resist the full implications of the judgment in court would only add to the uncertainty experienced by members.

The matter will be remitted to the employment tribunal in respect of the litigants in the firefighters and judicial pension schemes. It will be for the tribunal to determine a remedy. Alongside this process, Government will be engaging with employer and member representatives, as well as the devolved Administrations, to help inform our proposals to the tribunal and in respect of the other public service pension schemes.

Initial estimates suggest remedying the discrimination will add around £4 billion per annum to scheme liabilities from 2015.

The reasons for the 2015 reforms remain: that public service pensions are a significant cost for the taxpayer, now and in the future. The judgment does not alter the Government's commitment to ensuring that the cost of public service pensions are affordable for taxpayers and sustainable for the long term.

[HCWS1725]

DEFENCE

Chemical Weapons Convention: Declaration of Protective Programme

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster):

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence in the House of Lords (The Earl Howe) has made the following written ministerial statement.

The UK's chemical protection programme is designed to protect against the use of chemical weapons. Such a programme is permitted by the Chemical Weapons Convention, with which the United Kingdom is fully compliant. Under the terms of the convention, we are required to provide information annually to the organisation for the prohibition of chemical weapons. In accordance with the Government's commitment to openness, I am placing in the Library of the House a copy of the summary that has been provided to the organisation outlining the UK's chemical protection programme in 2018.

[HCWS1718]

Inappropriate Behaviour in the Armed Forces: Review

The Secretary of State for Defence (Penny Mordaunt):

In April of this year a report was commissioned to look into inappropriate behaviour in the armed forces. Our armed forces are the pride of our nation, and have a hard-won reputation here, and across the world.

The report which was undertaken by Air Chief Marshal Mike Wigston, concluded that while the vast majority of military personnel serve with great honour and distinction, some unacceptable behaviour does occur. I am publishing the report today.

I am accepting the recommendations of the report in full, including creating a defence authority to provide centralised oversight of their implementation. Detailed work on the design of this body and its responsibilities is now under way.

We are examining the recommendations and ascertaining how we can prevent inappropriate behaviour in the first place, and where it does occur, deal with the perpetrators more effectively. Leadership is key to this approach at all levels of the services from the most senior to the most junior. Everyone has a role to play in setting and maintaining standards. Non-Commissioned Officers in particular are key in holding people to these standards and the values of their service. I am therefore, in addition to the findings of this report, looking to ensure all Non-Commissioned Officers have what they need to address poor behaviour when they see it.

This will clearly take time, and I see today as the start of this work, not the end.

[HCWS1720]

EDUCATION

School Sport and Activity

The Secretary of State for Education (Damian Hinds):

A positive experience of sport and physical activity at a young age can build a lifetime habit of participation. It is central to meeting the Government's ambitions for a world-class education system which promotes character, good physical health and mental wellbeing. We face a significant challenge to increase and maintain activity levels among children and young people, particularly

given the levels of childhood obesity. Data from Sport England's Active Lives Children and Young People survey show that a third of children are currently doing less than 30 minutes of physical activity a day, less than half the amount recommended by the Chief Medical Officer.

The Department for Education, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and Department of Health and Social Care are today publishing a joint school sport and activity action plan which will set out the following ambitions:

All children and young people take part in at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day.

All children and young people have the opportunity to realise developmental, character- building experiences through sport, competition and active pursuits.

All sport and physical activity provision for children and young people is designed around building basic skills as well as confidence, enjoyment, knowledge and understanding (known as physical literacy) with a focus on fun and enjoyment, and reaching the least active young people.

The action plan will set out a number of immediate actions that feed into realising these ambitions, including a strong commitment to joint working between schools and the sport sector. The plan also sets out areas of activity for the future with action to be confirmed in a further updated plan later in the year, following the spending review.

The immediate actions include a commitment to an additional £2.5 million from the Department for Education in 2019-20 to support schools through further work on teacher training, more help and advice to enable schools to open up their facilities and make links with providers, as well as providing more opportunities for young people to volunteer in sport. The plan also sets out over £4 million of Sport England investment in new after-school clubs, strengthening the school games competition and building girls' confidence through a programme linked to 'This Girl Can'.

The Government are also committing to develop regional pilots to trial new and innovative approaches to getting young people active, jointly funded by Sport England and the Department for Education from 2020. The pilots will involve collaborative working from the school and community sector to offer a co-ordinated sport and physical activity experience for young people.

We will be working with sporting organisations like the Youth Sport Trust, RFU, England Netball and the Premier League to ensure that sports clubs and programmes can reach even more children, encouraging them to get active by focusing on fun, enjoyment and increasing confidence.

[HCWS1724]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Compliance Improvement Review

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): On 9 May 2019 I made a written ministerial statement to notify Parliament of compliance risks that MI5 had identified and reported within certain technology environments used to store and analyse data. In the

statement I confirmed that I had established an independent review to consider and report back to me on what lessons could be learned for the future. My statement today notifies Parliament that this review, the Compliance Improvement Review (CIR), is now complete and that the Government are publishing the summary section of the report and its recommendations, gisted where necessary for national security reasons.

The CIR was led by Sir Martin Donnelly, a former Permanent Secretary, and examined how the issue arose and considered MI5's governance and risk management procedures in light of this. The review team had access to all relevant documentation and met key individuals from Government, MI5 and the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office to discuss the background to the risks being identified. I would like to place on record my thanks to Sir Martin and the review team, who have worked diligently to complete a thorough and well-evidenced review.

I was provided with a copy of the review report in late June and have since had the opportunity to discuss it with Sir Martin. The Investigatory Powers Commissioner and the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament have both received copies of the full report.

The CIR identified three areas where improvements can be made. These are: improvements to support an effective compliance culture across MI5; improvements to ensure more effective sharing of information between MI5 and the Home Office to identify emerging issues; and improvements to ensure increased legal input to the MI5 Management Board and ensuring closer joint working between MI5 and Home Office legal advisors. The review makes a total of 14 recommendations to address these issues, which are set out in the document that has been published today.

I can confirm that DG MI5 and I agree with the CIR's conclusions and my Department will now work closely with MI5 to deliver the recommendations.

It should be noted that the CIR found that there was no attempt by MI5 to hide the compliance risk they were managing. The CIR describes MI5 as "a consistently high-performing organisation, with a growing number of committed and professional staff working under sustained pressure to keep this country safe", a view I share from my experience as Home Secretary. Copies of the CIR summary document will be made available on www.gov.uk and will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS1722]

Serious Violence

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): On 1 April 2019 the Government published a consultation paper on a new legal duty to support a multi-agency approach to preventing and tackling serious violence.

The consultation sought views on three options to support a multi-agency approach to preventing and tackling serious violence including: a new duty on specific organisations to have due regard to the prevention and tackling of serious violence; a new duty through legislating to revise community safety partnerships; and, a voluntary non-legislative approach.

The consultation closed on 28 May and I am today publishing the Government response to the consultation which includes a summary of the responses that the consultation received. A copy of the Government response and related impact assessment will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and will be available on the www.gov.uk website.

[HCWS1721]

JUSTICE

Personal Injury Compensation

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Gauke): Earlier today, I notified the market via the London Stock Exchange group that I would today lay a statutory instrument to change the discount rate applicable to personal injury lump sum compensation payments in England and Wales, to -0.25%. The new rate will come into force on 5 August 2019, in line with the statutory timetable set out by the Civil Liability Act 2018 (“the Act”).

Under the Damages Act 1996, I, as Lord Chancellor, have the power to set a discount rate which courts must consider when awarding compensation for future financial losses in the form of a lump sum in personal injury cases. The legal framework was changed by the Civil Liability Act 2018.

The new framework makes clear that claimants must be treated as “low risk” investors. Under the Act I, as Lord Chancellor, must conduct a review and determine whether the rate should be changed or kept unchanged within 140 days of beginning the review and including the day on which the review starts. I started the review on 19 March 2019, and in conducting this review, I consulted the Government Actuary and HM Treasury.

The Government Actuary provided an analysis of dual rates—this would involve a lower short-term rate and then a higher long-term rate after a “switchover” period. Although I consider their analysis interesting with some promising indications, I do not consider it appropriate, noting the lack of quantity and depth of evidence required, to adopt a dual rate for this review. The potential of the dual rate to be appropriate for future reviews is one that I will consider in more detail.

A full statement of reasons, explaining how I have decided upon this rate, will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS1717]

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

Office for Tackling Injustices

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Penny Mordaunt): On Friday 12 July, the Prime Minister announced the creation of the Office for Tackling Injustices. This is a new organisation that will hold the Government and wider society to account for tackling key social injustices.

Despite the great progress we have made in promoting fair treatment for all in the UK, we know that too many of our citizens are still held back by the injustice of

unequal treatment on the grounds of their socio-economic background, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or disability.

The Prime Minister has spoken of her determination to tackle these “burning injustices”. But all Governments should work to end the injustices that continue to characterise our country for too many. The Office for Tackling Injustices (OfTI) will focus minds on how to create a fairer country in the decades to come.

By shining a light on data on injustices and monitoring change, the OfTI will provide evidence-based challenge to future Governments and wider society to tackle disparities in social and economic outcomes. Data is a hard, sometimes uncomfortable fact, but publishing it and communicating it clearly forces Government and others to hold a mirror up to their own performance and challenge themselves to do better.

The OfTI will have a remit covering social injustices relating to ethnicity, gender, disability, socioeconomic background and LGBT. As well as annually delivering a data-driven report on progress to Parliament, the OfTI will also publish thematic studies into issues relevant to its mandate. It will make use of relevant published data from various public authorities, monitoring trends and considering the underlying causes and drivers for them.

[HCWS1723]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council

The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma): The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council took place on 8 July 2019 in Brussels. The deputy permanent representative to the European Union, Katrina Williams, represented the UK.

The Council approved the non-binding 2019 country specific recommendations (CSRs) to member states, and endorsed the joint opinion of the Employment and Social Protection Committees, assessing the 2019 CSRs and the implementation of those from 2018. The Council also adopted guidelines for the employment policies of the member states 2019.

The Council debated the “economy of wellbeing” and “employment aspects of the strategic long term vision for a climate neutral economy”.

The Council closed with employment and social policy updates by the Commission on the International Labour Organisation, G7 and G20.

[HCWS1716]

Health-related Job Loss

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson): I would like to make the following statement on behalf of myself and the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price).

Today, my Department, in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Care, will publish a consultation on proposals to reduce health-related job loss.

As people live and work for longer, more employees are disabled or have long-term health conditions. There are significant and well evidenced benefits for employers, individuals and Government if health-related job loss can be reduced.

For employers, offering flexibility, early support and occupational health advice are the key to successful retention. Employers are best placed to take the early preventative measures that are most effective. There are large variations in employers' capability and capacity to act with large firms five times more likely to provide occupational health when compared to small firms.

Each year more than 100,000 people leave their job following a period of sickness absence lasting at least four weeks. Survey evidence shows that 44% of people who had been off sick for a year then left employment altogether.

The proposals set out in this consultation include:

Amending the legal framework to encourage workplace modifications and early action to support individuals on sickness absence leave;

Reforming statutory sick pay so that it is better enforced, more flexible and covers the lowest paid and potentially, rewards effective action with a new rebate;

Improving access to occupational health services with additional support for small employers including a potential subsidy;

Government to provide best practice advice and support for employers on managing health and disability in the workplace.

The evidence and views gathered during this consultation will be used to develop our proposals further and understand the impact of the changes on both employers and employees.

[HCWS1719]

Ministerial Corrections

Monday 15 July 2019

WORK AND PENSIONS

Inequality and Social Mobility

The following is an extract from the Opposition day debate on Inequality and Social Mobility on 12 June 2019.

Amber Rudd: Our safety net is one of the strongest in the world. We deliver the fourth most generous level of welfare support in the OECD. In this financial year, total welfare spending will be more than £220 billion.

[Official Report, 12 June 2019, Vol. 661, c. 734.]

Letter of correction from the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions:

An error has been identified in my contribution to the debate.

The correct information should have been:

Amber Rudd: Our safety net is one of the strongest in the world. **We are the fourth most generous country, according to the UN World Happiness Report.** In this financial year, total welfare spending will be more than £220 billion.

EDUCATION

Education Funding

The following is an extract from the Westminster Hall debate on Education Funding on 4 June 2019.

Nick Gibb: I refer my hon. Friend and other hon. Members to the schedules that show how the national funding formula is made up. Local authorities will attract the same figure for every primary school pupil in 2019-20, regardless of where they are in the country, and the same figure for secondary and key stage 4. That

represents about 73% of the total funding per pupil. **The remaining 27% is made up of additional needs.** For example, a pupil who has qualified for free school meals in the last six years will attract £540 in primary and £785 in secondary. If that secondary school pupil is in band D of the income deprivation affecting children index, they will attract another £515. If that secondary school pupil has low prior attainment based on primary school results, they will attract an additional £1,550. If that secondary school child has English as an additional language, they will attract an additional £1,385. That applies whether that pupil lives in Sheppey, Greenwich or York. The only difference will be that those figures are multiplied by the percentage area cost adjustment.

[Official Report, 4 June 2019, Vol. 661, c. 75WH.]

Letter of correction from the Minister for School Standards:

Errors have been identified in my response to points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Gordon Henderson) and others.

The correct response should have been:

Nick Gibb: I refer my hon. Friend and other hon. Members to the schedules that show how the national funding formula is made up. Local authorities will attract the same figure for every primary school pupil in 2019-20, regardless of where they are in the country, and the same figure for secondary and key stage 4. That represents about 73% of the total funding per pupil. **A further 18% is made up of additional needs.** For example, a pupil who has qualified for free school meals in the last six years will attract £540 in primary and £785 in secondary. If that secondary school pupil is in band D of the income deprivation affecting children index, they will attract another £515. If that secondary school pupil has low prior attainment based on primary school results, they will attract an additional £1,550. If that secondary school child has English as an additional language, they will attract an additional £1,385. That applies whether that pupil lives in Sheppey, Greenwich or York. The only difference will be that those figures are multiplied by the percentage area cost adjustment. **The final 9% is made up of school-led funding.**

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Monday 22 July 2019**

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