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16 July 2019**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**
(HANSARD)

Tuesday 16 July 2019

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Tourism Sector Deal

1. **Peter Heaton-Jones** (North Devon) (Con): What plans he has to establish a tourism sector deal under the Industrial Strategy. [911951]

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): This summer we should recognise the vital role that visitors play in the UK economy—particularly, I might say, overseas sporting visitors. Overseas visitors spent nearly £150 million in Devon last year, supporting jobs and growth throughout the county. Our new sector deal with the tourism industry was published last month, and includes commitments to an additional 10,000 apprenticeships annually and an extra 130,000 hotel rooms.

Peter Heaton-Jones: As the Secretary of State will know, the best place to visit as a tourist is, of course, North Devon. I welcome the publication of the tourism sector deal, but will he look favourably on the granting of tourism zone status to my constituency? Will he also join me in thanking all those who work so hard at this time of year in the tourism and hospitality industries, especially the North Devon Marketing Bureau, which does such good work in ensuring that people know that North Devon is the place to come to?

Mr Speaker: Including the Woolacombe Bay Hotel.

Greg Clark: That is a great endorsement, Mr Speaker.

I certainly join my hon. Friend in recognising that what is a time for holidays for many people is a time of intense work for people in the hospitality and tourism industries throughout the country. I also recognise North Devon's bid to become one of the tourism zones. As my hon. Friend knows, the sector deal includes an investment of more than £26 million in the English coastal path, one of the most beautiful and popular attractions in his very beautiful constituency.

20. [911972] **Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Given that 20,000 non-UK staff work in tourism in the Lake District, there is a desperate need for

home-grown talent, whether we leave the EU or not. However, the Government have watered down the already delayed catering and hospitality T-level, which no longer includes hospitality. Will the Secretary of State undo that backwards move, and fast-track a catering and hospitality T-level to next year?

Greg Clark: If the hon. Gentleman looks at the sector deal, he will see a great commitment to the development of careers in the hospitality industry, including 30,000 apprenticeships a year. The new T-levels have been developed in conjunction with the sector. I hope the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that that is a great step forward, and that they will be available as a result of the commitment that has been made.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I am tempted to say that the best thing about Devon is that it is the place that one drives through on the way to Cornwall, which has again been recognised as the UK's best and favourite holiday destination. I welcome the announcement of the tourism sector deal, but more than 50% of international tourists visit only London. What extra help can the Government give to get more of them out of London, and into places like Cornwall?

Greg Clark: I am fearful that I shall find myself in an invidious position, given the competing claims of west country Members. All I will say is that, on this day of the 50th anniversary of the moon mission, my hon. Friend will know that Newquay's unique claim to be in pole position for a UK spaceport adds to the already considerable attractions of his constituency.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): During last week's Westminster Hall debate, the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the hon. Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst), was enthusiastic when she told us that Amazon was leading the retail task group. I dread to think who the Secretary of State might have in mind for tourism—Airbnb, perhaps?

It is Labour that is standing up for the crucial sectors in our economy, not the likes of Amazon, with its exploitation of workers and undercutting of other businesses, not to mention its sweetheart tax agreements. When will the Government stop the gimmicks, and deliver not only hospitality deals but the retail deals that are so badly needed by those vital sectors of the economy?

Greg Clark: That is a strange point for the hon. Gentleman to make, given that our tourism sector deal—the subject of this question—has been hailed by the industry as a pivotal moment for it. Of course it is right to engage with all retailers of all sizes, but colleagues who represent rural communities will know that the outlets, national and international, that web-based platforms such as Amazon give to small rural businesses are very important to retailing. It is vital for that perspective to be part of the deal.

Zero-carbon Economy

2. **Anna McMorrin** (Cardiff North) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure a smooth transition to a zero-carbon economy. [911952]

10. Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he is taking to implement the Government's net zero carbon target. [911960]

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Chris Skidmore): We have made world-leading progress, cutting our emissions by 42% while growing the economy at the fastest rate of any G20 country since 2000—a point recognised by the International Energy Agency in its recent report. The Committee on Climate Change is clear: our clean growth strategy and industrial strategy provide the right frameworks for delivering net zero. I hope Members will welcome the recent launch of the green finance strategy as a clear demonstration of how seriously the Government take net zero.

Anna McMorris: The Government are failing to act quickly and robustly enough to tackle the climate emergency, particularly in solar and onshore wind. Will the Secretary of State welcome the actions of the peaceful Extinction Rebellion protesters across five cities in this country, including my own of Cardiff, to disrupt business as usual and send that important message?

Chris Skidmore: What I welcome is that our legislating on net zero—we are the first country in the G7 to legislate for net zero by 2050—marks a catalytic moment for everyone to recognise that we need a whole-of-society approach to this. I welcome all action, whether from the Climate Coalition, whom I met recently, or businesses and industries: organisations such as Tesco and Marks & Spencer, for example, have committed to net zero. We all have a part to play.

Rachael Maskell: In light of the Government's abysmal progress on carbon reduction, last year the Committee on Climate Change issued 25 policy recommendations; the Government delivered just one. What clear steps will the Government take in the next six months to ensure that we get back on track for the fourth and fifth carbon budgets?

Chris Skidmore: On the work the Committee has taken forward in its recent report, we welcome that the Committee acts as a critical friend. Now that we have net zero in place, we must go much further much faster. We have over-achieved on carbon budgets 1 and 2, we are on course to meet budget 3, and we are 90% there on carbon budgets 4 and 5, but I admit that we must do much more. I look forward to going to the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee later to discuss this in greater detail, but the net-zero commitment now gives the opportunity to move on this.

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): Three times as much energy is delivered by the gas grid and electricity grid, so what is the Department doing to support moves to hydrogen from natural gas?

Chris Skidmore: Hydrogen is a really interesting source of energy and we need to explore it further. There are lots of opportunities that other countries, in particular France, are taking forward, such as by looking at hydrogen supply and how we can combine that with the gas grid. That makes the point that innovation here is crucial. We make up 1% of the world's emissions; if we are going to be able to make a real difference worldwide, it will be by

innovating in this country—innovating in areas such as hydrogen, where we can make a far greater impact across the world.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Given our abundance of tides as an island nation, it seems to me that we could be doing more to utilise them for sustainable energy generation. What does the Minister think?

Chris Skidmore: I think we have the opportunity to look at alternative sources of all energy and power. The latest round for contracts for difference opened in May and will close on 18 June. We have looked at alternative sources of power and we want to be able to explore that. But this is also about creating a market mechanism by which we can look at establishing new technologies, moving away from subsidies and ensuring that we have a proud record for the future on renewable energy supplies.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): The most recent report from the Committee on Climate Change shows that we are moving in the wrong direction in terms of meeting our fourth and fifth carbon budgets. We have now rightly strengthened those objectives to achieve net zero, but without a single policy to help us get there. The long-awaited energy White Paper has still not been published, so can the Minister confirm today that that White Paper will be published before the summer recess and that it will include policies to get us there with onshore wind, solar technology, battery storage and electric vehicles?

Chris Skidmore: The hon. Lady mentions electric vehicles and battery storage. The Prime Minister made a significant announcement yesterday at her business council, attended by the Secretary of State: £500 million-worth of export finance will be provided for electric vehicles. There are also the guarantees on looking at charging points. The White Paper is due this summer; I cannot give any more guarantees beyond that, but it is absolutely critical as the next milestone going forward that we have the legislation in place for net zero, and we now need to set out a plan. The clean growth strategy was set out earlier—late last year. We are on track to meet 90% of carbon budgets 4 and 5, and we will do more to ensure that we meet them.

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): Publicly owned buildings such as schools and hospitals can access interest-free loans in order to retrofit their buildings and put on solar panels and so forth. What consideration will be given to allow that kind of scheme to be available to small businesses?

Chris Skidmore: I entirely agree that taking a local, bottom-up approach is the way in which the Government want to go. For instance, the rural communities energy fund has recently been established—an extra £10 million has been made available there—and we have the smart export guarantee when it comes to looking at renewable sources of power for small businesses or other small community buildings—

Anna McMorris: But you have raised VAT on solar.

Chris Skidmore: The hon. Lady just carries on chuntering. She has asked her question and I have given her an answer. She should allow me to respond to other Members of Parliament. She needs to accept that this Government—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister is right. The hon. Lady has asked her question and it was answered. It might not have been answered to her satisfaction, but it was answered and that is the end of it. Please be quiet.

Chris Skidmore: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) that when it comes to looking at how we should be creating new schemes, this is the direction in which we need to go. We will do more and I am happy to discuss with him the opportunity to involve small businesses. This will be part of the energy White Paper, and we recognise that we need to make significant strides to ensure that small businesses are able to retrofit their properties.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): The Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee has shown that, as if being hostile to onshore wind and destructive to solar were not enough, the Department will not achieve its climate ambitions due to its ambivalence over carbon capture and its failure to emulate Scotland on energy efficiency measures. The net zero 2050 target was imposed by the Prime Minister above Ministers' heads. As they prepare to leave their posts, will the Minister admit that his Department lacks the policies to achieve that target, and that his legacy will be one of abject failure?

Chris Skidmore: No. If anything, I think that my legacy will be as the Minister who signed the legislation ensuring that we were the first country to achieve net zero by 2050.

I also hope that our legacy will be a successful partnership bid with the Italians for COP26. The Italian ambassador came to meet Members of Parliament here yesterday. I did not see the hon. Gentleman there, but never mind about that—*[Interruption.]* He might not recognise that we had the Italian ambassador here to cover our COP26 bid, but he would have been welcome. An email was sent to him, inviting him to attend, but unfortunately he did not turn up. Our commitment must be UK-wide and we are making UK-wide schemes available, including recently ensuring that we can subsidise energy supplies for the north of Scotland, which demonstrates the benefits of the Union in delivering net zero.

Mr Speaker: The key is not to speak more quickly but to use fewer words.

Drew Hendry: With bizarre and rubbish answers like that, it is no wonder that the polls in Scotland are showing greater support for the Scottish National party and for independence than ever before. Will the Minister do just one thing? Will he rule out serving under the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) and vote against a no-deal Brexit to prevent further harm?

Chris Skidmore: This is what it always comes down to. Here we are in BEIS questions talking about clean growth and, yes, about how the Government need to

make more progress on net zero, but what is the hon. Gentleman's No. 1 priority? Independence for Scotland. He wants to divide and rule as usual—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Chris Skidmore: In fact, it is being within the United Kingdom that has allowed Scotland to benefit from 16 contracts for difference projects recently, allowing for 2.6 GW of green energy. Also, £4 million was recently announced for Project Acorn in Scotland for carbon capture, utilisation and storage projects. The hon. Gentleman never mentions the policy benefits of the Union or the investment that it delivers in Scotland. No—all he wants to talk about is independence. But let us look at what the Scottish people had to say about—

Mr Speaker: Order. We are grateful to the Minister. He has spoken with considerable force and alacrity, and I am sure that he is very pleased with his own words, although we have had enough of them.

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): Does the Minister agree with the TUC that, while decarbonisation presents exciting economic opportunities, the lack of a comprehensive and just transition policy and a coherent industrial strategy means that many well-paid, highly skilled unionised jobs are under threat?

Chris Skidmore: I will half-agree with the TUC on this point. It is concerned about reaching net zero through a just transition. We are living through a revolution, and we are going to need to take the population with us when it comes to jobs and job security. We have 400,000 green jobs now, and there is a potential for 2 million by 2030. We need to work with the unions and to ensure that when we look at the future of the world of work, we take the entire population with us.

Rebecca Long Bailey: I do not believe that the Minister provided any specifics in that answer. What is his plan for the workers in the closing coal plants? Why are yards in Fife losing out to international rivals for wind farms that are only a few miles away? Why has Dyson, a British company, chosen Singapore over the UK for the production of its electric vehicles? Germany is investing €1.5 billion in battery production; this Government's measly £246 million comes nowhere near that.

The truth is that the party that devastated the UK's industrial heartlands in the 1980s does not have a just transition plan. Will the Minister put ideology and laissez-faire economics aside and work with us on this side to make a real green industrial revolution a reality?

Chris Skidmore: The hon. Lady seems obsessed with talking about the 20th century. I want to talk about the 21st century—about what will be going on when we get to 2030. Why did she not talk about Jaguar Land Rover's announcement yesterday that it will be investing in building electric vehicles here, in the midlands? Why did she not speak about the fact that electric Minis will now be rolling from plants in Oxford? These are positive investments for the United Kingdom, which demonstrate that we can make the change towards net zero and clean technology by having clean growth—by investing in the economy and in jobs and ensuring that we have record levels of new green jobs going forwards.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Shorter questions and shorter answers are required.

Consumer Protection

3. Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): What recent steps his Department has taken to protect consumers. [911953]

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): In June, the Government announced steps to ensure that consumers will not be punished for their loyalty. We are giving increased powers to the Competition and Markets Authority to fine companies that breach the law and to enable consumers to take control of the data that businesses hold on them.

Kevin Hollinrake: Mr Speaker, when you stay at the Woolacombe Bay Hotel, you may be paying 20% too much, because online agencies such as Booking.com use brandjacking clauses to colonise search results, and rate parity clauses, which mean that even if you go direct, you still pay 20% more than you need to. Other EU nations have banned this. Will we?

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that point. The Competition and Markets Authority is taking enforcement action against the major hotel booking sites precisely because of those concerns. It has already secured binding commitments from those companies, which will protect consumers in exactly the way that he recommends.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Why can we not protect consumers from having their goods delivered by companies such as Amazon in filthy, dirty, polluting vehicles? Why will the Secretary of State not step in and do something about that?

Greg Clark: We have already had exchanges across the Chamber on the move to electric vehicles. The investments of recent days are moving us towards a clean and green fleet. With his industrial interests, I know that the hon. Gentleman welcomes that.

Mr Speaker: Pithiness personified: I call Mr Philip Hollobone.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Is not the best way to protect value, service and price for consumers through the promotion of competition?

Greg Clark: I completely agree with my hon. Friend.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): Consumers can sign up to long-term financial commitments for broadband, television and mobile phone services by clicking a few buttons online, but to cancel those services they have to fill out arduous forms, make numerous phone calls or even write to the companies involved. Will the Secretary of State look at that anomaly, to ensure fairness, and to provide the same mechanism for getting and stopping?

Greg Clark: For precisely those reasons, the issue is already being looked at by the Competition and Markets Authority. It is important that people are not penalised and do not find it difficult to extract themselves from commitments that are easily entered into. There needs to be fairness and transparency, and that is precisely what the CMA is engaged in.

Two-factor Payment Authentication

4. Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (LD): What assessment he has made of the effect of two-factor payment authentication on (a) consumers and (b) businesses. [911954]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst): The implementation of strong customer authentication, which mandates two-factor authentication for some online payments, will introduce more secure payments for individuals and businesses. That was introduced by the second payment services directive. The Treasury published an impact assessment on the implementation of that EU directive in 2017.

Chuka Umunna: I am staggered that the Government are not doing more about this ticking timebomb for online retail, which is on track to cause major disruption. The British Retail Consortium estimates that 75% of retailers are unaware that it is coming into effect in September. It is the same for consumers. The implementation is forecast to lead to the failure of nearly a third of e-commerce transactions from September, due to poor access to a proper phone signal or wi-fi. Will the Minister ensure that no enforcement action will be taken for at least 18 months, to give our retail sector breathing space to adapt to the new rules?

Kelly Tolhurst: I point out that there was £309 million-worth of fraud in e-commerce in 2016 versus £13.6 million in 1998. The hon. Gentleman will know that the European Banking Authority published an opinion on readiness for implementation and the Financial Conduct Authority published a statement in June. They are working on mitigations past the September implementation date. They are working with industry and providers to make sure that the essence of the changes prevail, which is to make it safer for merchants and consumers.

Sustainable Energy: Somerset

5. David Warburton (Somerton and Frome) (Con): What steps his Department has taken to develop sustainable energy in rural communities in Somerset. [911955]

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Chris Skidmore): I thank my hon. Friend for his local interest in taking action on climate change. I am pleased to say, as I mentioned earlier, that we have recently reopened the £10 million rural community energy fund. It has already supported over 150 rural communities, including through the installation of a solar capacity project in my hon. Friend's constituency of Frome. We have also established five local energy hubs across the country, including in the south-west, providing support to local authorities that are planning green energy projects.

David Warburton: I met a large group of people from Somerset the other day at the Time Is Now rally in Westminster. It is clear that people from every walk of life are keen for the Government to lead the way in environmental sustainability, yet reductions in feed-in tariffs, a lack of incentives to use brownfield resources and a lack of obligations on new build houses make the going tough. How will the Department change this?

Chris Skidmore: The feed-in tariff scheme achieved its objectives in support of over 3,000 installations in my hon. Friend's constituency. Its successor, the smart export guarantee, will be a smarter, more market-driven mechanism that will help to deploy without subsidy as costs continue to fall. I can reassure my hon. Friend that the Government have set a clear ambition for new homes to be energy efficient and to embrace low-carbon technologies through the buildings mission and the 2025 future homes standard commitment announced by the Chancellor in the spring Budget.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): The Minister is a constituency neighbour of mine. If he has time during the summer break, may I urge him to visit Wyke farm in Somerset for an example of a business that prides itself on being 100% green? It has used pulp from the cider mills to supply its anaerobic digesters and is doing really interesting things on waste water. It really shows how a farm can be at the heart of the local community, using its waste and farming in a sustainable way.

Chris Skidmore: I thank the hon. Lady for that suggestion. I would be happy to come and visit during the recess. I pay tribute to her leadership on this issue locally and nationally. She has made significant commitments to this agenda for a long time and I have learned a lot from her.

Onshore Wind: Scotland

6. **Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP):** What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Scotland on support for onshore wind. [911956]

11. **Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP):** What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Scotland on support for onshore wind. [911961]

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Chris Skidmore): BEIS Ministers regularly discuss a range of issues with their counterparts in the Scotland Office, and just last week I met with the Scottish Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands at the British-Irish Council in Manchester to discuss energy and the environment. It was an incredibly productive meeting, in contrast to what I often find with Opposition Members in this place. The Government will continue to work with Scotland on a range of issues, including strengthening the city region deals in six areas, including Glasgow, Stirling and Aberdeen.

Stuart C. McDonald: Research published today by Vivid Economics estimates that proposals by the Committee on Climate Change for increasing onshore wind capacity to 35 GW by 2035 would reduce the cost of electricity

by 7%. Ahead of the energy White Paper, can the Minister confirm whether the Secretary of State for Scotland has made the case for onshore wind to receive contracts for difference support, just as that new report suggests it should?

Chris Skidmore: It is a little known fact that we have 13.8 GW of onshore wind capacity installed in the UK already—enough to power over 7.6 million UK homes—which includes 8.1 GW in Scotland. I understand that there are new projects close to the hon. Gentleman's constituency in north Lanarkshire, with 46 MW of onshore wind projects planned. I am not necessarily interested in what the Secretary of State for Scotland has to say on this issue; I am interested in what the Scottish people have to say and in securing local community support for ensuring, whatever our range of energy supply, that we commit to renewables of all forms in meeting our net zero commitments by 2050.

Alan Brown: It is interesting that the Minister seems not to care what the Secretary of State for Scotland says, but wants to listen to the people of Scotland. That is good going forward. The Vivid Economics report shows that supporting onshore wind will create 2,300 jobs in Scotland. Will the Minister confirm that the blocker to those jobs and investment in Scotland is the Scottish Secretary of State and that he put his ideological objections in writing to the BEIS Secretary?

Chris Skidmore: I understand that the hon. Gentleman has a particular issue with the Scottish Secretary of State; and I am sure that he will be happy to take up some of those issues with him at Scottish questions. All I can say is that the hon. Gentleman has made a freedom of information request to the Department. The Government have replied and that is the Government's official response.

When it comes to renewables, let us take the positives. Let us get away from the SNP's negativity and endless griping. There are Scottish MPs on the Government side of the House who are committed to delivering positive action to the benefit of the Scottish people—putting politics and discussions of independence aside, getting down and doing the job, delivering for the people of Scotland, and ensuring that we have offshore wind, onshore wind or whatever supply is most appropriate for Scotland.

18. [911968] **Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op):** Does the Minister not share my concern that, as we try to build an effective industrial base for renewables in Scotland, we are seeing—because of a change in the rules for the delivery of 60% of through-life content, instead of 60% of manufactured content—that contracts for manufacturing components have been sent to Indonesia, whereas BiFab's yard is a mere 10 miles from a potential wind farm? What conversations has he had with the Scottish Government on these issues?

Chris Skidmore: Boosting local and national content is a key issue, and, taking up the point raised by the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey), the Government are determined to ensure the delivery of local green jobs. The offshore wind sector deal has obviously committed to 60% content by 2025

or 2030. I cannot remember the exact date, but I am happy to come back to the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) on that.

It is important that, as we go forward with the contract for difference proposals, we make sure that we bring local suppliers with us. That is a key part of the Government's industrial strategy.

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): If the Minister had an opportunity to look at today's report from RenewableUK on onshore wind, he would see that there has been a complete collapse in planning applications for onshore wind, in Scotland and in the UK as a whole, yet the report indicates that customers could have substantially saved on their future energy bills if that collapse had not happened.

Does the Minister agree that the policy of banning onshore wind in England, through planning restrictions, and in the UK as a whole, through discrimination in support, is now completely indefensible? If he does agree, what is he doing to reverse this policy?

Chris Skidmore: When it comes to renewables, we now have a record high of 52% of our electricity being generated from low-carbon sources, with 33% from renewables. We have seen with offshore wind that, actually, the reduction in our prices demonstrates that we can move towards effective renewables for the future. As I mentioned, we have 13.8 GW of onshore wind delivering for 7.6 million households. We have the local planning processes in place for the future, which was a commitment in the 2015 Conservative manifesto, but we want to make sure that we take local communities with us. That is also the case with net zero. It has to be a transition on which we have the confidence of the entire population. There is no point trying to impose green technology on local communities if they do not support that technology for the future.

Product Safety

7. **Gerald Jones** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): What steps he is taking to improve product safety. [911957]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst): We are providing £12 million a year of new funding through the Office for Product Safety and Standards to strengthen national capacity for product safety enforcement. The OPSS provides specialist expertise, scientific advice, support and training for trading standards, and it leads on national product safety challenges to protect consumers.

Gerald Jones: I recently attended an Electrical Safety First event on the dangers of buying second-hand electrical goods. The reality is that many people buy second-hand electrical goods, sometimes not by choice, so will the Minister commit, in the light of the Whirlpool recall, to a public awareness campaign on how to buy and use electrical products safely?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that question. Last week we took part in a Westminster Hall debate secured by the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris). The OPSS is currently working

with Electrical Safety First on various campaigns, to which we have an ongoing commitment. Consumer protection and consumer education are important.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Given the difficulty of tracing the whereabouts of half a million potentially faulty Whirlpool tumble dryers, what discussions has the Minister had with the OPSS on developing a proposal for product registration at point of sale?

Kelly Tolhurst: Again, I thank my hon. Friend for his question. In last week's Westminster Hall debate I committed to developing and testing the ability for mandatory registration of electrical products, which is something we are looking at. It was initiated in a discussion at the Consumer Protection Partnership last Thursday, and we are hoping to get outcomes in the near future.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): The Government have known for four years that there were 5.5 million Whirlpool tumble dryers in homes across the UK that were liable to catch fire. Last month, the Minister gave notice that she intended to order the recall of those dryers still in use, but now she has agreed a voluntary recall with the company. Will she reconsider that and use the powers she has? If she does not, how will we know that Whirlpool is taking this seriously?

Kelly Tolhurst: I recognise the hon. Gentleman's concern in this regard. He is absolutely correct to say that we issued a notice of intent to recall on Whirlpool. It submitted its proposal, which we assessed. We also took advice from an expert panel, comprising an independent QC and chief scientific officers from the Health and Safety Executive, the Home Office and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. We decided not only to accept the proposal, which has been published, but to issue a regulation 28 notice with regard to further information that needs to be shared with the OPSS, so that we can review the recall process.

Used Electrical Goods: Online Sales

8. **Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): What plans he has to improve the regulation of second-hand electrical goods online. [911958]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst): I have recently written to online platforms to make clear the priority I place on consumer safety. The hon. Lady will know, after her Westminster Hall debate last week, that the Office for Product Safety and Standards is undertaking specific projects to tackle the risks of second-hand and online sales, including targeting those goods entering the UK via fulfilment houses.

Carolyn Harris: I appreciated the Minister's letter this weekend on the online sales of second-hand recalled tumble dryers. Currently, it is possible to upload details of such products on to online platforms without recall notices, or model or display numbers. Her letter states that she has written to these online platforms, but it fails to say which ones. Will she commit to publishing these letters and any advice she has given, in the interests of clarity?

Kelly Tolhurst: I would like to reassure the hon. Lady that I have written to not just one online platform, but all the online platforms in relation to this. I would just like to clarify that some platforms have been advertising certain models and Whirlpool has used the same model number for a number of machines, so it is not correct to assume that all models will be subject to recall. As I have outlined, if any platform is selling products that are part of that recall, the organisations are being alerted and the products are being taken down as soon as possible.

Strategic Transport Infrastructure Projects: Essex

9. **Priti Patel** (Witham) (Con): If he will hold discussions with the Secretary of State for Transport to discuss the potential benefits to (a) businesses and (b) the implementation of the industrial strategy of funding strategic transport infrastructure projects in Essex.

[911959]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Stephenson): Our national productivity investment fund of £37 billion will increase investment in areas important for economic growth, such as transport. The Government are also committed to deliver the Lower Thames crossing with an estimated cost of £5.3 billion. I will happily discuss infrastructure projects in Essex with the Secretary of State for Transport, when I next see him.

Priti Patel: Last week, I chaired key investment meetings with businesses in Essex for the Great Eastern Mainline Taskforce and on the dualling of the A120. Those two projects alone would contribute £5 billion to the regional and national economy. Will the Minister and the Secretary of State encourage the entire Department to work with us to get behind this and get to the Treasury in particular to get the investment that is needed to get those schemes moving?

Andrew Stephenson: I welcome my right hon. Friend's tireless championing of the case for improved road and rail in Essex, and I am happy to lend my support to her campaign. The county has a vibrant, enterprising economy, but greater investment in connectivity would deliver more jobs, housing and opportunities right across the region.

UK Automotive Sector: No-deal Brexit

12. **Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): What steps he plans to take to support the UK automotive sector in the event that the UK leaves the EU without a deal.

[911962]

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): The industrial strategy chose to invest to make Britain a leading location for the next generation of vehicles, irrespective of Brexit. This month, we have worked with Jaguar Land Rover to secure the electric XJ at Castle Bromwich. Last week, I launched the new electric Mini, to be built in Oxford. Immediately after these questions, I am unveiling Lotus's Evija, the UK's first all-electric hypercar, made in Norfolk. I am determined that Britain's automotive strength will flourish through the next generation of vehicles.

Justin Madders: As the Secretary of State knows, Vauxhall Motors in Ellesmere Port has a future if we can avoid a no-deal Brexit. In recent weeks, members of the Government have been falling over themselves to endorse a no-deal Brexit, despite the damage that will do to the automotive sector. Will he not put his own job ahead of those of my constituents—will he rule out a no-deal Brexit today?

Greg Clark: I am sure the hon. Gentleman welcomes the commitment given by Vauxhall's owners to invest in Ellesmere Port, but he is absolutely right that they have said that that depends on a successful resolution of Brexit that means Vauxhall can continue to trade without tariffs and friction with the rest of the European Union. That reinforces how vital it is to secure such a deal.

Fuel Cell Manufacturing

13. **Nicky Morgan** (Loughborough) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to help improve the viability of fuel cell manufacturing in the UK.

[911963]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Stephenson): We provide support through Innovate UK for early-stage fuel cell technologies, and through the Advanced Propulsion Centre and the energy entrepreneurs fund as those technologies mature towards the market. Our £23 million hydrogen for transport programme is expanding refuelling infrastructure, and fuel cell vehicles are eligible for consumer incentives, which helps to increase demand. Two weeks ago, I was at No. 10 with Intelligent Energy, a company in my right hon. Friend's constituency, considering further opportunities for fuel cell deployment.

Nicky Morgan: I thank the Minister very much indeed for that answer; it sounds almost as if he knew I was going to raise Intelligent Energy, which is based in my constituency and, as he obviously knows, manufactures hydrogen fuel cells, having developed the technology. Will he confirm that the Government are technology neutral when it comes to identifying future technologies? To follow on from the previous question, do the Minister and the Department appreciate the opportunities for factories where diesel engines are no longer going to be manufactured to get into the manufacture of the next generation of engines, which should be fuelled by hydrogen fuel cells?

Andrew Stephenson: I agree strongly with my right hon. Friend: there is huge potential for the auto sector. The Government are committed to policies that are technology neutral as we achieve the ambitions that we set out in the Road to Zero strategy around a year ago. The Government support the development of hydrogen as a transport fuel and we are in step with international progress. However, we acknowledge that we need to go further and faster in all different types of technologies.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): We have certainly had some impressive improvements since the Automated and Electric Vehicles Bill in 2017, but will the Minister outline what recent steps have been taken to secure this manufacturing facility, which was so central to the Bill and its goal?

Andrew Stephenson: I missed the manufacturing facility that the hon. Gentleman referred to, but I am more than happy to work with him and others. I have been working closely with colleagues in Northern Ireland on a range of issues, and I am keen to meet the hon. Gentleman who is a tireless champion on behalf of industry in his part of the United Kingdom.

Recycling Nuclear Submarines

14. **Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Defence on extending the provisions of the Energy Act 2004 to include recycling nuclear submarines. [911964]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Stephenson): Officials in my Department have had several discussions with their counterparts in the Ministry of Defence on how the expertise and resources of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority can best assist the submarine dismantling programme. However, we do not believe that extending the provisions of the Energy Act 2004 would provide an appropriate addition to that support.

Luke Pollard: I thank the Minister for his reply, but it is disappointing that that is the first time a Minister has said no to the cross-party request to extend the civil clean-up of nuclear sites to include old nuclear submarines, of which there are 13 in Devonport and six in Rosyth. Will the Minister lend the same support as his predecessor did and agree to meet the cross-party campaign? We have to find a way to safely recycle the submarines.

Andrew Stephenson: The disposal of nuclear submarines is a complex and challenging undertaking that I last discussed with the Minister for defence procurement, the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew), yesterday. As the hon. Gentleman will know from the meeting he had earlier this year, the Government have an established programme of work in place and are committed to the safe, secure and cost-effective defuelling and dismantling of all decommissioned nuclear submarines as soon as practically possible. I am more than happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss the matter further.

Manufacturing Output

15. **Mr Adrian Bailey** (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): What recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on trends in the level of manufacturing output. [911965]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Stephenson): We have regular discussions with Treasury Ministers on a range of subjects, including the importance of the manufacturing sector to the UK economy—it is the fourth largest in the EU and supports 2.7 million jobs. We are taking several measures to support manufacturing growth, including £141 million for the Made Smarter industrial digitalisation programme and £600 million for the high-value manufacturing catapult.

Mr Bailey: Notwithstanding the welcome news from Jaguar Land Rover, overall manufacturing production is contracting, export and domestic orders are down, investment is paralysed and employment is dropping. This has huge implications for the public finances. What discussions is the Minister having with the Treasury on the implications of all that for the delivery of the Tory leadership contenders' tax and spending plans?

Andrew Stephenson: The latest Office for National Statistics index of production figures show that, despite strong fluctuations in recent months, the level of manufacturing output in May 2019 was the same as it was in May the previous year, and the level of the three months to May 2019 was actually higher than it was in the same period in 2018. That stands in stark contrast to the situation under the Labour Government, when we saw more than 35,000 manufacturing businesses cease to exist and 1.7 million manufacturing jobs lost.

Mrs Kemi Badenoch (Saffron Walden) (Con): MetalMin is a manufacturing business in my constituency and part of the British Steel supply chain. Will the Secretary of State meet the directors of the company to discuss what specific support the Department is providing to British Steel suppliers to ensure that they can stay in business?

Andrew Stephenson: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. She will know that the Secretary of State and I are actively involved in the British Steel support group, which meets weekly. We will raise the concerns of her local business at that support group and I will come back to her.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): The Minister will know that last month's statistics on foreign direct investment show that new projects are down by 14%, new jobs are down by 24% and existing jobs safeguarded by new investment are down by 54%. That is an 80% drop in FDI over the past five years. What discussions has he had with the Chancellor about the effect of that on manufacturing output?

Andrew Stephenson: I am proud that we remain one of the most attractive destinations in the world for foreign direct investment. UK unemployment has now fallen below 3.8% for the first time since 1974, average wages are growing twice as fast as inflation and by the fastest rate in over a decade, and all while we borrow half as much as Labour did in the five years before the crash.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Can the Minister give an update on negotiations in reference to Scunthorpe steelworks?

Andrew Stephenson: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. As he will know, that is in the hands of the official receiver. I am seeking to keep him and other local Members of Parliament updated regularly with what is going on, but I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has left no stone unturned and is meeting with various bidders and other people to secure the long-term future of steelmaking in his region.

Automotive Industry

16. **Kirstene Hair** (Angus) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to support the automotive industry in the UK. [911966]

17. **Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to support the automotive industry in the UK. [911967]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Stephenson): Yesterday, the Prime Minister chaired a roundtable with automotive companies to discuss how the Government can best continue to support the industry through this period of unprecedented change. The Prime Minister announced a £500 million loan guarantee to support Jaguar Land Rover's design, manufacture and export of the next generation of electric vehicles, with similar support also available to others in the sector. Through our industrial strategy and landmark automotive sector deal, we remain committed to keeping the UK at the forefront of new technological development.

Kirstene Hair: I thank the Minister for that answer and declare that I am vice-chair of the all-party group for fair fuel.

The automotive industry is moving apace to ensure that it can help reach the Government's ambitious targets for electric vehicles, but of course we need to have the infrastructure in place to supplement that as well. Will the Minister outline what his Department has done to help rural communities such as Angus with that?

Andrew Stephenson: Our UK-wide grant scheme and the £400 million public-private charging infrastructure investment fund will see thousands more public charge points installed across the UK, including in rural areas. Yesterday, the Prime Minister committed that all new rapid and higher-powered charge points will provide pay-as-you-go debit or credit card payment options by spring 2020 to enable access for all in the community. We will continue to monitor whether any significant gaps in infrastructure provision emerge in the medium term and will consider whether further support is required.

Jeremy Lefroy: I very much welcome the announcements by JLR and BMW. The Minister will know that in the event of a no-deal, which I very much hope will not happen, we will face not only tariffs, but the implication of rules of origin. This was seen by BMW moving the manufacture of engines for South Africa out of Hams Hall in the west midlands to Germany. What discussions has he had with his colleagues in Government over the implications of rules of origin for future trade arrangements?

Andrew Stephenson: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He is right to say that the decisions by JLR and BMW about the electric Mini are votes of confidence in the workforce in the west midlands. However, we must prepare for all scenarios, and we are fully preparing for no deal and working with the industry to understand the potential impacts, including, as he says, the impact of rules of origin. We are determined to ensure that the

UK continues to be a competitive location for automotive under any scenario. Alongside industry, we are investing almost £1.5 billion to ensure that we are at the forefront of new automotive technologies.

Support for Growth in the Midlands

21. **Jack Brereton** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to support growth in the midlands. [911973]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Jake Berry): We are supporting the midlands engine through the £250 million midlands engine investment fund and £1.6 billion of local growth funding. I congratulate the west midlands, which recently published its local industrial strategy. I feel certain that this will ensure jobs and growth for many decades to come.

Jack Brereton: The ceramic valley enterprise zone in Stoke-on-Trent has been incredibly successful for our local economy by creating jobs. Will the Minister support continuing the ceramic valley enterprise zone and expanding it to include other sites in the city?

Jake Berry: Having had the privilege of visiting the ceramic valley enterprise zone during a recent visit to Stoke-on-Trent, I am delighted to confirm that, once completed, it will have created over 7,000 jobs and redeveloped 140 hectares of former brownfield land. I hope to continue to work with my hon. Friend, who is a redoubtable campaigner for his constituency, to see what more can be done to expand this hugely successful site.

Topical Questions

T1. [911976] **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): May I take this opportunity to say to the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey) that although she and I strongly disagree on various issues, including on the future of modern capitalism, we should be proud to have a shared commitment to reaching net zero emissions? Since our last oral questions session, the UK has become the first major economy in the world to pass laws to end its contribution to global warming by 2050, and companies from around the world are choosing to develop green technologies here in the UK. Last week I launched the new electric Mini, built in Oxford; the week before, Jaguar Land Rover announced that it is making a range of electric vehicles; and in an hour's time I will be launching Lotus's new electric hypercar. So, in keeping with what appears to be a new tradition of sharing pre-holiday gifts across the Dispatch Box, I would like to provide the hon. Lady with a small symbol—this model Mini—of what I hope will be our efforts to support our automotive industry, of which we are very proud, in its shift to a greener future.

Mr Speaker: I call Laura Pidcock.

Laura Pidcock (North West Durham) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I apologise; I am ahead of myself. I was so captivated by the Secretary of State's munificence that I neglected the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), which I must tell all observers is a very risky enterprise. Let's hear from the fella.

Kevin Brennan: I will not take it personally, Mr Speaker.

While the Secretary of State is in the mood for holiday gifts, the latest Government statistics show that 61% of those working in music, performing and visual arts are self-employed, so will the Secretary of State update shared parental leave rules to include self-employed people to prevent talented women from having to leave their careers in the creative industries and other industries when they have children?

Greg Clark: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We are evaluating the responses we have had from the creative industries and others on that issue. I fully recognise that it is an unresolved matter that we will address during the months ahead.

T4. [911979] **Luke Hall** (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): The introduction of the national living wage has helped to raise the living standards of many of my constituents. What assessment has the Minister made of the impact of increasing the national living wage from 60% to 66% of median earnings and the ability of the retail sector to continue to grow its workforce considering that change?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst): Given my hon. Friend's background, I know that he has a keen interest in the retail sector. In April, the increase in the national living wage meant that nearly 1.8 million workers received an above-inflation pay rise. The Government have stated our ambition to end low pay in the UK. The national living wage is on track to meet its target of 60% of median earnings by 2020, and we will announce its future target later this year. In setting a new target, we will work with the expert Low Pay Commission to carefully consider the impact on businesses and workers across all sectors.

Laura Pidcock: Given the reported use of food banks by staff in the Secretary of State's Department, and given that the first ever indefinite strike action of outsourced workers in Whitehall is happening now, does the Secretary of State not see it as his duty at least to ensure that BEIS contractors are not breaking legislation? That includes potential breaches of regulation 7 of the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations 2003, whereby an employment business may not supply a temporary worker to a hirer to replace an individual taking part in official strike action. Can the Secretary of State please explain to the House what action he has taken on the issue following the Public and Commercial Services Union's referral of the matter to the Met police, and letters sent to him and his permanent secretary on 10 July?

Greg Clark: I value very highly everyone who works in my Department, whether they are directly employed or employed through contractors. Of course, we will always require our contractors to obey the law. What we have done, and what I have acted to do, is make sure that our contractor staff are paid at least the average

level across London for their employment. I know that that has been welcomed. I take the issue very seriously and I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising it.

T5. [911980] **Peter Heaton-Jones** (North Devon) (Con): Do Ministers agree that improving the whole A303, A30 and A358 corridor would remove a significant barrier to growth across the south-west and North Devon?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Jake Berry): Yes, we agree that that is an important corridor for the south-west, increasing resilience and providing alternative routes. That is why the Government have already committed £2 billion to starting the project in the first road investment strategy. Work is already under way on developing the first major improvements. The Government's intention is that subsequent road investment strategies will fund the remaining improvements. As my hon. Friend says, this is important to driving prosperity and growth in the whole south-west.

T2. [911977] **David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Do Ministers support the Treasury's proposed VAT rise to 20% for solar-based products, and what assessment have they made of its impact on installations?

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Chris Skidmore): It is not the Treasury's rise; it is the European Union's rise. In considering the reasons why he supports staying in the European Union, the right hon. Gentleman has to address the fact that these are EU regulations that we are putting in force while we remain a member. We will have the freedom in future—and, I hope, his support—to deal with such VAT issues once we are out of the European Union.

T7. [911982] **Ben Bradley** (Mansfield) (Con): Hundreds of small businesses—particularly retailers, perhaps—stand to benefit from Mansfield's progress in the future high streets fund. I know that the Minister has to be impartial, although I am sure that behind closed doors Mansfield is his favourite bid. Would he be willing to meet me to discuss the bid and make sure that we get the right advice and the best possible bang for our buck to support those businesses?

Jake Berry: Of course. I will happily meet my hon. Friend. I pay tribute to the work he is doing in driving forward the hopes and dreams of those involved in the Mansfield bid for the future high streets fund. Many areas across the country will not have succeeded in going through to the business case of the first round of the fund. I remind them that the fund will open again to applications very shortly—[*Interruption.*] That includes the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), who is complaining from a sedentary position on the Labour Front Bench. We will see what we can do.

T3. [911978] **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Matthew's Foods, which has served the Asian community in Glasgow North for nearly 20 years, is being threatened with electrical disconnection because it is disputing a £400,000 bill on an emergency tariff from British Gas. Jobs are at risk, even though the company tells me that it simply wants to pay a fair price for the utilities it has

used. What powers does the Department or the regulator have to encourage both sides to come to an amicable solution?

Chris Skidmore: I am happy to take away that specific issue. I want to make sure that the curry industry in Glasgow continues and that local businesses continue to thrive. I am happy to take away the issue and look at it in further detail. We work closely with the regulator, Ofgem, to make sure that suppliers and individuals continue to benefit from a flexible energy economy.

T9. [911984] **Kirstene Hair** (Angus) (Con): The oil and gas industry has a vital role to play in achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050. One way of doing so is by providing a commercial incentive for carbon capture and storage. Will the Minister outline what steps the Department is taking to see whether that could become commercially viable?

Chris Skidmore: We recently announced £26 million for, I think, 11 carbon capture, utilisation and storage projects across the UK, including Project Acorn in Scotland. I visited Tata Chemicals in Cheshire, which is the largest project in the UK; it is 100 times larger than other projects. The Committee on Climate Change report is absolutely clear that 50% of our carbon emission reductions will come from CCUS. We must continue to invest in that more and then take those innovations across the globe.

T6. [911981] **Rosie Cooper** (West Lancashire) (Lab): Could the Secretary of State respond to the findings of Citizens Advice that utility companies have overcharged customers by £24 billion over 15 years?

Greg Clark: As I said in answer to earlier questions, the Competition and Markets Authority has recognised the unacceptable position of loyal customers being overcharged, and it is acting to correct that, as we have done in this House when it comes to energy bills.

T10. [911985] **Trudy Harrison** (Copeland) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that nuclear energy must be part of the decarbonisation of this country? Could he update the House on progress made with the regulated asset base financial model and the energy White Paper?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Stephenson): I agree with my hon. Friend that nuclear power has a key role to play in delivering the net zero target and acknowledge the unrivalled nuclear expertise in Copeland, which I was delighted to see on my recent visit to her constituency. We intend to publish our assessment of the feasibility of the RAB model for funding new nuclear shortly.

T8. [911983] **Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The St Rollox railway works in my constituency will close next Friday, with a loss of 200 jobs and ending 163 years of operation. While the Scottish Government have refused to renationalise the facility, Scottish Enterprise is actively seeking a new buyer for the site. Will the Secretary of State ensure that his Department is fully deployed to aid in that effort at all levels of Government?

Greg Clark: I work very well with not only the Scotland Office here but the Scottish Government, and I am happy to take that up after this session.

Ms Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con): All forms of company are registered and incorporated with Companies House. While it is a great resource if used properly, it is open to misuse, abuse and fraudulent information. What steps will the Secretary of State take to ensure validation before companies are registered, so that the public can have faith in the register?

Kelly Tolhurst *rose—*

Ms McVey: Secretary of State, please.

Greg Clark: I am happy to respond to my right hon. Friend. The problem that she identifies is a real and present one. We are taking steps to require information given to Companies House, and therefore made use of, to be validated. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Someone chunters from a sedentary position, “Can she do that?”—can the right hon. Lady demand that the Secretary of State, rather than some other Minister, answers the question? There is no prohibition. It is a matter of the force of personality, which the right hon. Lady has just eloquently exhibited, and it may well encourage copycat behaviour.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): What better week than this to discuss the potential for a tourism sector deal for Northern Ireland? After all, this week the sun has got its hat on, Rory’s out to play, the Open has come to Ulster—hopefully, it’s coming home to stay.

Greg Clark: I did not have the hon. Gentleman down as a poet, as well as his other accomplishments.

The sector deal that has been signed very much relates to the whole United Kingdom, and I hope the manifold attractions of Northern Ireland will be given a boost by the very good news that this sector deal constitutes for the industry.

Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con): I recently visited Coca-Cola in my constituency. It will be investing £50 million in its Wakefield plant this year, providing jobs and apprenticeships to my constituents. Companies are investing in Britain, demonstrating that the future will be bright after Brexit. What is the Department doing to attract further foreign investment?

Andrew Stephenson: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. We work closely with the Department for International Trade to secure more inward investment into the UK, and we ensure through our industrial strategy that we have one of the most competitive environments for investment globally.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): What discussions is the Secretary of State having with his relevant counterparts in other departmental teams about the ability of people in the creative industries to travel around the European Union if there is a Brexit of any sort? Secretary of State, please.

Greg Clark: You were right, Mr Speaker; this is becoming a habit. I am happy to respond to the hon. Lady. The ability—especially in the creative industries, but also in professional and business services—for people to ply their trade by visiting and working in other countries is essential. It is a big part of the negotiations, which I hope will result in a deal that allows a strong part of the UK economy to continue to flourish.

Andrew Griffiths (Burton) (Con): Some 900 jobs were put at risk when Kerry Foods announced the closure of its plant in Burton. I know the Secretary of State has been in touch with the managing director of Kerry to press it on finding a new buyer. Will he commit to doing all he can to make sure that a new buyer is found and that those jobs are protected?

Greg Clark: I will indeed. I have been in touch with the owners of the site. My hon. Friend is absolutely right: the most important thing is that a new owner should be found for that historic site in Burton, so that it can continue its good track record of employment.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): The chief executives of Coca-Cola, Unilever, Nestlé and PepsiCo are indirectly responsible for much of the 8 million tonnes of plastic waste that ends up in our seas. Will the Secretary of State meet those chief executives to encourage them to adopt more sustainable packaging?

Chris Skidmore: I am certainly happy to meet those chief executives. We are working on projects to deliver sustainable packaging when it comes to looking at future research and innovation on alternatives to plastics, which I think will be critical. I would like to thank this UK sector for looking at making adaptations for the future. Everyone agrees that we have to rid the UK of plastic packaging, and do so in a way that will not harm the economy. Going forward, we need to have the support of companies such as those the hon. Gentleman mentioned, and I will happily meet them.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): In approximately 1 hour and 56 minutes, it will be exactly 50 years since the launch of the Apollo 11 mission to land a man on the moon. Will my hon. Friend the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation—if I may be specific—tell the House how the Government are planning to commemorate the landing of the first man on the moon this weekend?

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore): It is nice to be top of the menu for once. Yes, at 2.32 pm, we will have the 50th anniversary of the launch of the Apollo 11 moon

mission. On the Government's commitment to space, I will be giving a speech at the Policy Exchange, setting out what we think is a clear priority for the UK economy—not just in space exploration, but in earth observation. To come back again to the net zero target—it is not like we have talked about it enough already—space technology is a key enabling technology that will enable us to better detect changes in the earth. The future of space is actually critical for our survival on earth.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): It was a privilege to stand with 1,000 Jaguar workers and hear that the factory that built the Spitfire during the war and two generations of Jaguar after the war—it nearly closed 10 years ago—will now build the electric cars of the future. Will the Secretary of State, in welcoming yesterday's announcement, join me in saying that we must now build the batteries in Britain so that we have a vibrant British industry?

Will the Secretary of State also join me in paying tribute to the remarkable man that was Lord Kumar Bhattacharyya for his championing of manufacturing in Britain and his drive, intellect and ambition for Britain and British workers? It is thanks to Kumar that the Jaguar plant remains open.

Greg Clark: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It was a proud moment for all of us to have the commitment that Jaguar Land Rover has made. I know everyone is immensely proud not just of the history but of the future of that great company.

I join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to Lord Bhattacharyya, the regius professor of manufacturing at Warwick and the founder of the Warwick Manufacturing Group. I can announce to the House that, in recognition of his immense contribution, we are establishing two awards. The first is the Bhattacharyya award for collaboration between academia and industry, which will be a prize of £25,000 each year to the team who best show how industry and universities can work together. Because Lord Bhattacharyya was such a champion of inclusion and helped so many young people enjoy flourishing careers in engineering, we are establishing the Bhattacharyya engineering inclusion programme, working with school and further education college students in the west midlands. It will make available 80 bursaries a year for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to study engineering, and it will also support extracurricular activities to inspire the next generation of young people to study engineering.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but demand exceeds supply, and we must move on.

Relationship Education in Schools

12.39 pm

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on what steps he is taking to counter misinformation about the content of relationship education in schools.

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): This spring, Parliament passed the relationships, sex and health education regulations with overwhelming support. We know that many parents agree that these subjects should be taught by schools. We also know that for some parents, this raises concerns. Parents have a right to understand what we are requiring schools to teach and how their child's school is intending to go about it. That is why we will be requiring schools to consult parents on their relationship education or RSE policy. Open and constructive dialogue can only work, however, if the facts of the situation are known to all.

We are aware that misinformation is circulating about what schools currently teach about relationships and what they will teach when the new subjects are introduced. The Department for Education has undertaken a number of activities in response. In April this year, we published frequently asked questions designed to bust myths on the subjects. They have been translated into three languages. In June, we published the final version of the relationships, sex and health education guidance, as well as guides for parents on the subjects. Alongside that, we produced infographics that can be easily shared on social media—including WhatsApp, where we know much of the misinformation is shared—setting out the facts. We also sent an email to almost 40,000 teachers, providing them with factual information and links to various documents.

The Department has also been working on the ground with Birmingham City Council, Parkfield School, parents and other interested parties to convey the facts of the policy and dispel myths, to support a resolution to the protests in that school and nearby Anderton Park School. Nationally, we have worked with the National Association of Head Teachers to understand where there might be parent concerns in other parts of the country and to offer support. We will continue those efforts to support the introduction of the new subjects, which we strongly believe are hugely important for children growing up in modern Britain.

Mr Speaker: Quite so.

Emma Hardy: I am sure that Members from across the whole House will join me in affirming the importance of accepting that people have different family relationships and that it is not the shape or set-up of your family that matters, but only that you are loved and cared for.

Passing the Equality Act 2010 was rightly a proud moment for our country, but these rights remain only for as long as we fight to keep them. Respect and equality are the true British values. There is no reason to treat sexuality any differently from the way that we discuss any other part of the Equality Act, or families that may have a difference in age or even a disability. The misinformation is vast and in danger of spreading. With respect to the Minister, whatever efforts the Department has been making to counter that misinformation have clearly not worked.

It is clear from last night's "Panorama" programme that protests against relationship education are growing across the country. Over 70 schools are now experiencing pressure and intimidation because school leaders are fulfilling their legal duty under the Equality Act. It would also appear, from last night's "Panorama" programme, that pressure was applied from the Department to Parkfield School to suspend its equality programme to get the school out of the national news. This has led to copycat protests elsewhere, as protesters believe that if they make enough noise, and turn up with loudhailers and hurl abuse at headteachers, other schools will back down, too. There is a desperate need for clear, firm leadership from the Department.

Will the Minister assure the House that Department officials did not pressure the Parkfield leadership team into suspending its equality programme? Will he confirm that he will launch an investigation into such claims? Does the Minister agree with the Government's lead commissioner for countering extremism, Sara Khan, that the Department has been slow to respond to the growing protests? What lessons have the Department learnt from that? Will the Minister update guidance to schools from "if" to "when", to ensure that schools have a clear message about the need to teach LGBT-inclusive sex and relationship education? Will the Minister send a clear message to school protesters that LGBT-inclusive sex and relationship education is mandated by the Government, that compliance will be checked by Ofsted and that attempts to intimidate individual headteachers will not change that?

Nick Gibb: I agree with the hon. Lady about the importance of the equality of relationships and families, and that is spelt out in the guidance. This is a historic document. Relationships, sex and health education will cover everything from healthy eating to the importance of self-respect and to consent, the pitfalls of social media, recognising the signs of an unhealthy friendship, online safety and first aid. What is learnt in relationships and health education in primary school will provide the building blocks for a child to develop positive relationships as they grow up and into their adult life, and it will teach children to respect those who might be different.

This is a well-crafted document that has received widespread support. We consulted widely on it and it was drafted by experts. We wanted to make sure that the relationships and sex education guidance applied to all schools in this country, including private schools and faith schools, and that is why it has been crafted as it has.

The DFE has been involved from the first minute that we understood that there were problems at Parkfield School. We have had senior officials on a daily basis liaising with the schools, Birmingham City Council and groups of parents. We wanted to resolve this issue on the ground and to try to dispel the myths, so that parents were reassured about what is actually being taught in the No Outsiders programme at Parkfield School.

The hon. Lady says that the Department was slow to respond, but I do not believe that we were. As I said, we responded as soon as we heard that there were issues at the school. We—including senior officials—have been working very closely with the school. As far as the No Outsiders programme is concerned, my understanding is that it had reached its natural end and that, in the

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following term, the school would move on to religious education—that was part of the cycle. This is my understanding of the situation in the school.

The hon. Lady should understand that we want to achieve maximum consensus with this relationship education. That is why there is the requirement, in regulations, to publish the policy on the school's website and, in the statutory guidance, to consult parents, but ultimately, it is matter for the school itself to decide on the curriculum—[*Interruption.*] Hang on. When the school has decided on what it wants to teach and when, it will have the full support and backing of the Department for Education and Ministers.

In terms of “when” versus “if”, paragraph 37 of the guidance says:

“Schools should ensure that all of their teaching is sensitive and age appropriate... At the point at which schools consider it appropriate to teach their pupils about LGBT, they should ensure that this content is fully integrated into their programmes.”

What is important and required is that children will be taught about LGBT at some point during their education. Both the Secretary of State and I have frequently been on the record saying that we strongly encourage primary schools to teach LGBT relationships. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Lady says from a sedentary position, “You must tell them.” If we had done that, the guidance would not have achieved the consensus that it has right across the country and right across different types of schools. A large number of schools would not have adopted the guidance. It has been very successfully landed, because of the careful way that we have done this.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): Will the Minister confirm that much of the debate about this issue, including the protests in Birmingham, are about the current curriculum and not the new curriculum, which becomes statutory in September 2020? That new and updated guidance gives people an opportunity to be respectful of faith-based views—for example, on marriage, family and relationships—when the teaching occurs. It fundamentally states that the education should be “appropriate”, having regard to “the age” and “religious background” of pupils. Does the Minister agree that the updated guidance probably has the most comprehensive section ever on respect for religious belief?

Nick Gibb: Yes, my hon. Friend is right. The current controversy is about a curriculum that is in place now. Of course, we still support the school in wanting to teach LGBT issues. She is right that the guidance states, in paragraph 20:

“In all schools, when teaching these subjects, the religious background of all pupils must be taken into account when planning teaching, so that the topics that are included in the core content in this guidance are appropriately handled.”

Most schools will want to do that. My understanding and belief is that when parents are consulted and when they see the materials, the policy and the curriculum that the schools intend to teach, the vast majority of them will support the school in delivering that curriculum.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): I thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this important urgent question, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) for asking it with such passion.

I commend the Department for Education and Ministers for their work—we have made great progress—but I urge them to go further and support the school. If they did, they would have the support of this House and the other place. This is not about consultation—I do not believe that the issues that have arisen are about consultation; they are about LGBT rights, the misinformation being put out and the bigotry being displayed by some minorities on our streets. We have to hit back.

I saw it myself only a few weeks ago after marching with the Terrence Higgins Trust at London Pride. I was trolled for supporting the LGBT+ community, but the support I have received from hon. Members across the House is evidence to all that we will not opt out of equality in this place. It is time for Ministers to provide the right guidance, resource and support to face down the protests and prejudice. Many parents will not be watching this debate. In addition to the measures the Minister has already outlined, what will his Department do to combat the misinformation and to allay parents' fears?

In addition to the information for parents, training is meant to be available for teachers, but there is only £6 million to fund it, which averages at just £254 per school. Will the Minister confirm that his Department's estimate of the amount needed was actually over £30 million and will he share details of how that funding is being allocated? The early adopters will be starting in September—just weeks away. Will that funding be available only for early-adopter schools? If so, what resource is available for others wishing to take up the programme?

We must provide the most comprehensive support for the teachers on the frontline, and this must continue under the new Prime Minister. Inclusive education must be a right for every single child. We will not go back to the days of section 28. Every child is a gift. I hope that the Minister will ensure that his team and the Government take every step over the summer to reinforce this.

Nick Gibb: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her support for what is a landmark piece of legislation and statutory guidance. We should not allow this debate to overshadow the importance of what has been achieved. Thousands of schools do wish to adopt this policy early—in September—and we are producing an implementation guide for those early adopters on how to plan and develop the curriculum and to engage parents. We are also producing a guide on parental engagement planned for the early autumn about what the consultation means, what good practice is and where schools can get more support when they encounter the kind of problems we have seen in Birmingham.

The hon. Lady is right: we need to tackle misinformation. That is why we have produced these myth busters, which have been widely disseminated and are having an impact. On training, we are spending £6 million a year to develop online portals and material that we can spread to teachers who require that training. There should be a consensus in the House about the importance of updated guidance. It is 20 years since the last set of guidance on how to teach sex and relationships education in our schools, and she will know how much her party has helped achieve equality for LGBT people in this country in those 20 years and how the Conservative party, under the last Prime Minister, introduced the

right of gay people to marry—a right that I am personally extremely grateful for. We have had to ensure that our guidance reflects modern society. I am convinced that when this guidance and the curriculum are rolled out nationally we will be helping people better to prepare for life in modern Britain.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): If the Minister's instructions had been more prescriptive, as some hon. Members appear to be demanding, would it have been easier for teachers to implement?

Nick Gibb: We were keen to obtain as wide support as possible from all the major faith groups, including the Association of Muslim Schools, the Board of Deputies, the Catholic Education Service and the Church of England. We wanted a widespread consensus for the statutory guidance, and we wanted it to apply to private schools as well as schools in the state sector. To do that and to land it successfully, I believe we have the wording absolutely right in that important paragraph 37.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): If the Minister thinks the guidance is right, he might want to come and live where I live for a while, because it clearly is not working. All that is needed in the guidance is something that says that in every school every child has to learn about every equality characteristic—simple as that—and that there is no option. We go round the houses talking about consulting and speaking to parents, but the fundamental point is completely missed. For the reasonable, consultation will help, but what we are up against here is racists and homophobes trying to impose what they think on the children where I live. There needs to be clarity. Will he promise that? The headteachers in Birmingham and across the country who are getting in touch with me want that clarity.

Nick Gibb: I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for her work locally to counter the kind of views expressed in those protests. Those protests, which intimidate children going to school and the teachers in those schools, are unacceptable, which is why we supported Birmingham City Council in taking out an interim injunction against the protests. Of course people have a right to protest, but they do not have a right to intimidate young children going to school.

The hon. Lady suggests, “If only we had changed the wording of the guidance to make it more of a requirement,” but I do not believe it would have prevented the protests at the Birmingham school. There is a segment of opinion at either end of this debate that will not be persuaded of the appropriateness of the guidance. Some people will never agree to LGBT issues being taught in schools. As such, I do not believe that requiring it in guidance to be taught at a specific age in primary schools would have prevented the protests.

We have been clear that we support primary schools and headteachers who wish to teach LGBT relationships and local authorities that take legal action against protests that have turned into intimidation of young people, but if we had taken the hon. Lady's advice, we would not have had a consensus for the statutory guidance, there would have been opponents of the regulations as we took it through the House and another place, and we

would not have achieved its acceptance by a raft of independent private schools that we wanted to be subject to the statutory guidance.

Dame Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): The Church of England, the largest provider of primary education, fully supports this updating of the guidance. As the Minister says, it has not been updated for the past 20 years, and childhood has changed greatly during that time. Does the Minister agree that one of the imperatives for this change must be to protect pupils and keep them safe in the complex online world that they inhabit? My heart goes out to the children caught up in all this.

Nick Gibb: My right hon. Friend is right that the guidance needed to be updated. It includes teaching children how to tackle the pitfalls of social media, how to recognise the signs of things such as an unhealthy relationship and how to stay safe online. These are important additions in the relationships guidance. It is an important document. People are focusing on one or two paragraphs, but we should not underestimate its importance to schools in helping children to navigate what she correctly says is an increasingly complicated and at times dangerous world for young people.

Mr Speaker: Flockton Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School and Overthorpe C of E Academy were alike privileged to benefit from the headteachership of the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Thelma Walker), from whom I think it apposite that we should now hear.

Thelma Walker (Colne Valley) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am so impressed.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): You were meant to be.

Thelma Walker: Top of the class there, Mr Speaker.

A few weeks ago, along with members of the National Association of Headteachers and my former colleagues, I signed the following pledge:

“I support education in all schools which promotes equality, enabling children to leave school prepared for life in modern Britain, understanding difference and respecting diversity.”

Does the Minister agree with the wording of the pledge, and does he agree that every parent and, indeed, every member of society should support it?

Nick Gibb: Yes, we do support that pledge, and, as I have said, we will support schools that decide to teach children to understand the importance of difference. That is a fundamental part of our statutory guidance, which was passed by this House.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I find it somewhat disappointing that most of the ire has been focused on the Government—who have updated the relationship guidance—and not solely on the people who protest outside schools, doing their best to deprive young people of their ability to make their choices, and harassing great teachers and headteachers and putting them under pressure. If the protesters do not desist, and if the Minister is not going to make the guidance prescriptive, which would render the protests fruitless, will he consider introducing exclusion zones around the schools so that those protests cannot bear any fruit?

Nick Gibb: We supported Birmingham City Council's injunction against protests that had become very challenging for young people going to that school, and we will support similar action in future when protests become intimidatory for pupils. However, I disagree with my hon. Friend's view, and that of Opposition Members, that if we had made the guidance more prescriptive, it would have prevented the protests from occurring. There is an element of society that simply does not agree with what the Government are seeking to do when it comes to LGBT relationships, and they will protest as much as they want. We were never going to be able to bring that particular section of opinion on board, although we have brought the vast majority of people on board for this curriculum, including many fundamentalist faith groups.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): On Friday I drove past the protests, which have been moved just up the road from the school in Birmingham. Apart from the fact that allowing these people to get away with it has taken up precious police resources, if the Minister saw them, he would realise that putting the onus on the school to decide the content and the appropriateness will never be accepted by them. They will see it as a point of weakness, and they will agitate and intimidate until they get their way. Only the Government will be able to change that.

Nick Gibb: No Government have ever specified that level of detail in respect of sex education, let alone relationship education. It has always been—and must remain—for headteachers and schools to decide what is appropriate for their pupils, when it is age-appropriate, and so on.

We have issued clear guidance. The Secretary of State and I have said that we strongly encourage primary schools to teach children about LGBT relationships, because there will be pupils in primary schools who have two mothers and two fathers and it is important for the other children to respect that, but ultimately such matters must be for headteachers to decide. As I have said, I do not believe that had we been prescriptive—more prescriptive than the wording of paragraph 37—we would have secured consensus among major school providers in both the state and the private sector, and I do not believe that being more prescriptive would have prevented anyone from protesting against something with which they fundamentally disagree.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): As a child of the section 28 generation who saw the damaging effect that it had in telling some people that their relationships and their families were not as good as other people's, I want to speak up for the concerned parents of LGBT families who are now asking why the Government have essentially green-lighted protests against headteachers, the people who will make decisions about whether their family relationships are considered age-appropriate or "adult content". What does the Minister have to say to the people—not just in my constituency, but around the country—who may have five or six-year-old children, but who are in same-sex relationships? When is it appropriate for those children's peers in the playground to be taught that their families are just as full of love, just as much to be respected, and just as much to be

celebrated? That is what we are really talking about: little children being taught, by omission, to hate and not to respect each other.

Nick Gibb: It was to address those very issues that we published the statutory guidance. That is why we published the regulations that were passed in the House with almost no opposition. The hon. Lady is right to suggest that when young children at a school have parents of the same sex, that should perhaps be a pointer to the headteacher to provide for children to be taught about LGBT relationships earlier than they might have been otherwise. It is important to give them that discretion. As I have said, provided that schools have consulted, and provided that their policy is on their websites as required by the regulations, we will fully support headteachers when they make decisions about the content of the curriculum and when and how it should be taught.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): We will always respect religious and cultural values and differences, but there are also fundamental values of human rights. We will never retreat back down the path to a painful past in which the love of two men for one another, or two women for one another, was demonised. Does the Minister not recognise that by using the words "It is for the school to decide", the Government will this autumn expose dozens—potentially hundreds—of schools to the same kind of shameful treatment that we have seen in recent weeks?

Nick Gibb: No, I am afraid I do not agree with that. The guidance makes it very clear that pupils must be taught about LGBT relationships at some point in their school careers, and that that requirement will apply to private schools and faith schools, including orthodox faith schools. That is the important achievement of the guidance.

The Secretary of State and I have said on many occasions that we strongly encourage primary schools to start teaching children in primary schools about LGBT relationships, and we will support those that do so. I believe that when schools start to produce their policies and start to consult on what is being taught and the materials that will be used in teaching children about LGBT relationships, they will have widespread support from parents throughout the country.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): These changes could of course have been introduced in 2010, when the Minister was the shadow Minister, Labour was in power, and we had a plan to introduce relationship and sex education which he voted against. I am very pleased that, nearly 10 years on, relationship and sex education are to be taught in our schools, but I think that now is the time for the Minister to step up and show some real political leadership, and to say what the vast majority of people in this House and the other place agree with: "This has to be mandatory, it has to be taught, and it cannot be just left to the schools."

Nick Gibb: As I have said, we have had widespread support—from the Catholic Education Service, the Church of England, the Office of the Chief Rabbi and the Association of Muslim Schools—and we believe that the guidance strikes the right balance between a wide

range of views. That is why we have achieved consensus in this House and in the other place. Had we not taken this approach, I do not believe that we would be where we are today in terms of the widespread acceptance of the need to teach children about LGBT relationships in 23,000 schools up and down the country.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): Of course I welcome this guidance and have done all along, but I find myself frustrated by the answers from the Minister. I have met the head of Parkfield, who came to speak to a cross-party delegation just the other day, and she was very clear: the chink in the guidance—the word “encouraged” rather than “expected”—has essentially put her and her colleagues in the firing line of these parents. To state that changing the guidance would not make a difference contradicts what that head was saying. Has the Minister been to the school and spoken to the head, and if he hasn’t, will he?

Nick Gibb: The issue in that particular school is not to do with the relationship and sex education guidance—that comes into force in September 2020—and we are making very clear in the supplementary guidance the processes that are needed in terms of consultation. Consultation with parents is hugely important, not so that parents have a veto over the curriculum—they will not have a veto over the curriculum—but because it helps to dispel myths, and it helps to deal with the very misinformation that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) has raised this urgent question to discuss. That consultation is hugely important, and I believe that as and when schools do consult up and down the country, this new policy will attract widespread support from parents.

Mr Clive Betts: I appreciate what the Minister has done on this issue in many respects, but does he not understand that while prescription will not necessarily stop the protests, it will make it clear to the protestors that it is no use bullying the schools and the heads into trying to change the policy because the requirement lies elsewhere? He says that the parents do not have a veto on this, but if a school sits down and consults with parents, and those parents who want to stop same-sex education being taught know that the head has the ultimate decision, then there is enormous pressure on that head, and parents will believe that they have a veto regardless of whether they do or do not?

Nick Gibb: I can make it clear from this Dispatch Box that parents do not have a veto over the content of the curriculum. That has been absolutely clear: it is clear from the guidance; it is clear from what I have said; it is clear from what the Secretary of State has said. In addition to that, we strongly encourage schools to start teaching about LGBT issues in primary school.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Will the Minister make sure that his Department takes responsibility for ensuring that every piece of information that is made available to parents, including consultation materials, is available in community languages, in easy-read format and in other accessible formats?

Nick Gibb: The implementation guide will set out very clearly how to plan the curriculum, how to engage parents and the processes that schools need to go through

to plan and develop the policy. As I mentioned in my opening comments, we have published the information in three separate languages to try to dispel myths, but the key message that I hope comes from this debate is that we will fully support and back headteachers who decide to teach LGBT issues in their school. As long as they have been through the process of consultation and they publish their policy on the school website, they will have our full backing.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): I am in awe of teachers like Gillian Marshall at Red Hall primary school in my constituency who has been providing an inclusive education for many years now. She has worked tirelessly and sensitively with the parents of the children in her care and were this guidance to have a stronger, firmer legal footing, that would not stop: she would still seek to work alongside and with the parents in her community. The Minister does not need to worry that schools will abandon working alongside parents if he gives more power to the school and makes that clearer to the parents.

Nick Gibb: Yes, and I pay tribute to that headteacher. There are teachers in thousands of schools up and down the country that are teaching these issues with no protests from any group outside their school gates. The hon. Lady should realise that this is the first time that we are requiring schools to teach about LGBT issues. That will not affect the school she referred to, but it will affect many thousands of schools up and down the country that will for the first time be teaching their pupils about the need to respect difference and to understand that families come in different types, including single parents or parents of the same sex. So this is a very important piece of legislation—a very important piece of statutory guidance. We should all be doing more to support and welcome it, as the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), who speaks for the Opposition, did in her response to this urgent question.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): In Bristol on Saturday the Pride event was a magnificent celebration of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality. I was there; it was wonderful. Many of the people in the parade and at the event afterwards were probably pupils at schools where they felt excluded or misunderstood. Most of the people marching either were parents or one day will be parents, and they, too, want to know that their children will have the security of having an educational experience that is better than theirs, where they feel included and wanted, and for them the word “encouraged” is not enough. I respect the Minister, but will he please reconsider that little word “encouraged”? Can he not see that the fear of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender parents in my constituency that their children will be left out of education about positive role models and positive relationships is real, not imaginary?

Nick Gibb: This is a transforming piece of legislation and statutory guidance. It will mean that in thousands of schools up and down the country—in fact, in every school up and down the country—there will be a change in the approach to teaching about relationships and teaching about RSE. And it will mean that in schools that have not been teaching about LGBT issues, those issues will be taught at some point during their pupils’ education. I also believe strongly that it will be taught in the vast majority of primary schools, because the Secretary

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of State and I have made it clear that we strongly encourage LGBT issues to be taught in primary schools and not to wait until children reach secondary school. However, had we taken the hon. Lady's advice, this guidance would not be applying to the hundreds of faith schools in the private sector, and we took the view that pupils in those schools were equally deserving of being taught about LGBT issues and about modern life and respect for difference, which they would not be taught about had it not been for this guidance and the way that we have constructed it.

Jess Phillips: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I seek your advice about potentially correcting the record on something that has been said during this urgent question. The Minister stated that the no Outsiders programme had come to a natural conclusion and had not been shut down because of pressure from the Department. I and a number of other Members of Parliament—some present today and some not—from across parties heard a very different story from the leaders of that school last week in a meeting in this House. I wonder how I can seek clarity on that, because I am certain, as a local Member of Parliament, that had that action not been taken, the subsequent protest outside Anderton Park school would not have emerged. I have also been told by Members of Parliament from Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and Lancashire this week that they are expecting protests at their schools this week, next week and in September, and I wish to push back against the suggestions I feel we have heard today that this is just a Birmingham problem.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady and will offer some thoughts in a moment, but the Minister is signalling a willingness to respond and I think we should hear him.

Nick Gibb: As I said in response to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle, that was my understanding from a briefing I received from officials, some of whom had been involved in the day-to-day discussions with the school. Given that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) has raised this point of order, I will go back to those officials and ask them to check again whether the briefing I was given was correct, and if it turns out that I inadvertently misled the House on that particular point I will ensure that the record is corrected.

Mr Speaker: That is a most helpful and gracious response from the Minister of State which has, I think, for now satisfied the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley. I just want to say that the House collectively and the House service alike are very proud of our record on LGBT equality. In thanking the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle for raising this urgent question, and all colleagues for participating in the exchanges, I am going to permit myself two observations. First, in my experience as a Member of Parliament for more than 20 years, I often find that when people say, "We haven't been properly consulted", what they really mean is "You haven't done what I told you to do." Secondly, again on the strength of experience, we cannot appease bigots and homophobes; we have to confront them and defeat them. My strong sense is that there is unity across the House in that conviction.

Lotteries Regulation

1.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Mims Davies): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement in relation to lotteries. The national lottery and society lotteries contribute around £2 billion a year to good causes in this country, forming the backbone of giving in the UK. As preparations start for the competition for the next licence to run the national lottery, it is important that we ensure that the wider lotteries landscape is fit for the future and allows as much money as possible to be raised for good causes within a suitable framework. To ensure that there is clarity ahead of the upcoming fourth licence competition, I am today announcing next steps on society lotteries. I am also launching a consultation on increasing the age limit for playing the national lottery.

I turn to society lotteries. In June last year, the Government launched a consultation seeking views on proposals to reform the existing limits on society lotteries, which had not been raised for over a decade. I am aware that there has been strong support from across this House for the Government to increase the sales and prize limits for society lotteries, and that changes have taken a long time to come. Society lotteries are a vital source of funds for charities and other non-commercial organisations, and in 2018 alone they raised over £300 million. I am the Minister not only for lotteries but for charities as a whole, and I want the third sector to grow the pie overall for everybody's benefit. I am aware that society lotteries are a vital funding mechanism for thousands of charities in many of our local communities, including air ambulances and local hospices.

The consultation aimed to ensure that society lotteries and the national lottery were able to thrive, and that society lotteries could continue to grow while we maintain the unique position of the national lottery and its ability to raise funds across the country by offering the largest jackpots. We heard strong arguments from both sectors, and I am grateful to everyone who shared their views. In coming to a final decision, I have balanced needs across the sector to ensure that returns to good causes can grow overall.

I am pleased to announce that I will raise the per-draw sales limit from £4 million to £5 million, and the maximum prize limit from £400,000 to £500,000, for large society lotteries. These increases will allow for significant headroom for most of the sector to continue to grow, and I am pleased that the Gambling Commission has agreed to carefully monitor these changes for any potential wider impact. This will enable us to analyse the impact of the changes over time. In addition, I will raise the annual sales limit from £10 million to £50 million. In recent years we have seen charities forced to slow their fundraising from lotteries as a result of the current limits, or to adopt costly alternative structures to avoid breaching them, thereby increasing admin costs and diverting money away from good causes. Indeed, one charity told us that introducing such arrangements could cost £345,000, with additional running costs of more than £100,000 a year. A £50 million annual limit will reduce or prevent administrative burdens for society lotteries, and I fully expect to see an equivalent increase when it comes to

the amount of money directed to good causes as a result of the lower admin costs and this increase. I will be watching that closely.

I am aware that many Members support a higher annual limit of £100 million. I share that ambition, but this is a significant increase and I want to be certain that moving to this much higher limit would in reality increase returns to good causes across the sector. I want to be assured that an appropriate regulatory regime is in place. It is therefore my aim to launch a further consultation, looking at adding an additional tier of licence with suitable additional requirements for the very largest lotteries.

It is also important that society lotteries demonstrate the highest levels of transparency. I am therefore pleased that the Gambling Commission is also planning to consult on measures to tighten the existing licensing framework for all large society lotteries, looking in particular at the information provided to players on how the proceeds of society lotteries are used and on the good causes that benefit. We will also be looking further at how best to increase transparency in relation to executive pay, and we will seek further advice from the Gambling Commission. I will look to legislate if these measures do not go far enough. There was less support for changing the limits for small society lotteries and, having considered the evidence carefully, I do not plan to increase those limits at this time. I have previously committed to laying Camelot's response to the society lotteries consultation in the Library, and I will also lay the other key responses that my Department received.

The age of 18 is widely recognised as the age at which one becomes an adult, gaining full citizenship rights and responsibilities. At present, all lotteries can be played from the age of 16; that is one of the few exceptions to the age limit of 18 for gambling products. In addition to the option to raise the minimum age to 18 for all national lottery games and to retain the current limit of 16, I am also seeking views on a differentiated approach that would increase the minimum age for instant-win games only. That includes scratchcards and online instant-win games.

My initial view, based on the evidence reviewed so far, is that such a split could be the best approach. This takes into account the fact that the risk of harm associated with playing the national lottery is the lowest for any form of gambling. We know that the risk of harm is slightly higher for instant-win games than it is for draw-based games such as Lotto. Given that the national lottery matters so much to so many people, I am keen to see further evidence in this area and hear what others, including operators, distributors and retailers, think about any potential impacts and benefits of any change.

This year, the national lottery celebrates its 25th birthday. Mystic Meg herself could not have predicted how successful it would be in that time, raising over £40 billion to support our local communities, protect our heritage, enhance the arts and transform funding across our sports. The national lottery has been at the very heart of creating, protecting and driving much of what we love. Each week it raises around £30 million for good causes. Since 1992 it has funded more than 4,000 world-class UK Paralympians and Olympians, and each year it invests around £325 million in protecting some of our most prized national heritage. It has funded the development of our artistic talent, and access to art. It has ensured

access to sporting opportunities for people in all communities, alongside its support for 10,000 charitable causes each year, with more than £500 million of funding. I thank our national lottery players, the 12 distributors, the Gambling Commission and my Department for making that all possible.

Today's announcements give clarity to those interested in running our national lottery when the current licence expires in four years' time. It also gives our society lotteries greater capacity to continue to increase their work in the constituencies of my many colleagues in the Chamber. I look forward to seeing the real benefits of the changes for charities and good causes that are supported by all our lotteries across the UK. I commend this statement to the House.

1.30 pm

Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her statement. I appreciate the prudent approach that she has taken to the issue. As she knows, I wrote to the previous Secretary of State last summer to raise my concern that society lotteries had been waiting for six years for the result of a review into their regulation. More than a year on, it is now a full seven years that the sector has been waiting for an answer from the Government. The delay in making that decision has left society lotteries facing an increasing uncertainty, unable to make substantial plans for the future.

Society lotteries achieve a lot of good for our country, as does the national lottery. They raise hundreds of millions of pounds a year for good causes, funding charities as varied as Barnardo's, the Stroke Association, Friends of the Earth and Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, as well as many others. Major benefits of society lotteries include their flexibility and predictability, which charities tell me is exceptionally useful because it allows them to prioritise funds where they will have most impact.

The Minister is right that transparency must be paramount, and we agree with her about the importance of openness on what the costs of this fundraising process are and where the money goes. People who take part in the lotteries need to know that they are not just taking a punt but getting value for money.

I understand the feeling that sometimes there is a conflict of interest between society lotteries and the national lottery, and I agree with the Government's stated aim to

"achieve a balance between enabling the sustainable growth of society lotteries on the one hand while also protecting the unique position of the UK-wide National Lottery".

The Minister mentioned Mystic Meg. If she was Mystic Mims, what would she say the impact of the changes will be on the fundraising for good causes that the national lottery provides to the arts, culture, heritage and sport? When will the new regulations come into force?

The second issue is the age limit on national lottery products. There are 450,000 children gambling every week in our country; the number has quadrupled in recent years. For many young people, scratchcards are a gateway to gambling from the age of 16. We do not think that is right, particularly when we are struggling with an epidemic of gambling addiction across the country. Gambling is fun, but it can also be dangerous

[Tom Watson]

when it is poorly regulated or gets out of control for an individual. In my view, and in that of the Labour party, there is absolutely no need for a consultation on this issue.

The Minister's predecessor, the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), announced last year that she would gather evidence on the topic. It is our strong view—I am sure Members across the House will agree—that we already have all the evidence we need. Those who gamble should be adults, so the minimum age for all gambling products should be 18. It is as simple as that.

Mims Davies: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome. I believe that this is a prudent approach. I have been very mindful that, as the Secretary of State and I as well as many other Members have found, people are fed up with waiting and want to know what the lottery landscape looks like. As Mystic Mims, I would say that this sets the landscape appropriately for protecting the national lottery and all the good that it does: it keeps the £1 million prize and the jackpot for the national lottery, but allows society lotteries that support causes such as our air ambulances, which are bumping along at the top of the headroom of the money they are able give to local causes, to be able to raise more money and support our local communities. That is the right approach.

On the minimum age issue, the hon. Gentleman will know that I cannot say any more ahead of the consultation. I seek the views of those in this Chamber and across the sector. The current licence period has seen a range of technological developments, which have changed the way that we play the national lottery, and it has also seen gambling behaviours change. We are therefore right to consider how the licence might look. It is right to consider whether it is appropriate to sell all national lottery games to those under 18 as part of future proofing it for the duration of the next licence.

On the timetable, I hope that we would lay the changes in autumn in order to see a move in 2020.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I welcome my hon. Friend to the Dispatch Box. I completely agree that there is no need for a consultation about the age limit. Frankly, we should just get on with it—there is enough evidence out there.

Secondly, while I welcome the Minister's comments, I am slightly concerned. Will she tell the House whether there was real, powerful and compelling evidence why society lotteries should be restricted to a gain of only £100,000 on the prize money? If there is clear evidence that they damage the national lottery, will she publish that? If there is not, will she tell us why we have been in such trepidation about moving the prize money total?

Mims Davies: I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments. There has not been compelling evidence that the majority of the sector requires a £1 million prize limit to drive growth, so we have sought today to seek a balance to enable society lotteries to grow, while preserving the distinct space in which the national lottery operates, with the key feature of life-changing prizes. The Gambling Commission will be monitoring the impact of increasing

the prize limit to £500,000, so we do not rule out further increases in the future, if we have a clear evidence base on the impact of the current changes.

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): I thank the Minister for advance sight of the statement. I welcome the ongoing improvements in UK gambling legislation, which the Department has been bringing forward, and I appreciate and welcome the consultation to increase the age for playing the national lottery to 18.

I do not think the Government should be differentiating between Lotto and scratchcards—it should be 18 for all. I am concerned that the Government felt the need to put this comment in the statement:

“My initial view, based on the evidence reviewed so far, is that such a split could be the best approach.”

We are approaching a gambling epidemic in the UK, and the grooming of young adults in the gambling arena should be stopped, and stopped now.

The Gambling Commission was mentioned a number of times in the statement. I have concerns that extra administration will consume its budget, which should be tackling gambling-related harm. Last year, the national lottery paid its chief executive officer £100,000 more than it donated to gambling charities, and I take the opportunity to remind the Secretary of State once again that my preferred option is a mandatory levy.

Recent years have seen an increase in Camelot's profits against a backdrop of a decline in lottery funding for good causes. However that is to be addressed, we should never forget that we are using gambling to raise funds for charities, and that charities exist because the Government have let down particular areas of our society. Many of the charities being supported should be Government-funded in the first place. Will the Government please reconsider their age-limit review, and will they guarantee the percentage of gross profits to be allocated to good causes?

Mims Davies: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments and his hard work on protecting the vulnerable when it comes to gambling. I absolutely share the view that we should be protecting everybody from elements of harm. The risk from the national lottery is low. I understand that he feels differently about the levy, but the Department's responsible approach of working with the industry is bearing fruit, as we have seen with the £100 million announced recently. The consultation on the age limit applies to all national lottery products, and I will welcome his and others' response.

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): I thank the Minister for her statement and her recognition of the good that society lotteries do across the country through the funds that they raise. She has been clear that the jackpot will not be lifted to the £1 million that the society lotteries had hoped for and is now looking to place new transparency requirements on society lotteries. In the light of that, will she outline the problems she sees with the extensive reporting requirements on charities that justify this further action and the delay in raising the jackpot total to £1 million?

Mims Davies: I thank my right hon. Friend for her question. She has consistently campaigned to support society lotteries, recognising all the good work that they do in her constituency and many others. It is important

that society lotteries demonstrate the highest levels of transparency. The changes that we have announced, alongside the Gambling Commission's plans to consult on measures to tighten the national lottery licensing framework, will help to give players of the national lottery a clear understanding of where the money is spent locally and the good causes that it is spent on. It is absolutely right that we support society lotteries and grow the pie for them, while keeping the unique position of the national lottery. As the charities Minister, I am clear that all money for good causes is very welcome.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): Will the Minister explain what steps she has taken to increase the transparency of how the proceeds, particularly from large-scale lotteries, are spent?

Mims Davies: This issue has come up significantly in conversations with the national lottery and the sector. Transparency is vital when people play the lottery, so there will be further transparency measures with the change to £50 million, alongside work by the Gambling Commission. The hon. Lady will see from the consultation documents that we seek to ensure that everybody in this space understands where the money for good causes goes and what is spent on marketing, and I am sure that she will contribute to any further conversations.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Given gambling's tendency to be habit forming, the later that it can be put off until, the better. Certainly, gambling should not begin before adulthood, should it?

Mims Davies: I agree with my right hon. Friend, but those who play sport locally or enjoy their local heritage, or who have a local commitment to a hospice or something else in their community, might feel it appropriate to support that. That is why we are listening to all views in the consultation, and all national lottery products will be looked at.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): As the UK city of culture, Hull benefited enormously from national lottery funding. Will the same amount of money be available in future for arts, culture and sport with these changes—the point that my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson) raised from the Front Bench—or does the Minister think that what happened in the Netherlands will happen here and that less money will be available from the national lottery?

Mims Davies: The hon. Lady is right to mention the Netherlands, where things are set up differently from here. As the lotteries and charities Minister, I am clear that we should support our small lotteries and smaller charities, while maintaining the national lottery's unique status. It supports our arts, heritage, sports and cities of

culture, and it is vital that the unique status of the jackpot is maintained through these prudent changes—as the hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson) noted—that support the whole sector.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): The Gambling Commission evidence that, for scratchcards, people under 18 did not really suffer was based on a small sample size. Would it not be better to have a proper consultation on and examination of this aspect?

Mims Davies: The Gambling Commission plans to consult on measures to tighten up the society lotteries framework, including by looking at the information provided to players about the proceeds of a lottery and how they are used, and publishing breakdowns of where the money is spent and the good causes that benefit. As I said earlier, if we need to, and if those measures do not go far enough, I will look to legislate to protect all players, of all ages, who are appropriate to be playing.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): With greater transparency for society lotteries, can we also publish a proper breakdown of how the money is spent?

Mims Davies: As I said earlier, it is important to use this opportunity to work with the sector to ensure that those playing charity lotteries in their local communities get the transparency that they would expect and see from the national lottery—something that the national lottery and its distributors have raised strongly. That is why we have been looking at this and why the Gambling Commission is looking at the sector more widely to support these changes to ensure that anybody playing a society lottery or the national lottery is clear where the money goes and which good causes are supported.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): The £2 billion raised each year by lotteries helps to fund charities, sports and heritage initiatives in my constituency and across the country. I recognise that the Minister must strike a balance, and I know that some of the society lotteries might be disappointed at the limit not being £1 million. Will she confirm that the growth in society lotteries has not been, and will not be, to the detriment of the national lottery?

Mims Davies: This goes back to the prudent—I love that word—decisions that I believe I have made today. We had a huge response to the consultation, alongside the report from the Select Committee on Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and we have had up-to-date information and advice from the Gambling Commission. In the broader landscape, this change clears the space for the fourth licence, but more importantly gives the national lottery a chance to celebrate its 25th birthday, with a clear differentiation in the sector and clear transparency about where the money for good causes is going and how the sector can thrive on both sides.

Domestic Abuse

1.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): Home should be a place of safety and of love, but for 2 million people it is not. Domestic abuse takes place behind closed doors, turning people's homes into places of fear, abuse and violence. We recognise the importance of building trust with victims to tackle this hidden crime—victims who for too long have felt scared or unable to come forward. I am very pleased to announce today that the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice are introducing the Domestic Abuse Bill in the House. Led jointly by the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar) and me, we are also publishing our response to the pre-legislative scrutiny report of the Joint Committee on the Draft Domestic Abuse Bill.

Domestic abuse is complex and multifaceted. In addition to physical violence, it can include emotional, psychological, sexual and economic abuse, and at its heart is often controlling or coercive behaviour. We were the first Parliament in the world to recognise that when we introduced the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour in 2015. But our understanding of domestic abuse continues to grow and evolve, and this Bill gives us an opportunity to ensure that our legislation keeps pace.

Each year in this country, scores of people, mainly women, are murdered by their partners. Domestic abuse of all kinds destroys the lives of thousands more, including male and LGBT+ victims. Each and every day, those working on the frontline of our public services see the extent of the damage that it causes and the demands that it places on those who are there to help. I take a moment to thank those who work tirelessly to prevent abuse, protect victims and bring perpetrators to justice, particularly for their support in the consultation process, but there is more to be done.

In January 2019, we issued a written ministerial statement setting out our commitment to transforming the response to domestic abuse. In that statement we announced the publication of the draft Domestic Abuse Bill, as well as the publication of the response to the Government's domestic abuse consultation undertaken last year. We also published a set of non-legislative measures, because we recognise that although the Bill is vital, so too is our practical day-to-day response.

Taken together, the Bill, the consultation response and the non-legislative measures set out an ambitious programme of cross-Government action that puts victims at the heart of our response in a co-ordinated effort to tackle domestic abuse. That includes setting out our intention to address perpetrators' behaviour and to break the cycle of abuse through perpetrator programmes, domestic abuse prevention orders and even piloting polygraph testing to ensure compliance with programmes.

The Bill was published in draft to allow for prelegislative scrutiny by a Joint Committee of Members of Parliament and peers, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller). The Committee published its report on 14 June, and the Government are grateful to all parliamentarians on the Committee for their

detailed scrutiny of the draft Bill and to all those who provided evidence to the Committee—they have my personal thanks and the thanks of all Ministers involved.

We have carefully considered the Committee's report and have accepted many of its recommendations, either in part or in full. We have committed to giving other recommendations full consideration over the next few months, with the aim of publishing a further response to the report later this year. Where appropriate, we will table amendments to the Bill to address those recommendations.

That includes our work on refuge services. Subject to the outcome of the consultation currently under way, we will table amendments to implement the Government's proposals to improve support to victims and their children in accommodation-based domestic abuse services in England. I ask all hon. Members to encourage their networks to respond to that consultation by 2 August.

During the development of the Bill, hon. Members have raised the issue of migrant women who are victims of domestic abuse. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Immigration will today publish an updated asylum support policy on domestic abuse. The Home Office is using the asylum support budget to close a gap that has, until now, prevented asylum seekers and their dependants from accessing specialist domestic abuse refuge places because they are not entitled to housing benefit.

Further, we have listened to charities and victims who say that people feel trapped in abusive relationships by their immigration status. That is not acceptable, which is why we are committing to reviewing the response to all migrant victims of abuse, as recommended by the Joint Committee.

We have also listened to victims about their journeys through the legal system. The Bill prohibits perpetrators from continuing their reign of abuse through cross-examining their victims in person in the family courts, and it gives victims automatic eligibility for special measures in the criminal courts.

We want to recognise the devastating impact that domestic abuse can have on children and young people. Among the measures to achieve that is the requirement that the statutory guidance must recognise this adverse effect. We also want to meet our international obligations. The Bill includes the necessary provisions for all parts of the United Kingdom to meet the requirements of the Istanbul convention in respect of the extraterritorial jurisdiction of the criminal courts.

The Government wholeheartedly agree with the Joint Committee that victims of domestic abuse in all parts of the United Kingdom deserve effective protection and support. There has been a controlling or coercive behaviour offence in England and Wales since 2015, and the Scottish Government legislated for such an offence last year. Northern Ireland, however, has no such legislation in place. We are therefore pleased to inform the House that following a consultation undertaken in 2016, before the collapse of the Assembly, the Bill, as introduced, will include a bespoke domestic abuse offence for Northern Ireland. I pay tribute to all hon. Members who represent Northern Ireland and who take their seats in this place for their support on this measure.

Before I finish, I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. She has worked tirelessly over many years as a Member of Parliament, as Home Secretary

and as Prime Minister to ensure that the vulnerable are heard and protected and that perpetrators are brought to justice. Her determination and dedication to helping the 2 million victims of domestic abuse shines through this Bill.

We remain determined to do all we can to eradicate domestic abuse. Through this landmark Bill and our wider non-legislative programme, we will transform our response to this appalling crime and end the suffering caused by abuse. I commend this statement to the House.

1.55 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): I thank the Minister for meeting me last night and for giving me an early view of her statement, and I thank colleagues who sat on the Joint Committee on the draft Domestic Abuse Bill for their time and commitment and for the comprehensive report and recommendations they produced.

As the Minister alluded to, the Bill is not yet finalised, but we welcome some areas that we know will be included. We hope the Bill will begin to transform how we deal with domestic abuse. Although we agree that establishing a domestic abuse commissioner is key, we will be seeking assurances on the authority and funding of that role. Can the Minister give further clarity on the role and independence of the commissioner?

The improvements to proceedings in family courts, which will include prohibiting the cross-examination of victims, is very welcome. However, we will seek assurances that, in cases of custody and access to children, all victims will be treated equally and that the courts will not be prescriptive and inflexible but will look at cases individually.

Controlling and coercive behaviour will be included in the definition of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland. This change across the rest of the UK has been instrumental in changing the outcomes for many victims. None more so than Sally Challen, whose murder conviction was overturned and reduced to manslaughter earlier this year, which meant she was freed owing to time already served. I was very pleased to welcome her to the Terrace two weeks ago to listen to her story. We are pleased to see this definition being extended to Northern Ireland.

We know the Government are committed to helping migrant victims of domestic abuse, and we welcome their intention to review it, but we must ensure that these women are eligible to apply for indefinite leave to remain, irrespective of the type of visa they reside under, and are able to access public funds.

Although the Bill will not be gender specific, as has been called for by some in the sector, it is my understanding that commissioning services will be, which is a welcome step towards ensuring that all victims of domestic abuse receive parity in the provision of support services.

We still believe that the Bill may be weak when it comes to the impact of domestic abuse on children, both as victims and as witnesses. By not focusing enough on the impact, there will be a knock-on effect on the specialist support made available to them. Can the Minister advise on the plans to strengthen this area of the Bill to ensure that services for child victims are widely available, robust and adequately funded?

We all know that funding for women's refuges has been cut in recent years, meaning that refuges have had to close and that women have been forced to stay in

abusive relationships because they have nowhere else to go. We need assurances from the Government that this Bill will ensure that funding is available to enable women to leave their family home and have a safe alternative for themselves and their children.

There are other issues to consider in relation to the education of perpetrators; housing; personal, social, health and economic education; healthy relationship education; a wider use of schemes such as Operation Encompass to allow schools to be more supportive of pupils experiencing domestic abuse within their families; and an increase in the number of independent domestic abuse advisers in hospitals. Those are all areas on which we will be seeking clarity on Second Reading and beyond.

This Bill was a commitment made by the outgoing Prime Minister in her final Queen's Speech, just over two years ago. Although it has arrived very late in her leadership, and without time for her to see it through, I am pleased that she has finally set things in motion for this long overdue and much-needed legislation. We would, however, like assurances from this Government that whoever will be Prime Minister next week has the same commitment to this, and can guarantee that the Bill will be robust and that funding will be available to fulfil everything it promises. It is the intention of Opposition Members to work with the Government and the sector to take this Bill into legislation. There will be challenges, but we hope that with sensible debate, negotiation and compromise, we will help to form a lasting piece of legislation that will benefit all victims of domestic abuse. This Bill is a golden opportunity for the Government and for all parliamentarians to transform the domestic abuse agenda, and it is our duty to ensure that we get this right.

Victoria Atkins: I thank the hon. Lady for her response, and for the constructive and co-operative approach she has taken to this Bill and to many other matters. She is always a constructive critic of the Government, and rightly so, but I thank her and her colleagues for the spirit in which they are engaging in this. I must also pay tribute to and thank colleagues from across the House, on both sides, who have always been incredibly constrictive in their approach to this. I hope that that will continue, because I am sure we all want to see domestic violence stop.

The hon. Lady asked me about the domestic abuse commissioner. I am happy to confirm that we are appointing the commissioner, because we want the commissioner to hold national and local government to account. The commissioner will have the power to publish reports and make recommendations, and, crucially, statutory agencies will be required by law to respond to those recommendations publicly. We believe that will exert great pressure on local authorities to ensure that they are doing right by their local communities. Of course, in line with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government consultation, albeit that we are not prejudging its result, there will possibly be a further statutory duty through that route, to ensure that we have co-ordinated effort.

The hon. Lady raised the matter of family courts. We are reviewing practice direction 12J and the operation of the family courts more widely. I understand that we are aiming to report in September, and I know that the

[*Victoria Atkins*]

Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), has this very much at the forefront of his mind.

I am grateful for the hon. Lady's comments on migrant women. She knows how complex these issues are, but we are very much entering into this with the right spirit and we look forward to help from across the House on what more we can do to protect migrant women.

I absolutely understand charities' campaigns and the emphasis that they put on children, given the terrible impacts that domestic abuse has on them and their life chances. I often see that myself in the context of youth workers working with gang members; domestic abuse is a prevalent factor in the lives of some of those children. We will be ensuring that statutory guidance recognises the effect of domestic abuse on children, which is significant because it will have an impact on local commissioning. The domestic abuse commissioner will also be encouraging good practice in the identification of children, and we will consider whether we need to amend the definition of "harm" in the Children Act 1989 to explicitly include the impact of domestic abuse on children. The hon. Lady will know that we are investing £8 million to deal specifically with children who are the victims of domestic abuse, and of course, as I say, the MCHLG consultation plays an incredible part.

I am also delighted to confirm that this is not just a commitment of this Prime Minister, but a commitment of the Government. We have the extra confirmation of both leadership candidates' teams having confirmed to me that not only do the candidates support this Bill, but they will progress with it in the autumn.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I welcome my hon. Friend's statement. I thank the Government for introducing a groundbreaking piece of work, and I thank the Prime Minister personally for her incredible leadership in making this issue central to this Government's programme of work. It was a great privilege to be able to chair the Joint Committee, and I thank members of that Committee, from both this place and the other place, for their commitment, hard work and tenacity. Above all, I thank our Clerks, who did an incredible piece of work in a very truncated time, producing a top-quality report. I am pleased to see that the Government have welcomed the majority of its recommendations and have either accepted or partially accepted them.

The Joint Committee's most significant concern was the plight of migrant women with no recourse to public funds. In her statement, my hon. Friend underlined the Government's support for action on this issue to make sure that the gap in support is closed. Is it her objective to ensure that migrant women can be treated in the same way as any other victim of domestic abuse in terms of support, particularly given the welcome announcements by the Government on the introduction of the statutory duty in respect of the provision of refuge places? Will she assure me that she will redouble her efforts to make sure that any new support that is in place cannot be open to abuse, as that would discredit that support and affect the women who need it in order to survive?

Victoria Atkins: I thank my right hon. Friend for her sterling work chairing the Committee. She has given so much time, effort and service to the House in doing so,

and I am extremely grateful. It was a pleasure when she agreed to chair it, because I knew not only that it would be chaired well, but that the Committee would leave no stone unturned in its scrutiny of this Bill and of the Government's action. Again, I place on record my thanks to members of that Committee.

I also thank my right hon. Friend for raising the issue of migrant women. She knows, as the Committee does from the evidence it has taken, just how complex this issue is. She has alighted on the point about possible abuse of the system. That is one of the many factors that the Government must consider as part of their review, and it is fair to say, from meetings and roundtables that I and other Ministers have held with hon. Members and stakeholders on this issue, that everyone recognises that we need to deal with it, but in a sensitive way that does not have the potential for unintended consequences. I am delighted to put on record the fact that women who are victims of domestic abuse are just that—victims of domestic abuse—regardless of their migration or other status.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I thank the Minister for advance sight of her statement, and for the courtesy that she and the other Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), have afforded me in this regard. I welcome the introduction of the Bill. In general, the matters it covers are devolved to Scotland and, as she alluded to, Scotland passed a domestic abuse consolidation Bill last year, providing for statutory offences and for some changes on criminal procedure, evidence, sentencing and special measures. I am pleased to see England and Wales follow suit, and I particularly wish to applaud the Joint Committee's work. It noted that there is much to be learned from the devolved Administrations regarding guidance, training and multi-agency working, and I would like the Minister to confirm that the Government will follow that advice.

I hear what the Minister says about the Istanbul convention, but it is disappointing that the UK Government have yet to ratify it, despite the fact that the Bill introduced by my former colleague Eilidh Whiteford on ratifying it is law. So will the Minister confirm that that is going to be done and make a statement on her intention to do so before the recess, giving us a bit more detail on that? I realise that it is not an entirely straightforward procedure, but we are rather overdue with our ratification.

My hon. Friend the Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) has tirelessly campaigned on the issue of universal credit separate payments. The Bill is explicitly making economic abuse a form of domestic abuse, but the current system of a single UC payment by default can facilitate economic coercion. The Joint Committee notes that the Select Committee on Work and Pensions recommended that the Department for Work and Pensions should use the Scottish Government's intention to introduce split payments by default as an opportunity to "test and learn" the different possible approaches to splitting payments and whether they would help survivors in this area. Will the Minister commit to introducing default separate payments in universal credit, and will she do that before recess?

Finally, I note what has been said about migrant women and welcome the points made so far. However, it was alarming that the Joint Committee heard evidence

that some police forces share details of victims with the Home Office for the purpose of immigration control, rather than to help the victim to access appropriate support. The Joint Committee recommended that the Home Office policy should be robust and should be developed to determine the actions that may be taken by immigration authorities with respect to victims of crime who have approached the public authorities for protection and support. The Joint Committee also supported the Step Up Migrant Women campaign recommendation that a firewall be established at the levels of policy and practice to separate the reporting of crime from access to support services. Can the Minister give me some comfort that the Home Office will take those recommendations on board and that migrant women who seek help because of domestic abuse will not be shopped to the immigration authorities?

Victoria Atkins: I thank the hon. and learned Lady for her kind words about the Bill, and I thank the Scottish Government for responding and working so quickly with the UK Government to ensure that legislative consent motions will be passed when they are needed. I am always happy to acknowledge best practice and good practice wherever it happens; indeed, I intend to copy it quite shamelessly, where appropriate. I thank the hon. and learned Lady for her efforts.

We now publish annual reports on progress towards ratification of the Istanbul convention, with the next one due by the end of October. The fact that the law in each part of the UK needs to be compliant with the provisions of the convention before the UK as a whole can ratify it has led to some of the delay that the hon. and learned Lady set out, but it is absolutely our intention that the Bill will help us to arrive at that destination.

On universal credit, we are working with the Scottish Government to establish the practicalities of delivering split payments in Scotland, and we will further observe their implementation when that occurs. We think that around 60% of universal credit claimants are the main carer, who tends to be the woman in the relationship. We are keen to ensure that, because Jobcentre Plus can be the first touchstone, as it were, between a victim and the state, the staff there are properly trained to recognise the symptoms of someone in an abusive relationship. That could be a positive turn of events to help to ensure that when victims come into contact with the state, they are recognised and identified, and then, as it were, scooped up and helped.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): I think the Minister said there were 2 million victims; if that is the case, they will overwhelmingly be women, and if they are to be freed, that means changing the attitudes of men. How is that to be achieved?

Victoria Atkins: My right hon. Friend may be volunteering for a role. He is right to make the point that of the 2 million victims, we estimate that around 1.3 million are female and around 695,000 are male, and within that 695,000 we believe—it is very difficult to identify this, and there are problems in doing so—that the majority of perpetrators are male. Within the huge range of abusive behaviour in relationships, there are many, many manifestations, and what may be experienced

by a couple in a heterosexual relationship may be very different from what is experienced in a homosexual relationship, for example. That is why we are so committed to ensuring that our response, particularly in relation to accommodation-based services, addresses those specific needs. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, because part of the purpose of the Bill is to raise awareness and to make the point that men can be victims of domestic abuse as well, but the overwhelming majority of victims are female, and that starts from the very beginning, so we need to teach boys and girls what to expect from healthy relationships. That is precisely why relationship education in schools is such a vital part of our programme.

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her statement. I appreciate the commitment she has shown to the Bill and to working across the House, not only with the Labour Front-Bench team but with Back Benchers from all parties. I recognise the frustration that I know she has felt as she has pushed forward on this issue. As far as I am concerned, I hope that when the inevitable reshuffle happens, the Minister will keep her position so that she can push the Bill forward, and I hope that her colleague the victims Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), will stay in his position too.

I welcome the Bill, which I see as an important step in what has been a long struggle to tackle the scourge of domestic violence. The Bill rightly brings forward a new definition, new powers, new duties, a new office and an extension to Northern Ireland. Many of us want to add further things to it when it goes through further scrutiny. The question is, though: what happens next? Neither of the two leadership candidates has been what we might call a champion of the cause of tackling domestic violence. That is simply a fact. I hope the next Prime Minister recognises that this Bill is the will of the House and that there is commitment to it on all sides. The Prime Minister will be gone next week, but this Bill—her Bill—must go forward.

Victoria Atkins: I thank the right hon. and learned Lady for the enormous work she has done in her time in this place to advance the cause of women, and particularly to tackle the injustices that many women face. I reiterate her point that not only have the Front Benchers have been wonderful in their support and collaboration, but Back-Bench MPs have been incredibly important, too.

I thank the right hon. and learned Lady for her reference to the future Prime Minister; my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar) and I are grateful for that assistance. We are both determined to see the Bill through. Although the Prime Minister may be stepping down next week, she is not leaving the House. I am sure she will be a strong advocate for the Bill from the Back Benches.

The right hon. and learned Lady is absolutely right that this is not just a Government commitment, which it very firmly is, but has support across the House. We have been talking about it for long enough now that the public understand where we want to get to, and the House certainly will not let any future Government off the hook in delivering on it. That is why I am so pleased that both leadership candidates have committed to

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progressing with the Bill in the autumn. There will be many colleagues making sure that they keep to that pledge.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): It was a great pleasure to support the Minister when I was her Parliamentary Private Secretary. I have seen all the hard work that she has put into the Bill, which is an enormous tribute to her determination and, as she says, that of the Opposition Members, including her opposite number on the Front Bench, the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), and other Members across the House. I pay tribute to everybody, because I know how much work has gone into the Bill.

The Minister knows as well as anybody else that changing the law on its own is not enough. She has been clear from day one that a number of other measures have to be put in place to stop this horrific crime. Will she update the House a bit more on what those measures include?

Victoria Atkins: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend. This is beginning to turn into a bit of a lovefest, which is rare for this House, so we should just revel in it. I thank her genuinely, because she has been a great help, is a huge supporter of this agenda and has raised with me many times particular issues arising in her constituency.

My hon. Friend is right to raise the point, which has been made previously, that this is not just about the law. We all know that the law is really important in setting the definition, putting the commissioner in place and so on, but this also comes down to societal change and awareness. We have moved on a great deal from where we were perhaps 20 years ago. When people talked about domestic violence they tended to think of physical violence, and we now know that it can be much wider than that. That is thanks to the work of Members from all parties who have raised awareness, but importantly it is also thanks to charities. Many great charities work in this policy area and support victims day in, day out. It is through their campaigning and their help on the Bill that we will ensure that legislative and non-legislative measures are put in place to give victims the support that they deserve.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Let us continue with this lovefest for a little longer. As a member of the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee, may I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), who chaired this Committee so well? I, too, think that we produced a very good report. May I also pay tribute to both Front-Bench teams for the way that they are conducting themselves and working on this really important issue? However, I do want to add a little bit of grit into this debate in relation to the domestic abuse commissioner who is mentioned in the draft Bill and who will obviously be debated. I understand that the Home Office took the view that it would advertise, recruit and, as I understand it, fill the post prior to the legislation going through this and the other place. Is that correct? Perhaps the Minister can update us on that. Do we have a name of the domestic abuse commissioner?

Victoria Atkins: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I am very happy to acknowledge her important work on the Committee and, indeed, in many other areas of helping women and girls and of tackling violence. On the domestic abuse commissioner, we have been very anxious to get parts of this entire package moving as early as we could. We are in the process of appointing a designate domestic abuse commissioner, whose name will be announced soon. We have done that because, with the best will in the world, we are very aware that the Bill will take time to get through, so we are appointing a designate commissioner to get on with some of the really important work, such as mapping services and beginning to draw together the plans when it comes to children's services and so on. That will enable us to see what works, because I note that the Committee queried why it was a part-time role. Look, let us see how it works and if it requires more than that, we will, of course, look at that as well, but we are just very keen to get moving.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): I warmly welcome this statement, and I congratulate the Minister on the leadership that she has shown on this important issue. May I ask her about the automatic entitlement for special measures for complainants in allegations of domestic abuse? I warmly welcome that and ask her to clarify whether this means that those giving evidence in court will increasingly be able to do so by way of video-recorded evidence in chief and, indeed, video link cross-examinations, so that they do not have to experience the trauma of coming into court and sometimes facing their tormentor?

Victoria Atkins: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He brings his expertise as a criminal practitioner into this Chamber. I know that he has great experience of making those applications for special measures where it is painfully obvious to everyone concerned that, of course, special measures should be granted. I am extremely grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), for pressing very hard on this, and, yes, that is the expectation. We want victims of domestic abuse to be able to give their best evidence in court, and if that means through a video link or whatever, then that is what we must do.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): The Liberal Democrats also warmly welcome this Bill. I thank the Minister for her statement. May I reinforce the call on the Government to urgently ratify the Istanbul convention, because any delay means a delay for victims of rape getting support? I would like to mention children who witness domestic violence. I welcome the fact that the Government recognise that witnessing domestic violence is a trauma and an adverse childhood experience. Will she clarify whether the Government went along with the recommendation of the statutory definition of children as victims who witness domestic abuse? If so, what does that mean for children in the future?

Victoria Atkins: I thank the hon. Lady and make the point that this Bill is critical to our being able to ratify the Istanbul convention. I very much hope that colleagues across the House will have that in mind as well as many other factors when it comes to the progress of this Bill.

She mentions children. This has been one of the thorniest issues that we in the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice have grappled with, because we have wanted to reflect the impact that domestic abuse has on children living in an abusive household. We have also been mindful of the fact that the age of 16 is a significant time when it comes to how children are treated in law and the welfare of children. Traditionally, offences committed against children below the age of 16 are seen in terms of child abuse, and above 16, we move into the parameters of adulthood. We have very much taken advice from the consultation. Most responses suggested that we stick at the age of 16 with the statutory definition, so it has been a balancing act. I am grateful to the Joint Committee because it has reiterated the need for children to be at the heart of our response. The impact of having children in the statutory guidance will be very significant when it comes to the commissioning of local services, and that will make such a difference to children's day-to-day lives.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): I also want to congratulate the Ministers, the Front-Bench teams and particularly the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee on getting this Bill to this place and on its safe passage. Because of the Government's changes to pre-charge bail in 2017, there are serious safety concerns for victims, survivors and the general public. In February, Her Majesty's inspectorate found a 65% drop in the use of police bail in cases of domestic abuse. Earlier this month, my freedom of information requests found a 56% drop in the use of bail for child sexual abuse cases. Will the Minister accept the recommendations of the Joint Committee and the all-party group on adult survivors of child sexual abuse to create a legal presumption of pre-charge bail in cases of domestic and sexual abuse?

Victoria Atkins: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady, who does so much work not only in her constituency, but in a national context, to ensure that children and adults who are subjected to sexual exploitation are looked after properly. We are very aware of the concerns around the changes to pre-charge bail. The reforms were introduced to reduce the number of people and the length of time spent on pre-charge bail, but we do recognise that there are concerns in the criminal justice system about the way that that has worked out on the ground. We are working with the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, HM Courts and Tribunals Service and others to ensure that these are addressed satisfactorily, including the consideration of both legislative and non-legislative options. I cannot give her an answer at the moment, but work is under way, and I hope that I can give her some information in due course.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): May I praise the Minister and her colleague the Minister for victims—the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar)—for the determined and principled position they have taken in championing the Bill? I am delighted that it is being introduced today and am particularly grateful that Northern Ireland provisions are contained within it. It is clearly in the public interest to include such provisions. We are grateful that they are taking this step and mindful that, on this issue, there is complete political consensus in Northern Ireland, so it is the right thing to do. I have also raised

the issue of stalking with the Minister and would be grateful for her involvement. We have no legislative protection from stalking in Northern Ireland. Although it is not primarily attached to domestic abuse situations, I think that it is tangentially linked. I ask the Minister to engage with the Department of Justice in Northern Ireland, as she has been doing on the domestic abuse provisions, and consider whether there is provision or space within this Bill to ensure that we get protection from stalking as well?

Victoria Atkins: I thank the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues. We are grateful to everyone who represents Northern Ireland and take their seats in this House for their support. We are also grateful for the very clear message from him and others that they are keen for this offence of coercive controlling behaviour to be included in the Bill. The Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), and I are very happy to look into the situation that he has described. Clearly, omitting the offence of stalking from the statute book of Northern Ireland is not what anyone wants, and, certainly, we will consider whether we can include it in the Bill.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): I am delighted to welcome the Bill today. It feels like the first parliamentary step in what has seemed like a marathon to get to this point, but I think that we can all agree that this Bill still has quite a way to go before it is exactly what everybody in this House wants it to be, which is for it to be the best thing for all women. I am delighted by the concessions and by the fact that we have been heard, specifically around migrant women, and I thank the Minister for that. We shall obviously keep our eyes focused on pushing for the Bill to be the best that it can be. I know that she has said several times that both leadership candidates to be the Prime Minister in our country have agreed to take this forward. Unsurprisingly, a number of journalists have been in touch with me today and have told me that they have been in touch with both teams; the Foreign Secretary's team has confirmed that it would take this forward, but the team of the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) has yet to confirm that that is the case. Far be it from me to suggest that the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip is not always completely straightforward, but will the Minister share with the House specifically what the right hon. Gentleman has said to her on this matter?

Victoria Atkins: I am very grateful to the hon. Lady; as always, I take my hat off to her for the very practical experience that she brings to the House, given that she worked so avidly in domestic abuse refuges before she entered this place and given all the work she has done since then.

I had a confirmatory conversation only yesterday with a very senior member of the team of my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) who told me that they are delighted to support these measures and to make progress. I should say, by the way, that I have not declared for either candidate, so I am coming to this with genuinely clean hands. I feel obliged to point out that my right hon. Friend did some pretty impressive work drawing up a violence against women and girls strategy as Mayor of

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London, so that bodes very well. I am also conscious of the great work that the Foreign Secretary has done in his role at the Foreign Office and when he was at the Department of Health and Social Care to ensure that the wishes of women are met. I have great confidence that the message from this statement will have got through loud and clear that this House will make sure that it gives as much commitment to this agenda as we all have so far.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): I pay tribute to the many campaigners who have brought us to this day, many of whom are survivors of abuse themselves, and I thank them for opening my eyes to the issue. To build on what the Minister has already said about the need for public awareness, will she commit the Government to a public awareness-raising campaign so that the men who perpetrate these crimes—an overwhelming majority of perpetrators are men—know that they face severe sanctions and, perhaps most importantly, so that the people suffering in abusive relationships know that what is happening is wrong, that there is a way out and that if they take those steps people will be there to help them, backed up by the full force of the British law?

Victoria Atkins: I thank the hon. Gentleman, who has been a strong advocate on this agenda. Through him, I also thank the survivors who I have met who perhaps do not dwell publicly on their own experiences, but whose accounts I have listened to very carefully and taken to heart.

We have already funded a campaign for teenagers called Disrespect NoBody, which we believe has had some success in spreading the message. Relationships education in schools will also very much be about teaching people what a healthy relationship looks like. I take the hon. Gentleman's point about a public awareness campaign. If I may, I will take that away and have a think about it because I do not want to make any promises that I cannot follow up with spending.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): I welcome today's statement, but there was nothing in the draft Bill about employers' duty of care to workers who are suffering domestic violence, so will the Minister look at that during the passage of the Bill?

Victoria Atkins: I thank the hon. Lady for raising this matter. This is an example of the non-legislative measures that we are running alongside the Bill itself. There are wonderful organisations including the Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse and Hestia that the Government have funded to help on exactly this point. It is in everyone's interests to help identify people in the workforce who may be suffering from abuse so that employers can give them time off to attend hospital appointments and perhaps to help them to set up bank accounts so that they can siphon off part of their salary and so on. It is everybody's businesses, and it is through these initiatives that I think we will make some real change.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Can the Minister confirm that the Bill will consider social housing allocation and prioritisation policies to ensure that domestic abuse,

including financial coercion, is taken into consideration and recognised when it comes to rehousing and debt management?

Victoria Atkins: The hon. Lady raises a very important point, and it was a pleasure to visit a refuge in her constituency. We are very much looking at social housing as part of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government consultation. In fact, part of the Bill already deals with secure tenancies. It is a careful balancing act to ensure that we are looking at the issue on a needs basis, but I am happy to take on board the hon. Lady's point about ensuring that victims and children get the housing they need.

Forgive me for not having raised this matter before, but there has been a lot of talk about change in mindset and awareness. Where possible, we would like the victim and children to stay in their home and the perpetrator to leave. That is where we are coming from. That is our primary aim, but of course we recognise that there will be circumstances where the victim must flee for her or his own safety.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): There is a lot to welcome in this statement. However, almost 2,000 people fleeing domestic abuse last year were able to access refuges and hostels, but not safe homes on a longer-term basis. Will the Minister meet Women's Aid, Crisis and representatives of the all-party parliamentary groups on domestic abuse and on ending homelessness to look at how the Bill could provide the guaranteed prioritisation of long-term accommodation that everyone fleeing domestic abuse needs?

Victoria Atkins: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point and for his work on the all-party parliamentary group on ending homelessness. Ministers meet regularly to discuss this and other matters, but of course we would be happy to meet him and associated partners to discuss this issue. We have got to get it right. I might even meet the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips)—again.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I hardly know where to start with my appreciation for this Bill and for the cross-party consensus that has broken out. Of course, there are things that I would like to be better and the Minister knows that, but I want to draw the attention of the House to some very strange cross-party consensus, and that is between myself and the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne), who is no longer in his place.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about changing the attitudes of men. When I worked with perpetrators of domestic violence not 100 miles away from here—mostly men—we always used to worry about what would happen to the attitudes that we were working so hard to change, because even in the space between leaving the group work session and getting to the tube or bus stop, they would have been bombarded with other influences from friends, adverts, pornography and all sorts of places. I therefore reiterate the right hon. Gentleman's comments. Has the Minister or the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), visited a perpetrator programme to get a view on that? I encourage all Members to do so and to join the all-party parliamentary group on perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Will the Minister also work across the House to try to spearhead a campaign that is about not just raising the general public's awareness about being a victim, but the things that people need to change about how they behave in their own intimate relationships and men's attitudes in particular towards sexual entitlement in relationships, which is a specific concern to me.

Victoria Atkins: I thank the hon. Lady for yet again demonstrating the complexity of this subject area. I am very conscious of the experience that she brings to the Chamber and her work on perpetrator management. Indeed, she has helped me to understand far more about the issue than I did before taking up this role.

I very much welcome the work that Respect and other organisations do to drive these programmes forward. The hon. Lady will know that there is a range of work happening, a lot of which takes the form of pilots because we are at the forefront of discovering what helps to break the cycle of abuse and violence. However, we are very clear that the longer-term impacts for society can be fundamental. For example, the life chances of boys and girls growing up in abusive households can be very poorly affected by their childhood experiences when it comes to what they expect from their own relationships when they are older.

I have been to so many conferences with Respect and other organisations that I have to confess that I cannot quite recall whether I have been to a perpetrator programme. Believe you me, if I have not, my very efficient officials—to whom I must pay tribute because they have turned this response around in a month, which is unprecedented—will ensure that we fill that gap very quickly.

Thangam Debbonaire: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sorry but I have to make a slight correction. When I asked my question, I forgot to mention my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I used to work for Respect and for a perpetrator programme. I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the hon. Lady for that point of order, clarification and apology. I am sure the House will appreciate her offering it so speedily.

BILL PRESENTED

DOMESTIC ABUSE BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Sajid Javid, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr Secretary Gauke, Secretary Matt Hancock, Secretary James Brokenshire, Secretary Damian Hinds, Secretary Amber Rudd, Secretary Karen Bradley, the Attorney General, Victoria Atkins and Edward Argar, presented a Bill to make provision in relation to domestic abuse; to make provision for and in connection with the establishment of a Domestic Abuse Commissioner; to prohibit cross-examination in person in family proceedings in certain circumstances; to make provision about certain violent or sexual offences, and offences involving other abusive behaviour, committed outside the United Kingdom; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 422) with explanatory notes (Bill 422-EN).

Flexible Working

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

2.40pm

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require employers to offer flexible working in employment contracts and to advertise vacancies as suitable for flexible working unless certain conditions are met; and for connected purposes.

Anna Whitehouse was on her way to pick up her daughter from nursery, but a bag got stuck in a tube door and made her 12 minutes late. The nursery staff sat her down in one of those tiny children's chairs and sternly told her that she would be charged £1 for every minute she had kept the staff waiting. She felt like a failure as a parent, even though the delay had not been her fault.

She resolved not to let something as trivial as a bag stuck in a door upset the delicate balance of her work and family life again, so she asked her employer whether she could come to work 15 minutes early and leave 15 minutes early. That tiny change would have made juggling her career and her children work, but the request was denied. So she quit. For the sake of just 15 minutes, Anna left a job she loved, and her boss lost a dedicated member of staff.

Many women have similar stories. Every year, 54,000 pregnant women and working mothers are made redundant or are pressured to leave their jobs. That is why Anna, better known as Mother Pukka, is now campaigning, along with the Fawcett Society, Pregnant Then Screwed, the Young Women's Trust and the Fatherhood Institute, for better access to flexible working. I am delighted to welcome some of those campaigners to Westminster today, and am grateful for the support of all those at home.

The Flex for All petition has received nearly 30,000 signatures so far, and one comment on it encapsulates its potential:

"Flexible means I can juggle family and work life without compromising one or the other".

The 40-hour, five-day working week made sense in an era of single-earner households and stay-at-home mums, but it no longer reflects the reality of how many modern families want to live their lives. We no longer divide neatly into breadwinners and homemakers. Our lives are more complicated than that—and better for it. Although some employers recognise that and are moving with the times, many are not, so it is time to shift the dial on flexible working.

As we do that, we will create more opportunities for more people, especially women and those with disabilities. We will help close the gender pay gap, and we will strengthen families by helping parents share caring responsibilities more equally. It will be good for businesses, too. I am therefore asking the House to back this Bill and make flexible working the default.

A Conservative Government introduced the right to request flexible working, but in reality just 9.8% of jobs paying more than £20,000 are advertised as being flexible. Figures are not available for people who are paid less than £20,000, but the situation is almost certainly worse. Moreover, the grounds on which a flexible working request can be denied are vague. All the onus currently rests on the employee to make the case for why they should get special treatment, and many feel that they cannot even ask.

[Helen Whately]

The Government recognise that the current approach is not working, and action is being taken to improve the situation. The Minister for Women and Equalities has set out her vision for gender equality at all stages, including support for organisations to introduce family friendly policies. The Business Secretary is reviewing the right to request flexible working and consulting on whether employers should be required to consider whether a job can be done flexibly. That includes homeworking, job sharing and working different hours during school holidays.

That is progress—I am particularly thankful to the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst), who is sitting on the Front Bench, for everything she is doing—but it starts from a presumption against flexibility. What if we flip the question and ask whether a job cannot be done flexibly? How many more employers would find that actually it did not make a difference where or when a piece of work was done, as long as it was done?

We know how powerful the psychology of the opt-out is, compared with that of the opt-in. Pensions auto-enrolment has successfully reversed the decline in the number of people saving into a workplace pension—10 million more people are now saving for their old age thanks to the policy. Let us apply that same principle to flexible working, and ask employers to opt out of flexibility.

Of course, I recognise that not all jobs can be done flexibly. Sometimes people need to be in a specific place at a specific time. Employers must be able to set out why a job cannot be done flexibly. This Bill, however, is about shifting the norm. The potential benefits to individuals, businesses and the economy as a whole are huge and backed up by evidence. Closing the gender employment gap could add an extra £150 billion to our GDP by 2025. Although female employment is at a record high, 42% of women are working part-time, compared with 13% of men. Women working fewer hours and accruing less experience over their careers is a major contributor to the gender pay gap.

How many of those part-time jobs could actually be full-time, flexible jobs? Although some jobs demand set hours in a set location, we are a long way from realising the full potential of flexible working. According to the Timewise Foundation, 1.5 million people are trapped in low-paid, part-time jobs below their skill level because they cannot find an appropriate new job with the working pattern they need. With superfast broadband coverage to reach 97% by next year, and a full-fibre network being rolled out across the country, it is now possible to do many jobs from anywhere, at any time.

Flexible working increases productivity. The average commute is 46 minutes a day—it can take much longer for people in rural areas—and that is time that could be better spent. Caring responsibilities are one of the top causes of short-term absence from work. Businesses that allow flexible working are less likely to report employees taking time off sick for family reasons.

Research by Pregnant Then Screwed found that 81% of people who work flexibly are happier, and happier staff, with a better work-life balance, can be more productive and more likely to stay in their job. Employees and

managers agree that flexible working increases performance and is more motivating than a bonus. Looking to the future, we see that we must increase our productivity in order to stay competitive. We work longer hours than many other countries but we produce less. Flexible working is about making much smarter use of the hours in the day.

Being more family friendly helps employers recruit more women and enables more women to stay in work. That is good for women and good for business. For example, Gocompare has seen a significant increase in the number of female applicants—from 40% to 58%—since its job adverts started including positive messages about flexibility. Employees who work flexibly are more likely to stay in their jobs, with 70% of people who work flexibly saying that they would be reluctant to quit their job. The most gender diverse companies are more likely to enjoy above-average profitability. Underusing women's skills is costing us 2% of GDP per year, so it is costing the economy billions of pounds.

Let us not forget about men. Forty-seven per cent. of fathers say that they would consider a demotion to a less stressful job if it enabled them to spend more time with their families. That would be a huge potential loss of productivity, but it could be prevented if more men could work flexibly. However, men are less likely to make a request for flexible working, and are more likely to have a request denied. The barriers to requesting flexible working can be even greater for men because of old-fashioned perceptions about the ideal worker and the idea that caring for children is a woman's job. I spoke to a businesswoman the other day whose husband, a lawyer, had asked to work flexibly one day a week. His bemused employer responded by asking, "What's your wife doing?" That just shows how ingrained these assumptions are. Making flexibility the default would change workplace cultures for the better. It is not just families who will benefit from more modern working practices, but disabled people too, many of whom would like to be working or working more. Flexibility helps anyone who finds the journey to work or rigid work hours a problem.

To sum up, the Bill builds on work that the Government are already doing. By allowing the Bill to proceed today, we can go a step further towards making all jobs flexible by default, which will enable more women to stay at work and advance their careers after having children, help to close the gender pay gap and unlock productivity for businesses, and help employers to recruit more diverse candidates—especially those with disabilities. It will change the way we think about the work-life balance, shifting the culture in favour of flexible work and equal parenting, grasping the power of new technology to free workers from the nine-to-five and giving people choice about how they live their lives. Flexible working is the future, so I commend this Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Helen Whately, Victoria Prentis, Rachel Maclean, Tracey Crouch, Vicky Ford, Eddie Hughes, Emma Reynolds, Tom Tugendhat, Tracy Brabin, Gillian Keegan, Kirstene Hair and Andrew Selous present the Bill.

Helen Whately accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 423).

Courts and Tribunals (Online Procedure) Bill [Lords]

Second Reading

2.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Paul Maynard): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to move the Second Reading motion for this Bill. The Bill has already been considered in detail in the other place, and it follows the Courts and Tribunals (Judiciary and Functions of Staff) Act 2018—also known as CATJAFS; we now have CATOP, the Courts and Tribunals (Online Procedure) Bill. This enabling measure is another important step in the transformation of our justice system.

Our judiciary, together with our courts and tribunals, is rightly regarded as among the finest in the world. To maintain and build on that reputation, it is critical that we position ourselves at the forefront of using new technology to improve the ease with which people can access justice. However, it is also clear that the modernisation of our court system must have ordinary court users at its heart. People need our new digital services to be accessible, understandable and easy to use, and that is what the Bill seeks to facilitate.

Of course, the Bill is only a part of our overall ambition. In total we are investing more than £1 billion in transforming Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service, making the justice system simpler to access, more convenient to use and more efficient to run. Our court reform programme will make the most of new opportunities that innovations in technology offer to revolutionise how we deliver justice.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): While I welcome the new digital procedure in the courts, I am deeply concerned that it may result in some people having difficulty accessing the courts online. Can the Minister confirm that HMCTS will not close any more courts until a proper impact assessment has been carried out?

Paul Maynard: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point, which is rather separate from the Bill; this is an enabling measure to ensure that a procedure committee can be formed. However, I hear his point. We have no current plans to close further courthouses. We monitor their usage carefully. He will recall our previous debate about the “Fit for the future” consultation, setting out the considerations that will be brought to bear when looking at the use of our future estate, and I hope my answer to that debate will inform him.

The Bill will create an online procedure rule committee, which will be responsible for making online procedure rules for specified proceedings across the civil, family and tribunals jurisdictions. The committee will operate with the same powers as existing rule committees. We want to ensure that our online services and systems and the rules that underpin them are easily accessible and navigable routes for people to bring cases to court. To ensure that we build on and complement the digital working already in place, we intend to take a gradual approach to the implementation of these new online rules.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I welcome the principle behind the Bill. In setting out the enabling nature of the measure, will the Minister bear in mind that there is an underlying principle, consistent with the Briggs report, which the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Burnett, made clear in giving evidence to the Justice Committee? It is that while professional users will be obliged to use the online procedure, it is not the intention that litigants in person will be. Lord Burnett's evidence clearly was that a paper alternative will be available as a safeguard for litigants in person. That is an important measure for vulnerable court users. Will the Minister confirm that?

Paul Maynard: My hon. Friend makes an important point with which I wholeheartedly agree. I always agree with the Lord Chief Justice in everything he says and does, and I would never dream of disagreeing with him. The fact that an online process is available makes it in no way obligatory for people to use it. There is still a case for physical hearings and very much still a case that people who wish to use a paper system should be able to do so.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): As we just heard, the Minister agrees with the Lord Chief Justice on all matters. Does he agree with him that court structures and buildings need considerable investment? Will he reassure me that digitalisation, which is welcomed by those of us who have used the courts a great deal, is not at the expense of the physical courts?

Paul Maynard: We are cheerfully straying far and wide in this Second Reading debate, but I am more than happy to confirm that any innovation in online procedures does not in any way invalidate the concerns that many have about the state of our court estate. My hon. Friend will know that we are spending an extra £50 million this year on renovating courts. There is much more to do, and I am keen to see all buckets removed as soon as possible from the court system. I cannot promise that the online procedure rule committee is the remedy for that, but I assure her that I am working on it.

The new rule committee will be judicially chaired and comprised of three members of the judiciary, a member of the legal profession and two additional members, one of whom has experience of the lay advice sector and the other from IT design. While the new committee will be smaller than existing rule committees, the Bill provides the Minister with the power to amend the committee's membership so that it has the flexibility to respond to changes in subject matter and technology.

Bambos Charalambous: On the membership of the committee, has the Minister given thought to including a disabled user and people from the legal profession—a solicitor, barrister or legal executive—to give input into the way that the changes in court procedures are carried out?

Paul Maynard: It is one of the theoretical principles of governance that the moment we set up a committee, everyone thinks of extra people who should be on it. I hear the hon. Gentleman's point. There is nothing in the Bill that prevents the composition of the membership from changing over time, as the online procedures that the committee is considering change. In addition, it can set up sub-committees to look at separate specific areas.

[Paul Maynard]

The Bill is an enabling measure. As what we do changes, I am sure that the composition of the membership will also change, to include differing skillsets, but I hear what he says and thank him for his intervention.

The committee's combined expertise will ensure that our rules framework supports online services, while offering a straightforward, accessible and proportionate experience to those who are accessing justice. These powers mirror and do not exceed those provided in respect of the civil, family and tribunal procedure rules.

On Third Reading of the Bill in the other place, peers expressed their support for and enthusiasm about the Bill and for the Government amendments made throughout its passage. We have listened to and taken on board many of the points raised during the Bill's passage through the Lords and have amended the Bill accordingly. In particular, the Bill now reflects the Government's renewed commitment on two subjects.

First, people who may need support to participate online will be offered it. The Bill now makes explicit the duty to provide appropriate and proportionate digital support. The Bill also makes it clear that, before rules are made, the Lord Chancellor and the committee will have regard to the needs of those who will require digital assistance. This makes clear the Government's commitment to an accessible justice system that supports the needs of all our users.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Online procedures will not compensate for the under-investment of this Government in physical courts, which has led to a number of IT failures, the crumbling courts estate and delays in cases being heard. Does the Minister agree that financial cost cutting should never come before the accessibility of physical or digital justice systems?

Paul Maynard: In the grand philosophical scheme of things, I probably agree with the hon. Lady, but the purpose of the Bill is to ensure, as we move online, that the rules are common across civil, family and tribunal procedures. To my mind, it is about ensuring, as we move online, that they operate to a common procedure in order to harness the user experience wherever possible, and that is what this Bill seeks to do.

Secondly, the Bill clearly recognises that some people may not want or be able to use our online services, even with support, so it makes explicit provision for the availability of non-electronic channels, which will of course include paper. That was always the Government's intention, and we have now made clear the provision for users to choose a paper option throughout proceedings.

We are clear that this Bill will not prevent anyone from accessing justice; rather, it will improve access to justice by opening up a new route of access and creating a swifter, easier alternative for litigants. The reforms I have discussed are part of our important manifesto commitment to reform our courts and make them fit for the 21st century. For those reasons, I commend the Bill to the House.

3.1 pm

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): As a general rule, the adoption of new technologies in our justice system is something to welcome. It should, if done carefully, lead to better, more agile courts that

increase access to justice. Labour recognises the need for an online procedure rule committee, given the increased use of digital courts. Our aim now is to focus on amendments that improve the proposed committee and ensure that any rules strengthen, rather than weaken, our hard-won rights.

Although digitisation is necessary, it needs to be done with diligence and accuracy. Most importantly, it must not be done simply to achieve savings. Given that digitisation will have a substantial impact on our justice system, it is incredible that there still has not been any proper, publicly funded academic research into the impact of digital courts on access to justice. Instead, the Ministry of Justice seems happy to shell out huge consultant fees—over £60 million last year—and roll out untested and ad hoc changes.

In 2018, the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee expressed concern about the scale and pace of the changes the Ministry of Justice was attempting. It expressed little confidence in the capacity of Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service to deliver this hugely ambitious programme, not least because it found that Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service had failed to indicate

“what the new system would look like.”

That is a vital point and one that this Bill fails to deal with.

Far too often in the last year, the changes pursued by the Ministry of Justice have had a vague direction, instead of a particular, definable endpoint; after all, we have had at least seven Secretaries of State for Justice in the last nine years. The only consistent characteristic of these reforms seems to me to be related more to ideology than judicial policy: the desire ceaselessly to cut the budget year on year. Again, in the last nine years, the Ministry of Justice has had the highest budgetary cuts in comparison with other Departments.

The Law Society has noted the backward illogic of the reform programme, criticising the decision to close courts

“before the technology that is intended to replace the need for physical hearings has been tested, evaluated and proven to work.”

With half of our courts estate already sold off since 2010, we now have little choice but to move towards online courts. Finance appears to have triumphed over sense in deciding what to do in relation to justice.

On the current Bill, it is notable that the Government have chosen to go well beyond the relatively modest recommendations of Lord Justice Briggs in 2016. Further, instead of piloting individual areas, the Government's desire appears to be to digitise whole swathes of the courts system, with limited oversight. Amendments put forward in the other place tried to ensure that the piloting of new stages would be mandatory. That still seems a reasonable measure to ask for, bearing in mind how many internet breakdowns we have had in the court system in the last few months. It is really important to try out a pilot scheme to see how these things work. However, the Government do not appear to want to do this.

Another matter of importance in this debate is the question of whom the Bill authorises to make future decisions. Currently, it states that the relevant Minister may require amendments to be made, with little clarity about exactly what would justify such a requirement.

The suggestion discussed in the other place was that the committee be allowed to decline the Minister's request, and we think that was a very relevant and valuable suggestion. Although that did not pass, the amendments to clauses 9 and 10 provided some balance on the power of the relevant Minister, as they must seek the concurrence of the Lord Chief Justice.

While we welcome those important provisions, we believe that the Minister should not be the final arbiter in deciding whether the procedure rule committee makes a rule that he or she wants; that should ultimately be within the province and remit of the procedure rule committee. What is the point of having a committee to set out rules if the Minister is going to say, "No, I want you to change this"? If we have selected people to make the rules, they should be the ultimate arbiters of what the rules should be. That is very important because the Executive and Ministers cannot be allowed to get away with dictating what they want. While we accept that there needs to be a balance between a Minister and the committee, we urge the Government to reconsider and rethink this aspect.

At the moment, it is unclear how far Parliament will be able to scrutinise the rules put forward by the committee. Given that the online procedure rule committee will have the power significantly to alter the way many people engage with our justice system, it seems reasonable that an elected body should also have a say in this matter. As was highlighted by the Bar Council in relation to the Courts and Tribunals (Judiciary and Functions of Staff) Bill in 2018, this Government frequently adopt a "drip-feed"—its word—approach to change in order to avoid a full debate and proper legislative scrutiny of their court plans. That cannot be allowed to happen through this Bill. My counterpart in the other place suggested adopting the affirmative resolution procedure for clauses 8 and 9. That seems patently sensible, as it would provide parliamentary oversight of potentially major changes to our justice system.

The make-up of the proposed online rule procedure committee also merits consideration. Our amendment in the other place was to enlarge the committee to ensure representation from each of the legal professions—the Bar, the Law Society and legal executives—but, again, that was denied. That is really strange, bearing in mind that the civil procedure rule committee has 16 members, the family procedure rule committee has 15 members and the tribunal procedure rule committee has nine members, while the number here is much lower.

I heard what the Minister said in his opening speech to my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous). I may have misheard him, but the Minister suggested that there is nothing in the proposed legislation to stop an increase in the composition of the committee. That, however, is not accurate. The committee says that currently it does set out how many members there should be or who they should be. Therefore, unless the number and composition of committee members are put into primary legislation, we cannot just change it.

In my discussion with the Minister yesterday on the telephone, I explained the importance of having a barrister, a solicitor and a legal executive on the online procedure rule committee. When I practised at the Bar, solicitors would send me instructions on all the procedural parts of the case, such as starting the petition, issuing the

summonses or laying the charges. All those procedural matters were undertaken by legal executives and solicitors. Barristers would often just turn up at court to speak and do the advocacy part. Therefore, to exclude from the committee the very people involved in the procedural side does not make any sense. I am sorry, but I am not reassured by the Minister that the committee can somehow change itself. Again, I may have misheard. It is important for the legislation to spell out that there will be a member of the Bar, a solicitor from the Law Society and a legal executive. That is really important in ensuring the system works, because they are the people involved in all the procedural aspects.

The amendments we supported and argued for in the other place were also supported by Mind and the Law Society. I continue to feel that including non-lawyers with experience of disability and digital exclusion would significantly reduce fears that the Bill fails to properly ensure access to justice. We tried to promote gender balance on the committee, again without success. This would be an important measure. It is no secret that power in our court system resides with a group who are highly unrepresentative of our national population. We think provisions to require gender balance would rectify some of the imbalance and be an important step towards increasing diversity in our justice system. What assessment has the Minister made of the make-up of the committee in terms of both its composition and size? The Minister and I discussed this issue yesterday on the telephone.

We also raised concerns that the Bill could lead to digitisation by default. Whether proceedings are criminal, civil, tribunal, probate or family in nature, there are good reasons to feel that making digital the default option will, in many cases, restrict or entirely remove access to justice. We believe that both sides involved in a case should be able to decide on whether online or traditional measures are used throughout the case. Again, I had an encouraging conversation with the Minister on that point yesterday, but I would like to see proper guarantees in the Bill to ensure that both litigants are provided with the choice of using traditional methods and that this option is made very clear and easily available, so that most people do not feel that they should be going down the online route or that the in-person route is in any way exceptional as opposed to the norm.

Bambos Charalambous: My hon. Friend mentions the digitally excluded. For some people, only a face-to-face physical hearing will do. That leads to the point about insufficient weight or prominence being given to legal advice or representation, because that may well influence what decisions people make when they are faced with a choice about what to do with regard to digitisation. Does she agree that for everyone to be treated fairly and equally, not being forced down the path of digitisation is of the utmost importance?

Yasmin Qureshi: Absolutely. We can imagine a lay person being told to follow, or being pushed towards following, the online procedure. They are not going to be told that the paper procedure or turning up is just as doable and straightforward. I will come on to this point later, but ensuring that people have access to legal advice is even more important with the introduction of digitisation and there seems to be nothing in the Bill to deal with that issue.

[Yasmin Qureshi]

Sadly, in many areas of the reform programme, digitisation has frequently been imposed from the top down. Clause 4 recognises the Government's duty to "make support available for digitally excluded people"

in so far as the Lord Chancellor feels it to be "appropriate and proportionate". It is vital that support is not just there but properly funded and—importantly—sufficiently advertised. Even when there are mechanisms available to provide support, we worry that all too frequently they are poorly promoted. They work to show evidence of action, while providing little meaningful aid to those who need it. Since it was set up in February 2018, a helpline for those who need help to use video links in court has averaged less than one call a day. The Public and Commercial Services Union has questioned how widely HMCTS would advertise alternatives to digital justice and I share its concern.

Another point we are concerned about relates to clause 1(3)(d), which refers to the use of "innovative methods of resolving disputes."

Despite the probing of my counterpart in the other place, it is still unclear precisely what that means. Greater clarity on the wording would be useful. We are very concerned that the Bill does not lead to digital justice becoming an inescapable default setting across the justice system.

Access to legal aid and legal advice is very important, and it is regrettable that the Bill is pretty silent on that. The Bill should include the ability for those who go through the online procedures to at least be able to make a phone call to access legal advice. That phone call should not be a premium number or a chargeable number; it should be a free number, so that people can access proper legal advice. Many people do not have contract phones, with free mobile phone calls. A lot of people are still on pay-as-you-go, so they need a system that is free to use. It would therefore help if the Minister was able to ensure, when he responds to the debate or in Committee, that the Government deal with that point.

I emphasise that point because of my own personal experience as a practitioner. I can remember being in courts, whether civil or criminal, which were attended by unrepresented people. None of us gave legal advice as such, but lawyers and solicitors would at least provide them with some guidance, a signpost and somewhere to go. When we have online courts and people are sitting at their computers, they will not have human advice, guidance and signposting. It is therefore crucial that such people can access legal advice, even on a phone, so I ask the Government, the Ministry of Justice and the Minister to think about that.

Let me recap a few issues that really concern us, which I hope the Minister will address in his response. First, so far no rational reason has been produced as to why the committee needs to be so small. Secondly, how will he ensure that the rights of disabled people are properly represented in the committee? Thirdly, how will he ensure that there is real parliamentary oversight of potential major changes to our justice system? I would really appreciate answers to those questions.

Finally, I reiterate that fair and equal access to our justice system needs to be at the justice system's heart. It is well known that the most stable countries in the world

are those that have the best legal and judicial systems, where people feel that they will get justice in the end. Therefore, what will the Government, the Ministry of Justice and the Minister do to ensure that people are protected, that no harm comes to them and that justice is properly and fairly accessible to all those who need it?

3.21 pm

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I welcome the thrust of the Bill, which is an important, if modest, piece of legislation. The Minister is right to say that it is an enabling Bill. It is welcomed by the judiciary and that should weigh heavily with us, because this legislation is necessary to put in place the rule committee, which, in turn, is required to set up the online procedure in a practical form.

It is worth remembering that this has been talked about and largely initiated by the judiciary from a very early stage. The Briggs report in 2016 by Sir Michael Briggs, as he was then—he is now Lord Briggs of Westbourne—was the first important step in that and largely dealt with online civil money claims. Sir Michael made it very clear to me and many others he spoke to that it was a source of frustration that that sensible and practical measure had been delayed for so long. Since then, that was expanded on by the White Paper in 2016—the joint vision that was set out on transforming our justice system. Although the Opposition have made some criticisms of the Bill, it is worth remembering precisely that that was a joint vision, endorsed by the senior judiciary in England and Wales every bit as much as by the Government. It is an unusual example in our constitution of joint ownership of a project.

The Justice Committee took evidence from the Lord Chief Justice, the Master of the Rolls and the Senior President of Tribunals only last Wednesday. We had a detailed session with them, which was a very valuable insight into this issue. It was clear that they strongly endorse and welcome the principle of the programme and that they see it as one—if it is delivered correctly—that can enhance access to justice from where we are at the moment. Our Committee was impressed with that evidence. That does not mean that questions will not need to be answered in the Public Bill Committee and, in particular, as the rules are drawn up. I understand the points from the Opposition Front Benchers and elsewhere about the technical nature of how the rule committee is to be constructed, but the overall thrust of the proposal is clearly welcome.

Wera Hobhouse: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the diversity of the online procedure rule committee should be looked at, so that we make the courts as diverse as they can be?

Robert Neill: That certainly can be looked at as the Bill proceeds in Committee and, no doubt, when the online procedure rule committee is adopted. It is worth looking at the transcript of the evidence from the three most senior members of the judiciary—I think that was the first time that they have appeared jointly before any parliamentary Committee. There is, in fact, a far greater wealth of diversity of views and experience from our senior judiciary and the members of the judiciary who serve on these tribunals than some commentators give credit for. I think that there is a real understanding from

the judiciary, but that does not mean that it is not possible to supplement that. I would not want to think that simply because there are three members of the judiciary, as well as other members, that is not in itself enough. They are very alert to the issues that people face, but I think we can think about broadening this.

I have sympathy with the shadow Minister's point about perhaps making it easier to expand the committee to include practitioners from more than one jurisdiction. In the past, rules committees have often dealt with discrete areas—High Court rules, county court rules and criminal procedure rules. We are dealing with a multiplicity of jurisdictions, particularly in relation to the tribunals, and it is unlikely that we will find one or two practitioners who have the breadth of practical experience in all those different types of jurisdictions. The Law Society refers to the advisability or usefulness of including a member of the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives. That is a sensible point, because a lot of the interlocutory work—the pre-hearing work—will be done by legal executives rather than necessarily by solicitors or barristers, so I hope that the Minister will keep an open mind on that as we go forward.

My other message to the Minister is: please learn the lessons of transforming rehabilitation, which had worthy objectives and could have succeeded in joining up probation and prison in a better way, but it was rushed. It was not piloted properly and was taken at too great a speed. There is an argument that considerations of finance and expediency were allowed to weigh more heavily in the outworking of the process than questions of access to justice and outcomes, and for that reason it did not achieve either of those desired objectives.

I think that the current ministerial team have learned those lessons—the Lord Chancellor has made that very clear—and we have the opportunity to do this in a different, better way. I am confident that the Minister and his colleagues will do it differently, but it is worth bearing in mind that back in 2016, Lord Briggs said that “it would be entirely unsatisfactory...to make recourse to the [Online Court] compulsory until a proven structure of assistance for those who need it was designed, tested and put into full operation”.

That still holds good. Nothing in the Bill prevents that being done, but it is a question of the political will and the resource being put into it by the Government to achieve that.

Subject to that being done, it seemed to us from the evidence that we received that the House ought to support this modest measure in its current form. That does not mean that there are not broader issues that need to be looked at on the advice that people using our legal system get and the way they can access justice, not only in a nominal sense but practically, through informed decisions about how they use the system. A great deal of work is being done with the Ministry of Justice and the senior judiciary through the various judicial and practitioner working groups that have been set up, but it is really important that we stress the need to get this right, not rush and get absolutely everything nailed in place before we move on. Obviously, it is difficult to rectify injustice, which can include a potential litigant not bringing a meritorious claim, as well as people being led into bringing unmeritorious claims. It is important to get that right. Done properly, this could be a great advantage and in itself is worthwhile, but there is a good deal of devil in the detail that will come further down the track.

3.28 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): It is a pleasure as always to follow the Chair of the Justice Committee, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), whose contribution was as ever thought provoking and valuable.

I welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate. I thank the Minister for explaining the background to the Bill and for taking the time to speak yesterday on the telephone about its provisions. While the Bill will have its most significant impact in England and Wales, it is important to remind the House that it will also have significant implications for Scotland and Northern Ireland, because of its application to various reserved tribunals operating in those jurisdictions. The employment tribunal for Scotland received 24,000 cases last year, and while we do not have Scotland-specific figures for the UK-wide first and upper tier tribunals, even a simple population share would suggest a similar number again taking up social security cases and asylum and immigration cases in those institutions. In due course, further tribunal functions will be devolved, but in the meantime the Bill is important for many people seeking access to justice in Scotland.

On the Government's broad approach, we give a cautious welcome to the Bill. Who would not want to explore every opportunity available to use technology to make access to justice easier and less expensive? If online procedures can make access easier—and there is no doubt they can if properly resourced and planned—that is good from a rule of law perspective. The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service has its own five-year digital strategy, and the approach set out in that document gets to the heart of how we should approach technology in the law when it says:

“Digital is not an end in itself—but it is clear that well targeted development and investment in digital technology can increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the services and support we provide to the judiciary, to all those who use our services and to those who work to deliver them”.

We get what the Government are trying to achieve and support the broad aims of the Bill. It should have a Second Reading and our approach today is one of constructive criticism.

I shall briefly flag up four areas where further debate is needed. First, as already touched on, it is interesting that the Government thought the best way to proceed was to ask one single online procedure committee to look at the possibility of online rules for a huge variety of proceedings in different jurisdictions. The alternative approach would have been to task existing procedure rule committees and rule drafters with expanding online procedures and options in each discrete area of law. These existing committees clearly already have considerable expertise in their particular fields. It would be interesting to know why the Government thought it best to proceed in this way.

The single online committee will potentially be dabbling in very disparate fields of law—from tax to family and social security, and lots in between—and sometimes will be making rules applicable in completely distinct legal jurisdictions. That suggests that a wide variety of expertise might be needed and possibly a committee with a considerable number of members, as the Justice Committee Chair said, yet the committee is comparatively small for such a major undertaking.

[Stuart C. McDonald]

The Law Society argues—this was mentioned by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi)—that a committee with such significant powers to change legal processes should include at least one representative from each of the solicitor, barrister and chartered legal executive branches of the law, so that it has access to their varying professional experiences and skills. The fact that there is a solitary IT expert on the committee is also surprising, given the nature of its undertaking. We need to reconsider whether the Government have got the size and make-up of the committee right or whether these criticisms mean it should be amended—or are there other ways to ensure it taps into existing expertise, rather than trampling all over it?

There is currently no scope for representation on the committee from Scotland or Northern Ireland. This point was raised in the House of Lords. There is still a significant question about whether there should at least be the discretion to appoint suitably qualified legal practitioners or judges from those jurisdictions, especially when the committee is working on procedures that will impact directly on them. As I outlined earlier, many thousands of cases each year in Scotland and Northern Ireland could be affected. The Law Society of Scotland also argues that

“there should be capacity in the Bill to include representation from other jurisdictions if appropriate”.

There are different ways we could do that, and they could and should be explored in Committee.

We also need to carefully consider the issues of choice as against compulsion and whether the necessary support will be available to ensure that all can take advantage of new online procedures. As we have heard, there will be some who do not want or just cannot realistically use online procedures. The Minister himself acknowledged that. That might be because of infrastructure challenges. Ofcom’s “Connected Nations” reports remind us of the numbers who do not have access to good broadband or 4G. For many more people, there will be challenges around digital exclusion. There are various ways to measure that, but 10% of UK citizens—5.3 million people—have never used the internet or not used it at all in the past three months.

We must focus on the needs of vulnerable people and how online processes may impact on them and how they are protected. How do we ensure that online courts do not provide a back door for dodgy advisers and others offering dubious advice to people litigating online and that the advice being acted on is not being acted on without oversight?

We welcome the assurances that this is not about blanket compulsion and forcing online procedures on people and welcome the changes in that regard that were made in the House of Lords. In Committee, Members will be able to consider carefully whether those changes are sufficient to deal with the concerns that have been expressed.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman has made a valid point about people’s interpretations of online information. People often look up medical advice online and often subject it to their own interpretations. We must be very careful about this,

because many people cannot go online, and those who can may not be accustomed to, for example, certain legalistic phrases. The language must be simple as well.

Stuart C. McDonald: The hon. Gentleman has made a good point, and a useful comparison.

I have mentioned people who may not want to or cannot go online. The other side of the coin is that people should not have to opt out of online procedures if appropriate support would enable them to use those procedures and benefit from their advantages. The Lords introduced welcome additional measures relating to requirements for the provision of support. The Committee will be able to assess whether those measures have sufficient teeth to ensure that concerns that have been raised have been properly addressed. The availability of appropriate support is fundamental to the success of the Bill.

Barely a Bill is passed in this place without the Government’s helping themselves to broad Henry VIII-style powers and leaving too much to negative resolution procedures. That issue arises again in this Bill, and it will no doubt be tackled in Committee stage or on Report. The Law Society suggests that affirmative procedures should be required in relation to regulations under clauses 7(5) and 8(6), which would allow Parliament better scrutiny of new procedure rules as they are developed. I agree with the shadow Minister that we should look closely and positively at its suggestion.

That brings me to a final simple but important point. We must proceed cautiously, and on the basis of evidence. The hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst was right to say that we should not rush. As we move forward, we must make sure that we understand the impact of moving things online and respond appropriately.

As the shadow Minister said, research and testing are vital. Let me give just one example. In 2013, the Bail Observation Project found that there were significant variations in the outcomes of immigration bail hearings: 50% of people who were heard via video links were refused bail, compared to 22% of those who were heard in person. Recent research conducted by Jo Hynes of the University of Exeter suggests that that massively differential impact still exists. We need to understand why it exists, and until we understand it, we should be cautious about replacing certain types of hearing in person with video-link alternatives.

Sadly, caution was not what the Public Accounts Committee found when reviewing the Government’s programme of court and tribunal reform last year. It concluded:

“The pressure to deliver quickly and make savings is limiting HMCTS’s ability to consult meaningfully with stakeholders and risks it driving forward changes before it fully understands the impact on users and the justice system more widely.”

We must not allow the development of online systems to outpace our understanding of their impact. We therefore need to look at the role that Parliament has in scrutinising the roll-out of online procedures and consider whether we need to put tougher provisions about post-legislative scrutiny in the Bill so that we can ensure that progress is made at the right pace.

We welcome these proposals, with a degree of caution, and will seek to be constructive critics of the details. They are not a panacea that will cure some of the real

problems in accessing justice that have arisen—largely thanks to the terrible legal aid cuts in England and Wales over the past decade—but they can be part of a suite of measures that will allow legal proceedings to be simplified and made more accessible, and we want to support that goal.

3.38 pm

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): Let me begin by drawing attention to my registered interest as a member of the Bar.

As the House heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi), we support the establishment of an online procedure rules committee and the goal of modernising our courts and tribunals. However, we believe that new technologies must be used in our courts only when they have been proved to improve access to justice and engagement with the courts system, and we are concerned about a number of other issues raised by the Bill.

Concerns have been expressed by my hon. Friends the Members for Bolton South East, for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous) and for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) and by the Chair of the Justice Committee, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), who, in his usual fashion, has been very fair in his analysis of the Bill and highlighted and accepted that we in the Opposition will have natural and genuine concerns.

There has not been as much participation in the debate on the Bill today as we might have expected so my task in summing up the debate has been made slightly easier, but none the less I shall seek to go through our main concerns. I reiterate that we support an online procedure rule committee and the goal of modernising our courts and tribunals, but we do have concerns.

First, digital exclusion has been referred to by a number of Members, and we are concerned that the measures in this Bill could without proper protections exclude those with poor digital literacy from our justice system. Vulnerable people in particular and those with English as a second language are disproportionately represented among defendants, and the Law Society has stated that insufficient weight and prominence will be given to the need for legal advice and representation. Further stoking these fears is the catastrophic failure of the MOJ IT system earlier this year, which, in the words of the Criminal Bar Association put our courts “on their knees” by locking legal practitioners out of their secure email services, leaving them unable to access wi-fi and forcing the adjournment of trials. This is an illustration of technology taking a turn for the worse and how that can impact our justice system.

We are also clear that those using the courts must be able to opt out of a digital proceeding and instead choose a traditional court procedure to prevent them from being digitally excluded, particularly in the light of the fact that there is little research into the different justice outcomes of different procedures and the Government’s record of lacking research, piloting or consultation, which has meant that many of their existing digital reforms have led to delays, a worsening experience for court users and reduced access to justice.

The make-up of the OPRC must be representative; that point was also made by a number of speakers. Its make-up must be representative in particular of the legal profession, as it has the power to dramatically alter the processes in court. It should therefore include at least one representative from each of the solicitor, barrister, legal executive and magistrate professions. Only through this can the committee access the experience of the different legal professional users; only they can see the system as professionals and through the eyes of the client to deliver the best result when creating new rules. While the Government have ceded ground on this issue in the Lords by increasing the number of representatives, which we welcome, they must not seek to reverse this position in Committee, and they must go further to ensure better legal representation on the committee.

Finally, we are concerned about the way in which the Justice Secretary as Lord Chancellor sought to exercise his powers, as the Bill entered the Lords without any real safeguards on his powers in what are now clauses 9 and 10. The Lords Constitution Committee declared its own fears that the Bill conferred broad powers on the Lord Chancellor, and while the Government were defeated and these powers were curbed, we are clear that they must not seek to roll back this progress in Committee. It is right to involve the Lord Chief Justice or Senior President of Tribunals, as the Constitution Committee also states, to ensure fair and efficient administration of the justice system for which they are responsible.

Dramatically reducing the content of my speech in the light of the debate today, I say in conclusion that, while we support the creation of an online procedure rule committee and support the goal of modernising our courts and tribunals system to bring it into the 21st century, we still have some concerns about the Bill, as I have outlined. I hope that the Minister will address those points, so we will not seek a Division today. However, we will in Committee push for amendments to ensure that hard-won rights are protected, that the OPRC is representative of the legal profession and that, in the 70th year of Labour’s landmark introduction of legal aid that made access to justice an achievable goal for everyone, the ability to access justice is not further eroded by measures in the Bill.

3.45 pm

Paul Maynard: With the leave of the House, I will do my best to respond to the points raised as speedily as I can, because I know that many are now gathering for the next debate. It is interesting that we started off the debate with a bit of a spiel about ideology and cuts. I found that intriguing, given that we are talking about the £1 billion Government investment in our Courts and Tribunals Service and its modernisation. I am grateful to the Chairman of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), for reminding everyone in the House that these proposals have the support of our senior judiciary.

A number of concerns were raised about what was termed digitisation by default. Let me make it clear that innovation is crucial to delivering modernisation, but we should never introduce more complexity or technological innovation merely because we can. We should do so because that innovation satisfies our requirements for

[Paul Maynard]

proportionality and accessibility within the justice system. We always need to work with the grain of human nature, as our law is essentially a human contract in and of itself. Changes should never result in less justice or in people being incentivised not to behave in their own best interests. I have said at least twice in the debate already that the alternative methods must be protected at all times. People can seek telephone advice, for example. We are also piloting face-to-face advice in at least 25 areas. At any point, people can opt out of the online procedure, and the paper-based alternative will always be available. Either side in a case can opt out of an online procedure to ensure that it does not occur online.

Concerns were also expressed about piloting. I hear the point that there is no need to rush, and we are starting by focusing on civil claims under £25,000 being conducted online. Evaluation is important, and I have made it clear that I do not want Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service to mark its own homework. There will be an independent evaluation, and the panel has already met. It will have academic input in particular to look at the outcomes in relation to access to justice and the cost to users.

The membership of the committee was raised on a number of occasions. Let me be clear that the committee needs to be sufficiently agile to deal with a changing environment in which numerous online procedures will appear from time to time. Nothing in the Bill prevents the Lord Chancellor from utilising clause 7 to expand the membership of the committee when he sees fit to do so. At the same time, the committee can at any point choose to set up sub-committees or to bring in any wider expertise that it needs to draw up the procedures that it thinks appropriate.

Robert Neill: I believe that that will be welcomed by a number of practitioners. Can the Minister ensure that, in practice, no bureaucratic impediments will be put in the way of that happening? This intervention also gives me the chance to draw Members' attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, which I omitted to do in my speech. I apologise for that, Madam Deputy Speaker. Doing it this way is quicker than making a point of order.

Paul Maynard: That is an innovative way to facilitate that speediness.

The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi), mentioned parliamentary scrutiny. We are keen to ensure that accountability is maintained, and I continue to believe that it is right for these powers to reside with the Lord Chancellor, who is directly accountable to Parliament, whereas the committee is not. We are not trying to shift the constitutional balance within the Bill. We are looking to maintain that balance, which is why we have sought to ensure that the Bill mirrors the long-standing arrangements for the existing rule committees.

The hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald), who spoke for the Scottish National party, rightly raised Scottish representation, and I am very sympathetic to the points that he made. Obviously, I am as keen as he is to devolve tribunals. Not many Ministers stand at this Dispatch Box encouraging devolution, but in this case I am in

concurrence with him, to use the word of the day. I am sure that we will continue to discuss that matter, but I hear the point he made about Scottish representation. He also raised the intriguing question why we have only one committee for online procedures, and he asked why the other three committees were not given the task of setting up their own online procedure rules. Essentially, the answer to that lies in the fact that we need the procedure rules to be the same across each of the civil, family and tribunal divisions of our courts. The decision was taken, with the support of the judiciary, to go down that route.

The hon. Gentleman also rightly raised the point that not every type of case is suitable for online procedures. He cited the welfare of children, and that is a good example. We will not bring anything online without seeking the concurrence of the Lord Chief Justice and without laying an statutory instrument that will be debated in both Houses, but I hear what he says. There are many types of cases where physical hearings are the most appropriate path to go down, and I certainly agree with him on that.

On that basis, I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

COURTS AND TRIBUNALS (ONLINE PROCEDURE) BILL [LORDS] (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Courts and Tribunals (Online Procedure) Bill [Lords]:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

(2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 25 July 2019.

(3) The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading

(4) Proceedings on Consideration and any proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on Consideration are commenced.

(5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

(6) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—(*Matt Warman.*)

Question agreed to.

COURTS AND TRIBUNALS (ONLINE PROCEDURE) BILL [LORDS] (MONEY)

Queen's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Courts and Tribunals (Online Procedure) Bill [Lords], it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenditure incurred under or by virtue of the Act by the Lord Chancellor.—(*Matt Warman.*)

Question agreed to.

Backbench Business

Early Years Family Support

3.51 pm

Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House believes there is now overwhelming evidence of the importance of the first 1,001 critical days of a new baby's life in determining his or her lifelong physical and emotional wellbeing; notes the work of the Inter-Ministerial Group led by the Rt. hon. Member for South Northamptonshire, the Thirteenth Report of the Health and Social Care Select Committee, HC 1496, on First 1000 days of life and the Eleventh Report of the Science and Technology Committee, HC 506 on Evidence-based early years intervention; and calls on the Government to take strong and decisive action immediately to ensure that every baby gets the best start in life.

I am delighted to have the chance to speak today on a subject that is a real passion for me, and one of the reasons that I got into politics. I thank the Backbench Business Committee, particularly the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), for finding time for me to hold this important debate.

It is a great pleasure to see good friends from across the House here to support the motion this afternoon. I am looking forward to hearing some excellent speeches on an issue that, if we get it right, has the potential to be truly life-changing for so many in our society. We are here today to share the overwhelming evidence of the importance of the 1,001 critical days of a new baby's life in determining his or her lifelong physical and emotional wellbeing, and to call on the Government to take strong and decisive action right away to ensure that every baby gets the best start in life.

I want to pay tribute to some recent work that has been undertaken in this important area by the Select Committees chaired by the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) and the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston). I know that the right hon. Member for North Norfolk was keen to speak today and I am sorry that his duties elsewhere mean that he cannot be with us this afternoon.

As many right hon. and hon. Members will know, until recently I was chairing a cross-Whitehall inter-ministerial group at the request of my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, to look specifically at how the Government can best improve support in the earliest years, for families and their newborn babies. I pay tribute to the Prime Minister for her prioritisation of this key issue—I believe it can provide a vital part of her legacy.

I am told that the inter-ministerial group I chaired was the only significant piece of cross-departmental work under way, with the obvious exception of Brexit. I am so grateful to the Prime Minister for tasking me with the enormous responsibility of contributing my own experience and knowledge in this policy area to fundamentally change our society for the better. I was proud that one of the last things I did before stepping down from my role as Leader of the House was to sign off on the detailed recommendations of the group.

Before we turn to the recommendations, I want to take a few minutes to set out the science behind the importance of the 1,001 critical days. From conception

to the age of two—the period that is now referred to as the 1,001 critical days—it is the existence of a secure and loving relationship with a key adult carer that literally shapes the way a baby's brain develops. It is amazing that, in the first year of life, more than 1 million new neural connections per second are being created in the brain. Secure attachment to a loving adult carer has a lifelong beneficial impact on the baby's developing emotional health, and the developing brain will literally learn that the world is a good place and that problems can be solved.

Not only that, but secure attachment in the earliest period of life can have a positive impact on our entire social fabric. It is not about the impact on the individual; it is the positive ripple effect that secure attachment creates. It is the emotionally capable adults that those children become, able to make friends, learn, hold down a job, find a good partner and then become good parents themselves. It is the society that we could create if we fully address this issue.

Although it would be an exaggeration to claim that insecure or, worse still, disorganised attachment leads to all of life's problems, at one level there is no doubt that it severely limits a person's ability to cope with life's ups and downs, and we know that in the most extreme cases a person's earliest experiences can totally wreck their life. Negative early experiences create new generations of troubled and insecure young people and are often passed down to their babies by parents who themselves suffered insecure attachment. This is known as the cycle of deprivation. I well recall discussions with Dame Louise Casey when she was the troubled families tsar, who became convinced that intervening much earlier would be vital to prevent the later behavioural challenges that she was seeing, and the many discussions with my local police and crime commissioner, who recognises on the street every day the impact of a person's earliest experiences on their tendency towards later criminality, addiction and violence, as well as depression and suicide.

It is clear that the science of brain development matters not just in our early years, but is a cradle-to-grave public health issue, the symptoms of which are evident in the years and decades that follow poor early experiences, which can cost the individual and society so much.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): Before the right hon. Lady moves on, let me say that I chair a multi-academy trust. We are trying, without additional expenditure, to use midwives and health visitors to work from schools, so that any feeling that they are hostile places might be lessened, and to seek funds for home visiting during the first two years, so that mothers and fathers can learn skills that are good for them and even better for their young children, as the right hon. Lady has highlighted. Does she agree that one of our pleas to Government should be to look at how they spend existing budgets, as well as to give this subject the priority it deserves?

Andrea Leadsom: The right hon. Gentleman and I have worked together on this subject for many long years. I pay tribute to him for his amazing contribution in recognising the importance of secure early interventions and everything we can do to make people's lives more successful and secure. I am sure that some of his ideas will be, and are being, taken forward by Government.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing the debate and the work that she has done. She or the Government might wish to consider the Imagination Library, an initiative that we have started in North Lincolnshire which signs up every child for a free monthly book gifting scheme from birth, so that parents and carers read with their children from an early age. Health visitors and the maternity units in our local hospitals are involved, so that when people register their child's birth they are automatically enrolled in this incredible scheme, which is funded by North Lincolnshire Council. Over 95% of children in the North Lincolnshire part of my constituency are now signed up. The scheme is having a really impressive impact, which is following through to our literacy rates in school, and is something that the Government could consider expanding elsewhere in the country.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the so-called "Five to thrive" is cuddling up to your baby, reading with them and looking at pictures with them. That engagement, which develops the early brain of the infant, is vital, and I pay tribute to him for his work on that.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I congratulate the right hon. Lady on securing this very important debate. It is vital that we get this right, and she has mentioned the troubled families programme. Bath and North East Somerset Council has a successful project, but I understand the funding is not secure. Does she agree that, where this has been an important part of a local authority's intervention, it should continue and the Government should make funding available?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady is right, and it is, of course, part of the upcoming comprehensive spending review. I will return to that later because, at the moment, the troubled families spending does not specifically pick out the 1,001 days, but I think it will in future.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I congratulate the right hon. Lady on her work on this issue. I do not want to be negative or political, but it strikes me that, where a troubled family have an additional child, that additional child often does not develop as we would want. That happens for a variety of reasons, and it could be economic or the lack of a second parent. Has she looked at that? If so, does she have any solutions?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman tempts me to launch off in a completely different direction. He is right that, all too often, troubled families who have further children go on to have further problems, but the whole point of early intervention is that it can turn around the outcomes for all the family's children, not just the new one. The programme is vital.

Insecure attachment in the early years has a cost to society in terms of not only human happiness but the financial cost to individuals, families and the public purse. As Professor James Heckman, a winner of the Nobel memorial prize in economics, has demonstrated, the return on every dollar invested in the 1,001 critical days delivers an exponential financial benefit in later life. Not only is early years intervention good for human happiness; it is also good for the public purse.

There are two profound areas of impact on the foetus and, then, the infant during the 1,001 critical days. The first is the level of cortisol, the stress hormone, and the second is the extent of the development of the infant's prefrontal cortex. We know that a pregnant mother who suffers from stress produces more cortisol, which is easily transmitted via the placenta to the unborn child. The more stressed the mother, the more frequently the foetus is exposed to higher levels of cortisol.

The mother's stress levels could be due to insecure employment, financial instability, the worry that her partner might leave her or the difficulties of being a single mum living in temporary or unsuitable housing, and so on. We know that exposure to high levels of cortisol can lead to modifications in gene expression while the foetus's brain is still developing. Even in the womb, the potential for lifelong emotional and physical health is being determined.

We also know that maternal stress can lead to low birth weight, which can lead to all sorts of later complications, including diabetes, obesity and congenital heart disease. Once he or she is born, a baby left endlessly to cry themselves to sleep, or who is neglected or abused, will experience higher cortisol levels, which can over time lead to a lifelong higher tolerance of stress and an increased likelihood of being attracted to high-risk behaviour such as drug abuse, violence, criminality and so on.

We also know the critical role that the prefrontal cortex plays in developing the social and empathetic capacity of human beings. The prefrontal cortex is hardly present at birth, with the greatest growth spurt happening between six and 18 months, largely stimulated by the attention of a loving adult carer. Games like peekaboo, gazing into the baby's eyes, smiling and mimicking them, and saying, "I love you. Aren't you gorgeous?" [*Interruption.*] That is not directed at you, Mr Deputy Speaker. [*HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."*] I take that back, as it was mean. You are gorgeous. It is just that you are not in my arms. All that, in those 1,001 critical days, acts to jump-start the growth of the prefrontal cortex and the development of that vital human empathic capability.

However, if mum or dad is depressed, or if the baby suffers adverse childhood experiences, such as witnessing domestic violence, sexual abuse or substance misuse, that can have a significantly damaging effect on the development of the prefrontal cortex and the baby's ability to regulate their own emotions. That, extraordinarily, can affect the ability in later years to cope with life's challenges and opportunities, to form strong relationships and even to hold down a job. At the extreme end, the impact will be disastrous for that baby's own future life and therefore for society at large. So love—a secure early bond—is what we want for all babies, although that is far from what is happening today.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): The right hon. Lady is giving a powerful speech on why early intervention is so important. One of the things I most regret from the past few years is the demise of children's centres and of their ability to reach out into families—help educate parents about all the positive things that she is talking about. Saving money in the long term could well mean a small investment up front in these families, and children's centres could be an easy way of achieving that. Does she agree with me on that?

Andrea Leadsom: Of course on one level the hon. Lady is right: having a safe place for families to meet and receive particular interventions is important. But it is not the whole picture. I will expand on that in my remarks.

Let us look briefly at some of the facts we know. First, 67% of the UK population has had at least one adverse childhood experience—one in eight people have had four or more. Secondly, this predicts certain risks for those one in eight, such as a three times greater risk of lung disease through smoking; an 11 times greater likelihood of intravenous drug use; 14 times the number of suicide attempts; and a four and a half times greater chance of developing depression. Thirdly, people with six or more adverse childhood experiences can die as much as 20 years earlier than those who have none.

Fourthly, where domestic violence is present in the home, there is an increased risk of child maltreatment. In one study, families where domestic violence takes place were shown to be 23 times more likely to abuse their under-five-year-olds than families without. Research shows that about 30% of domestic violence begins during pregnancy. Fifthly, it is understood that conduct disorder in young children leads to adult antisocial personality disorder in about 50% of cases, and is associated with a wide range of adverse long-term outcomes, particularly criminality.

Of course, we are all aware, every day, of growing levels of mental ill health among young people, as well as the self-harming and eating disorders that are blighting too many young lives. So it is pretty obvious to all those with a passion for the earliest years why this issue matters—not just to the individual, but to society as a whole. For all the good that a free education can do, for all the good of quitting smoking, for all the benefits of rehabilitation programmes, we will never truly turn society around and break the cycle of deprivation until we prevent those acute problems that begin in the 1,001 critical days.

I should give a “health warning” about all this. Let me say that I am in no way suggesting that insecure attachment always leads to disastrous outcomes. It is possible for a baby who was insecurely attached in infancy to grow up to lead a perfectly normal and happy life, but there is also significant evidence that a troubled early life makes that so very much harder.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that evidence shows that there is a small window in early adolescence when much that has been done to a child can be put right? Does she agree that we need to focus on these times when a brain is most plastic?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is, of course, right to say that it is possible to turn around these outcomes, but the ideal time to do it is during that first, critical 1,001 days, when the baby’s brain is still developing. Although we will always seek to turn things around later on, if necessary, the best chance is during the 1,001 critical days.

As my hon. Friend says, it is possible for a baby insecurely attached in infancy to grow up to lead a perfectly normal and happy life, but there is significant evidence that a troubled early life makes that so very much harder. Sadly, disorganised attachment, in which

the person one turns to for love and support is also the person who sometimes abuses or neglects one—and in some cases, terrifies one—can lead to the worst sorts of outcomes in later life, including socio-pathological behaviour and a later cycle of abuse. In short, those who go on to become abusers in 20 years’ time are all too often the vulnerable babies who are themselves being abused today.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): The right hon. Lady is making a powerful point and we all appreciate her bringing this issue to the House. It all seems to stem from the cycle that we need to break. Does she agree that what we had with Sure Start centres and children’s centres was so important in enabling a change of behaviour and the breaking out of that cycle?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that there is a cycle of deprivation, which I will come on to discuss, but, as I said to the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran), although Sure Start centres are a vital part—having that safe place—in the work that I shall come on to talk about, this is about much more than that. That is just one of many services.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Let me just help a little. The opening speech on a Back-Bench debate is meant to be 15 minutes and we are now at 20 minutes. I am worried about that. Although of course it is a very important debate and I will allow some time, Members should bear in mind that we have time limits that we try to work to. But it is too important an issue to curtail at this stage.

Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful for your guidance, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Those who go on to become abusers in 20 years’ time will all too often be vulnerable babies who are themselves being abused today. The question that really matters is how we even start to tackle this issue.

Having had my own brief experience of post-natal depression, I can certainly attest to how difficult it can be to cope as a new parent. Colleagues might have heard me speak before about my own memory of sitting in my kitchen with a crying baby, in the middle of winter, with snow on the ground outside, looked at through dirty windows, feeling totally unable to call a window cleaner or even just to make a cup of tea. That feeling of helplessness and hopelessness is a vivid memory—and it is now 23 years on.

This is not my sob story, though: I was lucky enough to have a great husband, a strong network of support and a job to go back to, which snapped me out of it, but, thinking back, it could have been so much worse. Many parents who are struggling to cope are dealing with that reality each and every day. I really do understand how debilitating depression is and how unexpected and horrible the feelings are.

It was when my mum, herself a trained midwife and therapist, asked me to go along and help with a charity she was working with—the Oxford Parent Infant Project—that I realised just how vital secure attachment in those first years really is. After 10 years as chairman and a trustee of OXPIP, I went on to set up NorPIP, the Northamptonshire Parent Infant Partnership, into which

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) was dragged—although not kicking and screaming; she was delighted. I then set up PIPUK, the fabulous national charity that is setting up PIPs throughout the country to provide specialised parent-infant relationship support, including parent-infant psychotherapy, to families and their babies. PIPUK's aim is not only to address the immediate problems in the relationship between the baby and their parent, but to support a more positive and secure attachment for the long term.

I brought my passion for early years with me to Westminster when I was elected in 2010. I have since met so many brilliant people in the world of infant and maternal mental health, some of whom are present in the Chamber today, and many more of whom are following proceedings on TV. So many people have generously given their time and expertise. In 2011, with support from colleagues from every political party currently represented in Parliament, I launched “The 1001 Critical Days” manifesto, which called for a rethink of how we approach early years intervention at a policy level.

I particularly recognise the early commitment of the right hon. Members for North Norfolk and for Birkenhead (Frank Field), and of the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), in getting the work off the ground. I pay special tribute to the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) for her dedication to the “The 1001 Critical Days” campaign. She and I promised each other years ago that we would remain committed to achieving real and long-lasting positive change. I am delighted that she is present. We can definitely achieve much through cross-party collaboration for the greater good, and this work is the perfect example of it.

“The 1001 Critical Days” campaign has received the support of more than 100 different organisations, including the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Barnardo's, Best Beginnings, the Royal College of Midwives, the Royal College of General Practitioners and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. There are just too many esteemed charities, royal colleges and foundations for me to list here. I also had the pleasure of working closely with Dame Tessa Jowell on her interest in bringing early years support into the UNICEF millennium development goals.

With cross-party colleagues, we set up the all-party group for conception to age two. I wish to mention the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), with whom I very much enjoyed working on the all-party parliamentary Sure Start group.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I am very grateful to the right hon. Lady for giving way. I just wanted to commend her on her work at OXPIP and PIPUK, which she mentioned a moment or so ago; I visited myself to see the work being done. It is really quite outstanding to see what can be achieved. I also thank her for mentioning a number of us, as she has done so generously.

Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. It has been a great experience. When I became City Minister, I was so sorry to learn that I had to drop all trusteeships and the all-party groups overnight. I cannot thank my

hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) enough—I have known him for the many years since we were at university together—for picking up the ball and continuing to drive these important issues forward to this day with his amazing dedication, focus and care.

Let me fast-forward through my more recent roles as Energy Minister, Environment Secretary and Leader of the House. On the face of it, there was little scope for me to continue the push on early years, but with the continued collaboration between the right hon. and hon. Members whom I have mentioned and many others, the excellent work has continued, culminating in the Prime Minister herself committing to support the early years agenda and asking me to set up the IMG in the summer of 2018.

The IMG itself comprised my hon. Friends the Members for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson), for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak), for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) and for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price). I pay real tribute to all of them for their hard work on the group, as well as to the dedicated civil servants who supported us. Our remit was to consider the individual, the family and the wider societal risk factors that affect child development in the conception-to-age-two period and the long-term impacts, as well as the issues with central and local government's approach.

The Prime Minister had asked the IMG to make recommendations to the relevant Secretaries of State that would support local areas in improving the co-ordination of early years services and in spending their current funding more effectively and more efficiently. I am so grateful to the Prime Minister for her continued support for, and interest in, the IMG, which my ministerial colleagues and I felt demonstrated the high priority being placed on that work.

I was delighted to be told that the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Mark Sedwill, has already prepared a cross-Whitehall civil service team to take our recommendations forward once signed off by the various Departments. We met as a ministerial group several times and undertook a great many visits to learn from examples of best practice right around the country. We visited Manchester children's centres, the Lambeth Early Action Partnership, a parent-baby drop-in group in Peterborough and an outreach group in Devon. We held roundtables with charities and families, including parents within the civil service. We had consultations on Mumsnet and spoke to so many passionate and dedicated people working within the sector who want to make a clear difference for parents and babies. It was a wonderful and thoroughly rewarding experience. Out of those visits, meetings and consultations, we quickly began to identify a number of common issues that clearly need attention.

First and foremost is the postcode lottery across the country of the availability of perinatal mental health and specialised parent-infant relationship support, particularly around parent-infant psychotherapy services. In some areas, the provision is fantastic, but in others it is almost entirely non-existent. We heard from parents and professionals wanting health visitors to provide greater levels of support to new parents and their babies, particularly where parents are struggling to form a secure bond, with better levels of breastfeeding support and post-partum care. We also had detailed evidence of

the need for greater support for dads, greater support for same-sex parents, better availability for couple counselling and for targeted services for new parents, such as debt and housing advice.

One particular issue that we identified was the need for greater support for non-English-speaking parents. The incredible work of children's centres was highlighted everywhere we visited, and there is no doubt that parents and professionals want to see family-centred spaces such as these protected. There is a great amount of need out there, and it is clear that we have the opportunity to bring about a huge step change in how we deliver early years family support right across the country, if we seize on the recommendations of the inter-ministerial group.

What did we recommend? First and most importantly, getting the 1,001 critical days right can put children on course for good social, economic and physical outcomes later in life. Getting it wrong creates inequalities and significant costs later for Government and society. Secondly, better focus on both universal and targeted services needs to be a priority in this period.

I will not go into all the key recommendations because Mr Deputy Speaker is looking impatient, but I will mention some of them. First, using the wealth of research and evidence taken by the IMG, Departments should work together to create a clear and cohesive Government vision for the 1,001 critical days. That should be published in the autumn after the spending review. Local authorities should be invited to set out their own service models that work for their local communities, and should be properly measured on that.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): The right hon. Lady has made an excellent speech and I commend her on the great work that she has done. However, she must also recognise that all the suggestions and ideas that have been put forward to deal with this situation require proper funding and new funding; new moneys for local authorities and for different groups to be able to carry out the suggestions. Is that money being promised?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Before the right hon. Lady responds, let me just say that I am not impatient—far from it. We have time on our hands. Unfortunately, I do not make the conventions of the House. As a former Leader of the House, the right hon. Lady will be well aware that the opening speech should last 15 minutes and that the Minister will have 10 minutes. I did not make the rules. I am just trying to ensure that hon. Members have enough time to discuss a very important subject that matters to us all.

Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful for your advice, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I absolutely do understand your point. I know that you are very sympathetic, and I will hurry up.

The second key recommendation I want to mention is that Departments should work together to develop a spending review proposal for a fund that would support local authorities in rolling out best practice and innovation in the delivery of the 1,001 critical days services. Thirdly, Departments should work together to ensure that the successor to the troubled families programme has a specific focus on the 1,001 critical days.

The IMG set out many other recommendations, including investing in maternal and paternal perinatal mental health and ensuring that support is available

to address issues in parent-infant relationships. We recommended that the NHS expands access to evidence-based parent-infant psychotherapeutic services within specialist service provision. We also felt that a website should be created to support parents to make informed choices and decisions at key points in their parental journey, including the information that people need about parental leave, childcare support, family-friendly policies and the 1,001 critical days.

Given that breastfeeding boosts a baby's ability to fight illness and infection and supports emotional bonding in the early months of life, and given that the UK has one of the lowest rates of breastfeeding in Europe, we also recommended that further action must be taken to continue to focus on reforms that enable and support breastfeeding in England, including the recommendations of the "Becoming Breastfeeding Friendly" review. The IMG made many other recommendations, and I do hope that the Government pick these as soon as possible. One recommendation that I personally made very strongly is that there should be a specific ministerial responsibility for the 1,001 critical days.

As Members may know, I raised the work of the IMG with the Prime Minister during PMQs earlier this month, and I have tabled several written parliamentary questions to ask what progress has been made on addressing the IMG's recommendations. I truly believe that we are on the threshold of something very exciting for our country—a real opportunity to deliver long-lasting and positive change in our early years family support policy that would make a huge difference to individuals and society as a whole. I call on the Minister to commit that the Government will report back before the House returns from summer recess, and I ask him to make a statement about that response on the Floor of the House as soon as possible after we return, so that we may debate it further.

4.24 pm

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): I for one, Mr Deputy Speaker, am pleased that you allowed the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) the time she needed to give such an excellent and outstanding speech about why the 1,001 critical days are so important. When she asked me to co-sponsor this debate, I did not hesitate to say yes. As she has said, she and I have worked together on this issue for many years. In fact, she was the first Government Member to approach me when I first got elected, and she asked me to get involved with her work on this important area. She sought me out and we have worked very closely ever since. As we heard in her outstanding opening speech, her personal commitment to this agenda is completely without exception. She has done a fantastic job and we really miss her drive and leadership in government on these important issues. I will say more about that later.

I will not try to emulate the right hon. Lady's excellent speech, but, as she has said, all the evidence tells us that the most important time in the life not just of a child but of a human being is those first 1,001 critical days. The fact that we do not give enough attention to that is, in my view, immoral, because we know how important it is, yet it does not get the attention it deserves.

The science has already been outlined, but I want to highlight another aspect. Deprivation is still a really key issue for outcomes in the first 1,001 critical days and thereafter of a child's life. We know from all the evidence

[Lucy Powell]

that the single biggest indicator of how well someone will do in their GCSEs is their developmental level at the age of five. We also know that children from better-off backgrounds hear 30 million more words than those from less advantaged backgrounds. The developmental gap between the less well-off and their better-off peers is significant before a child even starts school. It can be as much as 18 months or more in some cases. The Government, services and others seem to spend a huge amount of time and money on trying to address those gaps later in life, when we could do a lot more earlier and save a lot more money in doing so.

That is why we are here today. If we spent on this issue even a fraction of the amount of resources and time that we spend on health, education, criminal justice, home affairs, the Department for Work and Pensions and all the services they support—and instead of focusing on the consequences of not getting the first 1,001 days right, focused on the root causes and those early years—not only would we save a huge amount of money for Government and the country, but we would create a much happier and better society.

We are here today because, unfortunately, the ambitious work that the right hon. Lady began and almost concluded in government has not yet come to light. Like her, I have asked questions, both written and oral, about what is happening. It would not take a huge amount. The Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), who will respond on behalf of the Government, is a fantastic Minister. He and I have worked very closely on a number of issues, and I do not doubt his commitment. I hope he will soon be in the Cabinet, and I believe that this issue needs Cabinet oversight.

What needs to happen? We have already heard some of the issues. I am going to focus on three things that I think need to happen. Some of my comments are based on my role leading on an outstanding piece of work that the Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, asked me to do on school readiness across Greater Manchester.

We do not need lots of new initiatives and new programmes. We know what works, largely, and we know what we need to do. We are just not doing it as well as we should or making it reach as many babies and parents as it should. I do not want the Government to take the message from this that we want lots of whizzy new action plans. We just want to get the nuts and bolts, and the agenda and the importance of that agenda, right, because if we steer this oil tanker in the right direction, we can make great strides. It is not rocket science, and that makes it even more immoral that we are not doing some of these things, because we know what works in the early years.

The first thing we need, I am afraid, is more cash. We cannot have this conversation without discussing funding, and particularly funding for local government. As we have heard, many of the early help and intervention support services—including, critically, Sure Start children's centres—are funded via local government, which has seen some of the biggest cuts across Government. Action for Children has published a really good report which shows the real value that Sure Start centres can provide in narrowing the attainment gap. The recent Institute

for Fiscal Studies report on Sure Start children's centres showed how much money was saved in just one area—hospitalisation of infants—for the NHS by reducing the number of unnecessary visits to hospital by parents.

We need more cash, and we need that cash to be allowed to be spent on early help and intervention. That includes the troubled families programme, which, as the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire said, should be extended to the early years. The troubled families programme is due to end soon. That would be a travesty, because it has done more to break the cycle of deprivation that we have heard so much about than many other joined-up programmes.

I want to make a small plea on funding. The Minister will know that I would not let this opportunity go without mentioning our valued maintained nursery schools, which in many cases act as hubs for children's centres and the holistic, place-based, integrated support services that we need to change lives for the better. Their funding is at risk. The Minister has been an outstanding champion for them. He has done a great deal of work with the all-party parliamentary group on nursery schools, nursery and reception classes and others to secure funding. If he leaves office for a higher position under the new Prime Minister, which I am sure he will and which he deserves to do, I hope he will leave a firm handover note to his successor. The sector will miss him greatly if he leaves the Department for Education. He is the most popular Minister we have had in this Government.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): We've had quite a few.

Lucy Powell: Indeed, and he is definitely top of the list by a long shot—I mean no disrespect to the others, but he has been very good.

The second thing we need to do is break down the barriers to joined-up services and commissioning. Key to that, as we have seen in Manchester, is the value of place-based, integrated services working together. In Greater Manchester, the early years delivery model acts as the core of the service. Every child, from pre-birth to the age of five, is seen at least eight, if not nine, times, with fully integrated service delivery, and intervention, support and advice can be put in place at any stage in the child's upbringing. It is already paying real dividends. The innovative work we are doing with the BBC on communication and language and other work is starting to have real results, especially for the most in need. It cannot just be at a local level—it needs to be joined up with Whitehall too, but that is not the answer. It is about place-based, integrated services.

The third and final area—just to conclude, because I know lots of people want to speak—is workforce development. A real challenge in this space is to make sure we have a workforce right across the piece—from health visitors to midwives, but also outreach workers and those who work in childcare, social services, health, schools and education—who are valued and paid well for a job that is the most important job they could do and who also have the ongoing career training and development to understand the root causes of poor child development and the impacts that can have, so that the whole body of people who ever come into contact with a family and child are all working with the same agenda, vision and understanding of what needs

to happen. That is not a whizzy initiative or a press release; it is the hard yards and the real focus on developing a whole workforce around families that will really get us the step change we want. That is why we are setting up the Greater Manchester early years workforce academy, and we hope this will be a beacon for the rest of the country to look at best practice.

In conclusion, as I have said a number of times, this is not rocket science. We know what we need to do, but it needs proper funding, leadership and drive across Government through the country into places, homes and families. As insurers do when they are looking at insurance policies, we could all probably work out who the families most likely to need help are—we can get names, not just numbers attached to these issues—and there really is no excuse for us not to do it. It is immoral for us not to try to help break the cycle of deprivation and really tackle those early and important 1,001 critical days. I want to thank the Minister and particularly the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire for the leadership they have both shown, and I hope they will continue to have the opportunity to do so in government over the coming months.

4.36 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): What has marked out this debate already is Members' great passion for and commitment to this subject. It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) and to hear more about the work she has been doing. However, the absolute tribute has to go to my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom), who is quite simply the oracle on early years and attachment theory.

I will always remember the first time I met my right hon. Friend, and I had a teach-in that most people would pay for on early years attachment theory. I think that it was in the car park of a pub, but I very much appreciated that teach-in. Actually, I do not think she realised it, but she sparked a real interest in this area for me. This conversation happened many years before we were both in Parliament together, and it really marked out a very deep interest for me. I was able to follow that up as a shadow Minister—not particularly when I had a ministerial post, but when I was a shadow Minister—in the years before 2010.

My right hon. Friend is an expert in early years and attachment theory, and I do not want to add to what she and, indeed, the hon. Member for Manchester Central have said on a number of these issues. I want to go on to some other areas to expand the debate a bit more, but before I do so, let me say that it is absolutely fundamental that we get it right for every single baby in this country. The early intervention that my right hon. Friend and the hon. Lady have talked about in the debate is completely critical and vital.

As my right hon. Friend has said, having universal and targeted services is a critical part of this. While she was talking, I was reflecting on the service offered in my own constituency by Basingstoke breastfeeding counsellors. They are a mixture of paid-for counsellors and volunteers, but this is very much focused on volunteers who are there for mums to be able effectively and successfully to breastfeed in those early weeks and months. It is a service, frankly, that the NHS finds quite difficult to provide and that involves those expert counsellors. That

is one way we can help to improve not only the health of our babies, but attachment from those very early weeks and months. That sort of support can be so important for babies and new mums in the early weeks—certainly, it was for me when I had my three children. Health visitor support makes a real difference in supporting mental health, breastfeeding and the health of the mother and baby.

I want to expand on the specific issues talked about today, because we need to get it right for families, too. To get it right for babies, we need secure and stable families and parents before babies are born, as well as afterwards. My right hon. Friend talked about the stress that can be put on mothers during pregnancy and how it can be transferred to the unborn child. That is one reason why I introduced a 10-minute rule Bill to try to change the law with regard to redundancy and pregnant women. More than 50,000 women a year in this country feel that they have no choice but to leave their jobs when they are pregnant. Those of us who have been pregnant, or have had partners who have been pregnant, can think of no time of our lives when we have less wanted to leave a job. At a time when financial stability is so important, one can only imagine the pressure individuals who have to give up their jobs are under.

In addition to specific expert support for parents around attachment, the Government need to reflect specifically on how we ensure pregnant women receive the support they need. In Germany, a law is in place that stops, except in extreme circumstances, any pregnant woman being made redundant. Not only does that help to alleviate some of the stress we have talked about, it enables that country to ensure that more women go back into employment after they have had children, and that helps to close the gender pay gap. I hope that the UK Government will continue to think about this issue, particularly at a time when we now have more women than men coming out of our best universities with science degrees. We need to find a way to ensure that those women can stay in the labour market and have a successful family life.

My right hon. Friend touched on the mental health of women after they have given birth. I commend the National Childbirth Trust's campaign for a six-week maternal post-natal check. I think that happened in the past, but it seems to have dropped out of the most recent iteration of the GP contract back in 2005 or 2006. It would be a great way to ensure that, as well as protecting mums before they give birth, we have a mental health check after they give birth. If mum's mental health is good, attachment can be strong.

Wera Hobhouse: The right hon. Lady is making a very powerful point about the perinatal mental health of women. NHS England and the British Medical Association are conducting a review of post-natal checks and the GP contract. Does she agree that now is the right time to include in the GP contract a mandatory check, as the NCT is asking for?

Mrs Miller: I have very strong sympathies with that. It should happen by rote for every woman, and I think that it happens haphazardly now. I can remember having that sort of conversation with my GP after the birth of my children, but it does not happen routinely. The NCT is right to pick this up. If we are to ensure that early

[Mrs Miller]

years family support is as good as it can be, it needs to include a mental health check for mums. All of us know individuals who have gone through post-natal depression. For the health of the mother as well as the children, it is so important that it is identified early on and action is taken.

As well as protecting mothers who are pregnant or have new babies, and as well as making sure that they get the right support from their GPs on mental health, the Government also need to reflect on a couple of other areas to make sure that our children have the best early years support possible. We heard about one of these earlier from my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately), who talked about flexible working. The Government have already heard an expert dissertation from her, so I will not repeat what she said. In summary, however, the more that we can give flexibility to families, particularly when they have very small children, but not solely then—I speak as the mother of a teenager, as my youngest is now—so that they can balance work and family life, the better. This goes on for our children's entire lives, even beyond them being children, so I hope that the Government are making sure that they take very seriously flexibility and flexible working as a default, which my hon. Friend spoke about in relation to her ten-minute rule Bill.

No Government have gone further than this one and the coalition Government in making flexible working something that we can all now request. We will take no lessons from anybody about any lack of understanding from Government Members on that, and I commend the Government for all the work that they have done, but we now need to look at going further to make sure that businesses take that flexibility for granted. The best businesses already do, of course, but we need more to do it routinely.

My final point is on shared parental leave. If we are to get it really right for our littlest people—the half a million babies that are born every single year—we need to get it right for both parents. At the moment, we do not get it right for dads at all. All the research coming out of countries such as Germany shows that if we have proper shared parental leave, fathers and children have much better relationships not just in the early years, but throughout their lives, including even if the adult relationship with the other parent breaks down. It is absolutely proven that a shared parental leave policy involving fathers far more in the lives of their children at an early age can lead to far better relations later in life as well. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to consider very carefully the role of shared parental leave in future. My Committee—the Women and Equalities Committee—has done an excellent paper on it, which he can read at his leisure. It shows clearly that three months of “use it or lose it” leave for dads is one of the best ways that we can support family life and help to address the gender pay gap.

Those are just some other ideas, building on the debate secured by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire, on how we can make sure that every child in this country gets the best start in life and that every family can thrive.

4.48 pm

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I commend the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) for securing this important debate today, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) on her superb leadership of the all-party group on nursery schools, nursery and reception classes. I have been to several meetings. They happen to be held in room 14, and I am always amazed by how many people come from across the country to attend those all-important meetings to make the case for maintained nurseries, in particular.

I first came across the importance of this sector in education when I was a county councillor in Warwickshire. I realised the supreme importance of getting not only to these young people, but to young parents, who are perhaps inexperienced, first-time parents. I realised that there was such a need to help with those early weeks and months of a young child's development and to assist young parents, who, as I said, may be a parent for the first time, to understand what has just hit them in their new lives. Having visited so many of the children's centres, I was always struck by how important they were and what a fabulous environment they provided, which was not just safe, but very stimulating, and that was great for both infant and child. It helped them to develop their skills and provided the support for the parent, challenging what was normal and making the child think about those around them—perhaps something they did not have that home. It was a fabulous environment for them to prosper in.

It was a shame therefore to see the breaking up and closure of so many Sure Start centres and children's centres. In Warwickshire, we have lost 25 of the 39 children's centres we had seven years ago. That leaves our communities and society with the challenge of provision, particularly in highly deprived areas. In the time I have available, I want to focus on the work of maintained nurseries. My constituency is lucky to have some superb maintained nurseries, and I want to highlight in particular the ones in Warwick and Whitnash, both of which I have visited.

The vast majority of maintained nurseries are set up in the most deprived areas and are so important, but no matter how good they are, they are only as good as the people who run them and the funding they have to sustain themselves. That is the challenge. While many of us welcome the Government's introduction of the free 30 hours' provision for three and four-year-olds, it is having an impact on the viability of these nurseries and their ability to sustain themselves given the financial pressures. People working in maintained nurseries are on a real pay level of £3 or £4 an hour, which is way below the minimum wage and a long way short of a national minimum wage.

Maintained nurseries are important for stimulating and developing young infants in those early years—the 1,001 days we have been talking about. I join others in recognising the work of my constituency neighbour the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), and the additional funding he secured. I commend him for doing that and urge him to bring certainty to these nurseries, which are under huge pressure from the funding crisis they face.

Finally, I pass on my thanks to all those who work and volunteer in these nurseries and elsewhere in our provision of early years across Warwickshire but certainly in Warwick and Leamington. I cite in particular the example of Warwick Nursery School, which will be celebrating its 60th birthday tomorrow. I thank them all for their work.

4.53 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): It is a great privilege to follow the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western). I, too, worship at the altar of my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom). She is the great authority on this subject and I pay tribute to her. I also pay limited tribute to the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), given I am no longer her favourite ex-Children's Minister—but there we go. *[Laughter.]* You can go off people.

It is interesting that at the same time as we started this debate there was a debate in Westminster Hall on children's mental health. In the many years I have been in this place, subjects such as children's mental health rarely got on to the Order Paper. It is a sign of huge progress that it is now much more common for us to talk about them—and with a great deal of experience and consensus. It is long overdue. We are starting to appreciate the huge strategic importance of doing much more, much better, much earlier for our children. Some of us have been banging on about that for many years in this place, and it is great to see many other headbangers joining us. It is becoming almost common parlance.

Wera Hobhouse *rose—*

Lucy Powell *rose—*

Tim Loughton: Hold on a minute. I will give way first to the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) and then to the hon. Member for Manchester Central.

Wera Hobhouse: I thank the hon. Gentleman. Does he agree that the whole body of knowledge about adverse childhood experiences should be shared even more widely in the House, because it makes so much sense when we are discussing, for instance, the Prison Service or the probation service? Every service should be informed about trauma. Once we understand adverse childhood experiences, it all seems to make sense.

Tim Loughton: I think that the hon. Lady is right. I shall come on to the way in which it is all joined up. "Adverse childhood experience" has become more common parlance now. Essentially, it goes back to attachment and all the stuff that Bowlby was talking about, often as a lone voice, many decades ago. However, it is true that we can now relate it to many of the challenges that we see as individual MPs and the Government see, in relation to antisocial behaviour, mental health conditions, and all the issues that have been referred to my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire and others.

I will now give way, very enthusiastically, to the hon. Member for Manchester Central.

Lucy Powell: I am grateful to my friend, because he has given me an opportunity to do what I did not do earlier—which was hugely remiss of me, because it was in my notes—and express my huge respect for his leadership and all the work that he does on Sure Start, children's services and education in the all-party parliamentary group for families in the early years. I thank him for that. He is, of course, absolutely one of my favourite Members on the opposite Benches, and he will long remain so, even if I am no longer one of his.

Tim Loughton: I am completely recharged and relieved by that. The hon. Lady is my absolute favourite Member of Parliament for Manchester Central, and many things besides. But this debate is getting far too consensual, so I shall return to the points that I was trying to make.

The phrase "1,000 days"—or, for those whose glass is half full, "1,001 days"—is almost becoming common parlance as well, and it needs to. It needs to be almost a brand. People need to understand that those 1,001-ish days of life from conception to the age of two are the period that will have the most impact on a child's future life. If we do not invest in the right support then, the cost of picking up the pieces later will be so much greater, both financially and, as I think everyone here recognises, socially.

I should declare an interest, in that I chair PIP UK—the Parent Infant Partnership—which was set up by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire. I became chairman of the trustees, and am proud still to be so. Our most recent report is "Rare Jewels". I pay tribute to Sally Hogg, who works for PIP and who did a great deal of research on the scarcity of parent and infant mental health specialist support. That was a false economy.

I shall now be slightly unconventional, and talk about the motion. The motion is about the inter-ministerial group, and I want to talk about some of the experiences of that group. As I found during my few years as a Minister, joined-up government is a complete myth. What the group almost uniquely did, because of the vim and force of my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire, was bring together key Ministers from half a dozen key Departments to try to create joined-up solutions. A child's mental health, and those early years affecting the child and his or her parents, are not just the preserve of the Department for Education and of children's social care. They touch on the work of so many other Departments.

I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) is still here. She will remember that some years ago, when I was the Children's Minister and Sarah Teather was also an Education Minister, we tried to put together the early intervention fund, which was largely intended to bring together different interests with a pooled budget so that we could work together on smarter solutions. However, that did not really fit the way in which the civil service worked.

We struggled for some months to pull together a plan that would involve various other Departments, and we were being frustrated at every turn; so we formed a pizza club, well before my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire was on the scene. My then colleague Sarah Teather and I rang other colleagues—Housing Ministers, Health Ministers and others. I think that my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke

[Tim Loughton]

was then a Minister in the Department for Work and Pensions. We got together in “The Adjournment” restaurant, had a pizza, agreed what we wanted to do, and all went back to our Departments in the following days and told our civil servants what we wanted to do. The response was “Well, I’m sorry but that’s not the way we do things around here, Minister”, to which our response was “Tough, we’re now doing it.” That was the only way we could actually get through an important joined-up policy because the system just did not work. I do not think things have improved much at all.

Another innovation I set up then was the Youth Action Group. Again, there were problems and I tried to youth-proof all Government policy, which is something I still bang on about. There were many problems that transcended different Departments, and yet if there was a problem, it would go from one Department to another in a vicious triangle, as it were. So I got together six major charities led by The Prince’s Trust and Barnardo’s. I co-chaired it and, at one stage, I think we had nine Ministers from nine different Departments. Invariably most of those Ministers would turn up to those meetings and the children’s charities and youth charities would bring particular problems to us. One problem was about housing benefit for looked-after children who were care leavers, which was the responsibility of the Department for Education for care, the Department for Communities and Local Government—whatever it was called in those days—for housing and the Department for Work and Pensions for benefits. We got the three Ministers together with the three lead officials and said, “Here’s the problem; can you please take it away and solve it and come back with a solution that the children and youth workers can then take away?” Alas, that group no longer exists, but we need far more of that sort of rationale and mentality in Government. The inter-ministerial group showed how it could be done, and it is so important that the work continues. I hope that the recommendations that have been made are taken up and run with.

We need a Minister for early years children and families at Cabinet level. It should not just be left to civil servants to people those committees when what we need is a co-ordinated ministerial response. This needs to be led by a high-profile Minister who has the clout, enthusiasm and drive to bring all the relevant Departments together and come up with a cross-departmental solution. I am afraid that we are still a long way from that in common practice, and that is partly what is wrong with Government and with our civil service. So that is my main plea.

On the investment equation, I am not going to repeat everything that has been said, but we know that healthy social and emotional development in the first 1,001 days means that individuals are more likely to have improved mental and physical health outcomes from cradle to grave and children will start school with the language, social and emotional skills they need to play and explore and learn. Children and young people will also be better able to understand and manage their emotions and behaviours, leading to less risky and antisocial behaviours and the costs that these bring to individuals and society, and they will have the skills they need to form trusting, healthy relationships—something we heard about in the Chamber earlier. If they had that, we would not have to

spend such a lot of time teaching it to them at school because it would come naturally, and they would know what a proper quality, trusting relationship actually is. And if they know, they are much more likely to be able to hand it on and nurture their own children as they become parents in the future.

The cost of getting this wrong is huge. Some years ago—although it is still as true and important today—the Maternal Mental Health Alliance calculated the cost of getting perinatal mental health care wrong for the one in six women who will have some form of perinatal mental illness. The cost of that was £8.1 billion each and every year, and the cost of child neglect in this country is £15 billion each and every year; so £23.1 billion is the price of getting it wrong. A fraction of that spent on early intervention—well-targeted, well-timed, well-positioned by well-qualified and trained professionals—could save so much personal grief and so much financial and social grief later on.

It is not rocket science, as I constantly say; it is technically neuroscience, but it really is something we should have been doing so many years ago. The troubled families programme is the model here, and it is essential that the troubled families programme is not just retained, but expanded in the comprehensive spending review. I have always said that we need a pre-troubled families programme, because in the troubled families programme we are dealing with the symptoms of getting it wrong earlier. If we prevented those symptoms in the first place, working in those very early years, so that we have a well-balanced parent or parents with well-balanced children, they are more likely to arrive at school eager and able to learn and be contributing members of society. That is so vital. Some 28% of mothers with mental health problems report having difficulties bonding with their child. Research suggests that this initial dysfunction in the mother-baby relationship affects the child’s development by impairing the baby’s psychomotor and socio-emotional development.

Postnatal depression has also been linked with depression in fathers, and with higher rates of family breakdown. We forget the impact on fathers of not knowing how to deal with a mum—a partner—who all of a sudden has some form of postnatal mental illness. A lot of fathers are affected by this. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), who chairs the all-party parliamentary group on fatherhood, is going to talk about this. It is essential that we look at all parents, when both parents are on the scene, and give support to the family as a whole.

Mrs Miller: I well remember working with my hon. Friend and I remember his huge commitment in this area. If there are now more debates and discussions about child mental health, a lot of that is down to him. I should like to highlight a report that the Select Committee is doing on men’s mental health. Does he agree that the NHS needs to think long and hard about the way in which men can access mental health services? We are receiving evidence that the way in which these services are delivered is almost highly feminised, making it difficult for men to access them.

Tim Loughton: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is still this myth that it is not manly to admit to having some form of mental illness. I hope that

we are getting away from the stigma of that, but we still have far to go in encouraging people. Hon. Members in this place who have come forward with their own very painful experiences have done a huge service by providing role models, as have celebrities in sport and showbusiness, and by showing that there is nothing unmanly or abnormal about coming forward when they have an illness that happens to be a mental illness, just as they would come forward if they had a physical illness. Why should there be any difference? However, we need to make it easier for men to cross that threshold in the first place. We need to ensure that they can come and talk to somebody and get checked out.

I am not going to go into the whole children's centre argument. That is an important issue but this is not just about the bricks and mortar. However, one of my criticisms is that those places need to be much more dad-friendly, and much more imaginatively used. I have opened many children's centres in my time, and I have seen some great ones that have football clubs on Saturday afternoons when the children's centre is too often closed because it is a nine-to-five, Monday to Friday institution. Dads bring their kids and they play football together, then they do computers and reading with their kids afterwards. That is great bonding and co-educational time as well. Again, this is not rocket science. We need to make those places more welcoming for dads, and we need to put them in places that young fathers inhabit.

The killer statistic that I always use is that if a 15 or 16-year-old child in school has some form of depression, there is a 99% likelihood that their mother suffered from some form of mental illness during pregnancy or soon afterwards. The correlation is that close, and if we do nothing to help the mother at that early stage, we will certainly see the consequences later on. It is great that the Prime Minister has flagged up mental illness, and it is great that so much more will be happening with additional funding—not enough, but there will be additional funding—for mental health services in schools, but we need to do all this before school as well so that kids are less susceptible to mental illness problems, given all the pressures that they will face as they go through their school years. We need a much more joined-up approach.

Research by the Children's Commissioner shows that 8,300 babies under the age of one in England currently live in a household where domestic violence, alcohol or drug dependency and severe mental illness are all present. That is a very worrying amount. That is why the Domestic Abuse Bill, which was at last introduced today, is very important, but we need to look at the impact on children as well as the impact on parents, because that trauma will be long-lasting. We tend to look at the immediate victim of domestic violence without looking at the collateral damage that it also causes. My right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire mentioned the horrific statistic of something like one third of domestic violence starting during pregnancy.

I will come to a conclusion shortly, Mr Deputy Speaker, although you do not look too impatient, so I might go on a bit. To join up Departments, it is crucial to have key players who are wedded and committed to the issue and who want to work to achieve solutions. Domestic violence is dealt with in the Home Office. Child sexual exploitation is now dealt with in the Home Office. There is an impact on housing, which is dealt with in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and

Local Government. There is an impact on justice as well. The consequences of social media—now dealt with by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport—have an impact on children's mental health. I used to deal with most of those things in one Department when I was Children's Minister, but they have now been dispersed across Government, and we have to bring them back together.

I will finish on the role of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and public health. Health visitors are a huge resource. One of the great achievements of the Cameron Government—I was part of the discussions in the shadow Health team when we came up with the idea—was the huge expansion of the health visitor programme. Based on the research we did in the Netherlands with the Kraamzorg programme, which showed the impact that health visitors can have at an early stage when they have good, strong engagement with new mums and dads, there was a commitment in the 2010 manifesto to increase the number of health visitors to a figure of, I think, some 4,200. By 2015, that figure had just about been achieved. Alas, since then, things have gone into reverse.

I pay tribute particularly to Dr Cheryll Adams CBE, head of the Institute of Health Visiting, who has had a major input into the work that my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire has already mentioned and the all-party parliamentary group that I chair. As the IHV recently noted, England is now at risk of sleepwalking into the loss of the health visiting service as we know it, unless urgent action is taken to address the current threats it faces. There are ongoing cuts to the public health grant, a 26% reduction in NHS-employed health visitors since 2015 and an unwarranted variation in the quality of services commissioned for families based on where they live rather than the level of need. As the IHV says, investing in the earliest years saves money in the long run and ensures that every child is supported to achieve the best start in life, yet the cuts to services in England persist at a time when inequalities are widening and infant mortality is increasing.

Health visitors are the trusted face on the doorstep. Whereas social workers are often treated with scepticism and fear when they knock on the door, the health visitor is usually welcomed over the threshold, particularly by new parents. He or she is an early warning system of some deficiency in parenting, as well as for safeguarding. It is absolutely essential that we build those numbers back up before we lose too many more of those experienced health visitors, working out of children centres or wherever—hot desking even, with social workers, with the district nurses and other welfare officers—so that they can detect and signpost families to the relevant services. They really are absolutely invaluable. Since the switch in responsibility from the NHS to local authorities—this is no detriment to local government—there has been a lack of experience in how those sorts of services are run, and therefore the issue is not treated as a priority. It is a priority and we need to get back to that.

Finally, I reiterate the recommendations made in the “Building Great Britons” report that the all-party parliamentary group produced in 2015. It was about having a joined-up Government approach to the 1,001 days; about every local authority drawing up its local plan and working with all the local agencies on how to

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deliver that plan for the 1,001 days, within a five-year term at least; and about having a monitoring system, which I based on the adoption scorecards that we brought in back in 2012, so that there is no place to hide and everyone has to be transparent about how they are progressing towards producing those services, compared with other parts of the country.

The solutions were in that report. We all know what needs to be done. My right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire led the way in bringing together the relevant parties and Departments to show how it could be done. Now we need to do it.

5.14 pm

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): I should start by apologising for the fact that I will not be here for the wind-ups, with the agreement of my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) and the Minister. Both are aware that we are suffering quite a challenging family situation at home—cortisol levels are quite high—so I will dash away immediately after I have spoken, although I could not miss the opportunity to speak this afternoon.

I remember a young woman from north Oxfordshire. She had two toddlers and was trying to do a part-time job, with a husband who was busy working away from home. She had suffered the death of a baby previously, so was relatively vulnerable in her state of early motherhood. I remember her standing outside a school gate near her home when a blonde woman bore down upon her. Rather like my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), my first experience of my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire involved a long discussion about brain scans, Romanian orphans and how important brain development is in the first six to 18 years of life. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke, I found that the discussion took quite a long time, but at the end of it, I too was completely converted to the cause. I went on to become a founding trustee of NorPIP, the Northamptonshire Parent Infant Partnership.

Despite my extremely challenging family circumstances this afternoon, I have to speak in this debate. I pay enormous tribute, as everybody has, to my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire. She has persuaded a generation of us from across the House that this issue really matters. Despite your enormous indulgence of her, Mr Deputy Speaker, she did not have time to tell you how fabulous the work of PIP UK is—OXPIP, the Oxford Parent Infant Project, and NorPIP were the pioneers in those days, along with a few other areas—or how its targeted work with vulnerable women who need careful, considered, medical, evidence-based treatment transforms the lives of their families, babies and the following generation's babies, who will be brought up by those families, which is something that we perhaps have not said enough about. We need to look at this in the very broadest sense; this is about parenting.

I pay tribute to everybody who has spoken this afternoon. We have obviously all been got at in the same way by my right hon. Friend. We have read our briefs and have learned how critical the first 1,001 days are. We have learned to say things in words that have been carefully chosen: things about parenting, about brain development

and—I am going to say it, because my right hon. Friend did not—about “two is too late”, an early slogan of PIP UK that is not comfortable to say or think. Of course, two is not always too late, but it is a blimmin' sight easier to intervene before two. That should be the message that goes out loud and clear this afternoon.

Everybody else who has spoken is an expert in this field, so I will restrict myself to two constituency examples, as I want to add something in a small way to this debate. The first concerns a breakdown in parenting, which is something that one of my senior headteachers has been talking to me about for around 18 months. He has noticed that children arriving at the nursery in his school are not potty trained and have much lower levels of communication than in previous years, and he is really worried about that. He set up a fantastic organisation called Safeguarding Children in Banbury, which I am pleased to say the Minister came to visit not so long ago, with 19 other schools in my area. The organisation aims to help schools to deal with traumatised, not school-ready children.

I will not go into the examples that that headteacher has given me in any detail because it would probably be possible to identify the families, but it is fair to say that seven families cause him most of the concerns in his one school. Those seven families have 34 children, who have been or are currently in his care. These are complex cases that involve drug abuse, other forms of abuse and, it has to be said, neglect. He has asked me some profound questions, which he also shared with the Minister, about the role that we expect schools to play today.

Do we expect schools to educate our children as well as they possibly can through really good teaching, or do we also expect them to be a frontline safeguarding service that addresses concerns over which they have no control? Children arrive at school aged three or four, and we expect the schools to deal with earlier neglect and abuse. The headteacher whom I mentioned spends a lot of his time filling in education, health and care plans, which he does not feel is the best use of his time. He is concerned that we do not have the right balance or the right role for schools, which are on the frontline of this battle.

My second constituency example is of Adoption UK, which I am proud to say is based in my area. There is, of course, an enormous link between early years support and successful adoption. My family have had successful adoptions over the years, but it is important to remember that, for my generation, the average age of adoption was three months. My cousin has recently adopted; the average age for a child being adopted now is three years. The first 1,001 days are critical, and we can all work out the importance of getting to these particularly vulnerable children at the earliest possible stage.

I said earlier that two is too late, and we know that two is the optimum age by which we have formed good attachments and the bonds we need to form good relationships in later life, but there is a plasticity in early adolescence, when it may be possible to help children who did not have the best start in life to recover as best they can.

I urge the Minister to do all he can to safeguard the adoption support fund, as it has been repeatedly shown that this brilliant innovation targets help at the families

and children who need it, some 90% of whom say it has helped them a lot—children's parlance—with their mental health issues. These are children who, by definition, have difficulties with attachment and who have suffered in the past. It is important that we do that as a minimum.

In the early adolescent years it is possible to help children who have had a bad start in life and, by default, we should help them by offering all the counselling and extra services they may need. It should almost be that an adopted child has to opt out if they do not need it. If it is possible to help with attachment during that early adolescent period, it is important that we do everything we can to do so.

We have had some brilliant solutions, not least from my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton). I would also like to plug Home-Start UK, which has a great organisation in my constituency—I am sure other Members share my love for Home-Start. I learned in my early years at NorPIP that peer-reviewing and evidence is key to people taking this sector seriously, and I am interested in Cardiff University's study, which shows high levels of improvement in the mental health of children who have been helped by Home-Start.

We have heard about the importance of universal services, not least from the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell). This is not all about deprivation, and other families do need to be picked up—my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke suggested that six-week checks are critical—but targeted services are important, too. The families in Banbury identified by this headteacher are known to all sorts of services. We need to take a joined-up, targeted approach and get in there before the baby is born.

I very much hope that the IMG report and all its recommendations will be considered in enormous detail by the Minister—and by whoever takes over from him if he does move on. When I worked as a Parliamentary Private Secretary to my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire, I was fortunate enough to sit in at some of the IMG's meetings; I do not think I am breaking too many confidences by saying that after those meetings several—in fact more than several—of the Ministers present sidled up to me in the Lobby or in the Tea Room and said, “Golly, I didn't know all that about early brain development. Do you think I got it right with my own children?”

I had that conversation again and again, and I sure my right hon. Friend has it daily with colleagues and everyone else she comes across. It is true that we can all be better parents, at all levels of parenting. Investing in early years really is spending to save.

5.25 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is a great pleasure to contribute to this important debate. I, too, want to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) for her role in bringing this important issue and report before us.

I have the huge pleasure and joy of being the father of two boys. I feel somewhat old now, because the older one is due to be 29 shortly and my youngest one got married two weeks ago—it was a great day. So it was some time ago that I had that joy of being a new dad,

but it is as a dad and as the co-chair of the all-party group on fatherhood that I want to talk a little about the role of fathers in this important matter.

I feel a little left out, because I did not meet my right hon. Friend until 2015, when I had been elected, and so did not have the benefit of her input on this matter before becoming an MP, but I know from my own experience of being a dad, and from various roles that I played before coming to this House, the importance of those early years, both before birth and immediately after. I know just how important that time is for getting that connection to the parents right.

The report is such a good thing—but if I were to have one concern, it would be that we could do more to recognise the importance of the role that dads play at this time in a child's development. I encourage the Minister to consider and take note of the Centre for Social Justice report “Testing Times: Supporting fathers during the perinatal period and early parenthood”, which was written, in part, to support this review.

It is right we consider the role of fathers, who, according to the Office for National Statistics, are almost always present during this period; 95% of babies are born to couples, with 85% living under the same roof. Fathers are present, but despite that they often feel much overlooked at this important time in respect of their important role in supporting new families. Positive engagement and a strong emotional connection to a father has beneficial impacts—not just for the baby, but for the new mother, ranging from better physical and mental health outcomes to supporting emotional and cognitive development in young children.

It is a mistake to overlook the role of fathers, yet so often we do. In an analysis of inspection frameworks around maternity services, health visiting and children's centres, we find that the word “father” is hardly ever used; the role of fathers is literally written out of expectations of our public services during this important period. Fathers are increasingly being written out of everyday language, being referred to through vague generic terms such as “birthing partner”. The intention of such phrasing might be to avoid causing offence, but it denies the reality of the pregnancy process and the early days of parenting that fathers are almost always around.

Health services will never have enough workers or resources to be the round-the-clock support network for new mums. When new mothers are asked about support, almost two thirds identify their partner as being their primary source—that is almost three times as much as the next option, which is their own mother. Only 5% say that healthcare professionals are the most valuable support. It is not surprising that fathers feel badly undervalued, with seven out of 10 new fathers saying that they are made to feel like a spare part during the pregnancy period.

The Centre for Social Justice and others have called for Ministers to introduce into inspection frameworks a “dad test”, which would mean writing into inspection frameworks for maternity services, health visiting and children's centres a series of expectations around engaging fathers and helping them to help mother and child. There is so much more that we can do in this important policy area. Overlooking the role of fathers is misjudged. I hope that the Minister will look again at the report and ask what more can be done to ensure that new dads

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are given the support that they need, so that they can provide the help and support that the mother and child need at such a critical time.

5.30 pm

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate in support of my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom), who has such passion for and knowledge about this issue. I too feel a bit left out, because I have never been accosted in that way. I am a little bit upset, but perhaps we can do that later. I echo what my Cornish colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), said about fathers. I will touch on it a little later, but I am one of those who felt left out throughout that process.

I am a huge advocate of cross-departmental working, if joined-up government is even possible. As with many issues, collaboration in early years work is incredibly important if we want to improve the effectiveness of services, both in Government and out there in service delivery at a local level. The working group chaired by the former Leader of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire, was a positive step in bringing together all those Departments that need to be involved to find a rounded answer to the many complex issues relating to children's services. I hope that that group drew some genuine conclusions that can be carried forward under a new Government, and it is positive to hear that my right hon. Friend expects that to be the case.

I wish to acknowledge the progress the Government have made on early years. My right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) spoke about flexible working and shared leave. I am proud of the fact that more than 850,000 disadvantaged two-year-olds have benefited from free early education places since these were introduced. We spend £3.5 billion a year—that is more than ever—on early years entitlement, targeting those children who are less likely to access formal early education than their more affluent peers and helping to close the unfair gaps that exist from birth. As has been touched on, though, sometimes by the time those children reach two the challenges have already been set in place. It is then much more difficult to overcome them.

We need to do more to support children in disadvantaged areas, including Mansfield and Warsop in my constituency. On average, by the time a child from a disadvantaged background reaches the age of five, they are four months behind more affluent children in their overall development. The figures for children who start primary school in areas such as mine without the basic skills that they need are quite shocking. It simply is not good enough. The gap that exists at the age of five only widens and becomes more entrenched if it is not tackled early enough. We cannot wait until children get to school, when in many cases the damage is already done. My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) chairs the all-party group on the first 1,001 days and rightly recognises that this time is vital in identifying the children who need support and who will likely always be disadvantaged if they do not get help early on.

I support the point made by my colleague on the Education Committee, the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell): we do not need more whizzy initiatives. In fact, the Select Committee has looked at lots of whizzy initiatives in recent weeks and I have been highly unimpressed by several of them. We need to spend that money on the high-quality delivery of the basic services that we know work out there in local settings.

I support Action for Children's call for the Government to set a clear direction for children's centres, to introduce an outcome framework to address the current funding challenges, and to use the next spending review to allocate additional funding to local authorities for children's services. Children's centres provide support to families so that they can overcome challenges and help to provide a safe environment for children, but without adequate funding for children's services, children's centres have struggled. So many local authorities are in deficit in respect of children's services that it can be a huge challenge to look at moving to a more preventive, proactive approach, when they cannot fund the crisis services they are being asked to put in place.

We often argue in this place about Sure Start versus family hubs and other models. I advocate bringing some of those services into a primary school setting, because primary schools are trusted institutions that people might be happier to visit and to access. One way or another, a joined-up approach to proactive service delivery, accessible to those who need it, is necessary.

In those early weeks and months, we need to support the health visitors in their role of helping parents, babies and families across the country. I am happy to see that the Government will implement continuity of carers, which means that mothers will receive care from the same midwife throughout pregnancy, birth and into the post-natal period to better guard perinatal mental health. More support for young mothers and families can only be a good thing. I have mentioned my own experience as a new father, watching my wife cry as she fed our newborn baby, feeling very left out and totally helpless in that situation. Obviously, our family was a huge support, but so too were the health visitors. The advice that they gave us at that time was vital.

There are opportunities to access funding through other Departments. Obviously, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has some funding challenges. Health visitors used to come under the Department of Health. Their role is still very clearly a health matter, and there is perhaps more money in that Department than there is in other places. That is an example of where cross-departmental working might be able to help deliver these services on the ground in a more effective way.

I am also pleased that the Home Secretary has recognised that the Government need to tackle the adverse childhood experiences that my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire mentioned in her speech. The experience of drug abuse or domestic violence poses huge challenges throughout the lives of young people. Steps have been taken towards better cross-departmental working on this issue, identifying people who are at risk, but there is so much more to be done. When we compare people with four or more adverse childhood experiences with those who have none, we see that they are more likely to go to prison, more likely to develop

heart disease, type 2 diabetes, or mental illness, more likely to commit crime and more likely to undertake other health-harming behaviours such as drinking, smoking and drug use. Many of those issues are far too prevalent in my constituency. If we look at the statistics, we see that places such as Mansfield often feature at the top of the wrong kind of tables, which puts children at particular risk. These adults often go on to have children of their own who experience the same issues in their childhood, creating a downward spiral that crosses many generations. If we do not intervene early, it will affect many families and individuals and create challenges for schools and adult services across the board. It is a prime example of how investing in early intervention services saves not only lives but money further down the line.

What is clear even from this short speech in this debate today is that the issues cross countless Departments, many different Ministers in Westminster, and a variety of local service providers from local government to health, education, police and many more. After decades of erecting barriers between these services, each with its own pot of funding and its own agenda, we now must find a way of bringing those barriers down and building on the evidence of successful schemes that require genuine collaboration—working and funding things together. We need to do that locally and nationally, which is why my right hon. Friend's working group is still so important. It is why the troubled families programme is an example to follow. It is why we should be seeking out, rewarding and sharing best practice in this area.

Last week, I met the bigger charities in this sector, including Action for Children, Barnardo's, and the Children's Society. We discussed the collaborative approach that needs to be taken by those kinds of third sector organisations to make a convincing case to the Government and to the Treasury for proactive and preventive children's services. A financial case for shifting that investment upstream also needs to be made, making it obvious that value for money as well as the social value of that kind of support are key aspects as well.

Ultimately, it is only cross-departmental working and properly funding early intervention services that will break the cycle and improve the lives of children in areas such as Mansfield. It too often seems to be children who fall through the cracks between Departments—whether it is children's services across the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Department for Education, the Department for Work and Pensions and all the other services that come into that, all the way through the age range to youth provision, which has similar challenges across different Departments. We have to bring that back together. I certainly support the idea of Cabinet-level responsibility for these things all together.

I urge the new Government to commit to additional funding for children's services and to properly prioritise early intervention in the first 1,001 days, building on the work that has been done by my right hon. Friend and others. I am encouraged to hear that the IMG's work continues and will be taken forward under that new Government, as there is an awful lot to do in this area if we are to make sure that our children have the very best start in life. We need to deal with all those issues in the first two years, when it is vital that we find and support those young people.

5.38 pm

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) and the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) on their work, and I agree with much of what has been said this afternoon.

It will not surprise those who know my background as a former school teacher that I want to focus a little bit on education and the literacy programme that I mentioned when I intervened on my right hon. Friend. I started teaching secondary school in Hull, sadly more years ago now than I would care to remember. When I went into that job I thought to myself, "Actually, I can really change lives in this role." To some extent, that is true. But teaching 11 to 16-year-olds, I very quickly learned that so much of how my pupils' lives were going to work out had already been set for them, mostly by the age of 11 and certainly by the age of 16.

When I left secondary school teaching, I became a primary school teacher and I went to teach year 1. Going from teaching 11 to 16-year-olds to teaching five-year-olds was probably the biggest shock of my life. I thought that that age would be the point at which a teacher really has a huge, life-changing impact on children; and, of course, they absolutely do. But I very quickly realised again that, by five years old, the life chances of so many of the children I was teaching had already been set for them because of their pre-school experiences, family situations, social deprivation and all the rest of it. It was incredibly sad. There were instances when a new child would be starting at the school and we would already have had pupils from that family through the school already. Sadly, we would already know the challenges we were going to face with that new child, whose name we only knew from the register, because of the situations that had already been determined for them even before they started school.

As a primary school teacher, it became clear to me that literacy was absolutely fundamental to how well a child would perform throughout their school career. Where they started in school at four or five years old very much determined where they would end up with their GCSE results at the age of 16. Those children who had a history and heritage of sitting at home and reading with their parents, carers and grandparents came to school with much better literacy rates. Their speech was also better, and they were so much further ahead than other children in their ability to communicate and interact with adults and children. For very many of them, that start set how they would perform not just in the first few years at school, but throughout their entire school career.

Not long after I was elected, I got in touch with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. As the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) will know very well, Dolly Parton set the library up because of her own childhood experiences with illiteracy. We met representatives of the Imagination Library and both my local councils—North Lincolnshire Council and the East Riding of Yorkshire Council—and we tried to set up a local scheme to support some of the poorest children into membership. It is a very cheap scheme, costing about £28 or £30 per child per year. For those who do not know about the Imagination Library, it sends children an age-appropriate book in the post every single month

[Andrew Percy]

from birth through to five years old. This provides a really special time for families and it is a real event when the book arrives.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew Percy: Of course; the hon. Lady's town in particular knows about this scheme.

Sarah Champion: The Imagination Library had a transformative effect on children in Rotherham, not least because they felt so special receiving their books. Each book became something that was treasured, brought out and shown to other children. The scheme empowered a whole community, so I fully support the hon. Gentleman in trying to bring it to his constituency.

Andrew Percy: I thank the hon. Lady for her support. It might sound funny, but it is a real event when the book arrives in the post every month. The expectation of is a thing in itself. Then there is the process of the child opening the book, talking about it with their parent, carer or whomsoever, and spending time sitting down and bonding, which, as we know from the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire, is so important in those early years. This has such a transformative effect.

I am very proud to say that there are two schemes running in my area. I run a very small scheme in Goole—the Goole and Snaith Imagination Library—which I provide all the funding for myself. I am always asking anybody local who could help to sponsor more children to cough up some dosh and put it in the pot. It is a very small scheme. Unfortunately, I could not get the local authority to pay for it, but there are 110 children in Goole on that self-funded scheme, which I run through my office and fund myself and through other donations.

In North Lincolnshire, however—this is not a political point, because my party runs both councils—in 2013 we secured funding to roll out the scheme to every single child in the area, thanks to the leadership of Councillor Rob Waltham, who is now the council leader but who previously held the portfolio for young people. Since 2013 we have delivered through the letter boxes of North Lincolnshire almost 500,000 books to local children.

The take-up rate in my constituency is about 95%, and across the whole of the borough it is about 90%. At present, 8,100 children from birth to five in North Lincolnshire are signed up to the scheme. The buy-in has been incredible. As I mentioned in an intervention, when someone has a child at the local NHS maternity unit at Scunthorpe General Hospital, the first thing that happens is they are signed up and given a basket that includes information about the Imagination Library. When the birth is registered, they are checked again to see whether they have registered for the Imagination Library. Children's centres, health visitors and every local public service are signed up to the Imagination Library.

The council has done that without any additional funding from anywhere, in very difficult times. I am very proud of what we have done in North Lincolnshire to ensure that this is universal. Some people said at the

start, "Some parents can afford this and should perhaps pay for it themselves," but, to be frank, we took a political decision and said, "No, it doesn't matter. Every child should be signed up, regardless of whether or not they can pay, because the benefit is beyond doubt."

The results are reflected in our primary school figures. For example, in 2018 we were the most improved authority in the country for literacy and writing, and I think our phonics screening results were the seventh best in the country—they were certainly well above average. We have the data and it is manifesting itself in improved standards at primary school. Regardless of whether their parents can afford to buy a book every month, every child in North Lincolnshire gets a book through the post every month for five years, throughout reception and before they start school.

It is sad that the scheme drops off and ends at the age of five. A number of people write to me saying, "This is a brilliant scheme, but it's such a shame that it stops at five." As I have said, we have all the data and statistics showing the impact that the scheme has had. The most important data for me, however, is the testimony of local parents. When we set up the scheme, we focused it on the most challenged part of Goole, and a mother in Goole wrote to me saying, "I just want you to know that this scheme has been incredible for me and my child. I was not a confident reader, but sitting there every month with my child has improved my own literacy."

When I was a schoolteacher, the reason that some parents did not spend time reading and writing with their children and teaching them the ABCs and 123s was not always neglectful behaviour; it was often because they lacked confidence in their own literacy or numeracy abilities. That then manifested itself in what might have appeared to be neglectful behaviour, but they were actually embarrassed that they did not have the confidence to pass those skills on to their children. I found that sad. A lot of work has been done across our local authority to address that. It was not always a matter of neglect.

I do not want to say anything further, other than that I hope the Minister will look at the example of the North Lincolnshire Imagination Library. As I have said, almost 500,000 books have been delivered to local children through their letter boxes, and that is having a very clear impact on primary school results. It is not necessarily cheap, but we have decided locally that it is a worthwhile intervention because we will turn out children and young people at 16 and 18 who will perform better than they otherwise would have done. They will have confidence in literacy that they may not otherwise have had, and that will benefit the community when they get jobs in the area, including exciting jobs at the new Siemens rail factory, which will require those skills. Whether they are small schemes, of which a number are running across the country, or big schemes, these programmes can really make a difference to children's lives, including the 110 children in Goole who are benefiting and the 8,000-plus who are benefiting across North Lincolnshire.

5.50 pm

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to respond to the debate on behalf of my party. I would like to thank the Backbench Business Committee and its Chair, my hon. Friend the Member

for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), for making time for this important debate, as well as the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) and my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) for their work. This is a serious and important debate. Now more than ever, we see that for some children, childhood hurts, with 2.3 million growing up with vulnerable backgrounds, including in families with the toxic trio of ACEs—domestic violence, addiction and mental health issues.

It has been a brilliant debate, with some fantastic contributions that were genuinely from the heart. My hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) talked about maintained nurseries. My good friend the Member for Manchester Central has shown great support and commitment to early years and always comes up with fantastic solutions to problems. Her Manchester example is exemplary. I thank her for her work on maintained nurseries—she has put fantastic pressure on the Minister—and the early years workforce academy.

The right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) focused on health visitors. She does brilliant work with the Women and Equalities Committee on shared parental leave, pregnancy discrimination and maternity discrimination. I will take this opportunity to make a plug for my “selfie leave” ten-minute rule Bill for the self-employed. The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) has years of experience, and I was humbled by his contribution. He focused on adverse childhood experiences and called for joined-up solutions, which is exactly what we want. The scheme described by the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) was extraordinary, and I will definitely take it back to Batley and Spen. The numbers speak for themselves.

The hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) talked about local examples and adoption support. As we heard from the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), fathers are often missed out. I am doing work on trying to get men into early years settings, so that fathers feel more comfortable taking their children into those settings and discussing parenting and so on. I apologise if I have missed any Member out.

We have had a fantastic debate. The contribution from the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire was exceptional. Her personal experience was very moving. I am sure that lots of people outside this building will find the fact that post-natal depression can happen to anyone very relevant, and I hope that it will encourage them to seek support. Today's speeches show the determination and imagination that exists in this House to get the first 1,001 days of a baby's life right, and we have heard about the extraordinary speed at which babies' brains develop.

I would like to speak to the two Select Committee reports cited in the motion and then move on to explore some of the options available to us. The first is the report of the Science and Technology Committee called “Evidence-based early years intervention”. I was very interested in the report at the time of its release, and it was a privilege and pleasure to enjoy a thorough debate on the report in Westminster Hall in March. The right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) spoke with a great deal of wisdom in that debate. He had hoped to speak today, and his contribution is missed.

It is clear that there is cross-party consensus on the need for a data and outcomes-driven national strategy for early intervention. No matter how good the work that has been done by local authorities, that best practice should be spread across our country, and with technology, that should be easier than ever before. I share the disappointment that this key recommendation has not been accepted by the Government.

From reading the report, it is clear to me how important it is to share information. The fact that there has never been a tragedy in early life because too much information was shared speaks for itself. Unfortunately, we have seen how dangerous not sharing information can be. Much of this is because different agencies use different computer systems and different data handlers. We need a far better understanding of the principle of the Caldicott rules, sharing information when it is in someone's best interests.

I now turn to the Health and Social Care Committee report on the “First 1000 days of life”, which is truly a fantastic report. It comes at a pivotal time for children, when, according to Action for Children and YouGov, two thirds of parents and grandparents believe, for the first time ever, that their children and grandchildren will have a worse life than they have had. There are children—so many—who are just not getting the best start in life. At the age of two, there is a six-month developmental gap between higher and lower-income families, with one in 18 two to four-year-olds experiencing mental health issues. When I read this report, not only did I think some of the recommendations were absolutely excellent, but it highlighted for me how many gaps there are in what we currently provide.

First and foremost, I pay tribute to the recommendations in the report, including that the Government should consider the needs of vulnerable families in all policies. This is an absolutely brilliant step forward if we can make that work. It is important for children and health, and it will also send a strong message about social mobility and social justice. I was really encouraged to see the work of the Better Start projects. I have been lucky enough to get to know the work of Better Start in Bradford and the way it works across the local area, with a focus on health and education, which is really encouraging. In fact, I was really lucky to join it for Baby Week last November. That weeklong celebration of babies was informative and enjoyable; I got to squeeze lots of babies, which is always a good bit of my job. I would like to applaud the National Lottery Community Fund for its vision in creating this programme.

As a last point on this report, I want to touch on health visits. The report recommends five mandated visits and an additional visit when the child is aged between three and three and a half. Visits are so important for the health of a child, but they also help professionals understand the home environment of the child so that they can identify children at risk and respond to their complex needs.

If we discuss the first 1,001 days of a child's life, we must discuss Sure Starts and children's centres. A number of interventions have pointed to the loss of Sure Starts and how they made a difference. We know these centres can be transformative—a place for help and advice when parents need them—but, more than that, they support parents in building a loving and nurturing environment for their children, as well as in building

[Tracy Brabin]

attachment and an opportunity for the caring and safe home that is so integral to much of what we are speaking about today.

Let me say, very briefly, that I was lucky to visit Sheringham Nursery School and Children's Centre in Newham, where the focus is very much on the attachment theory. It has one worker who stays with a child, goes to their home and supports them throughout their experience in the nursery. I was told, statistically, about the children who will not settle. At the end of the first term, 1% of children leave maintained nurseries. However, there is not the focus on attachment in private nurseries, and often 12% of children leave those settings after the end of the first term because they have not settled. Attachment works, and we certainly see good practice in maintained nurseries.

Centres help with supporting children to become school-ready—whether through direct learning in the centre, or via the centre supporting parents to read to and to teach their children. This work is needed now more than ever, as just 57% of children from poorer backgrounds are school-ready by the age of five, by comparison to 74% of their wealthier peers. This just does not feel good enough, especially when we consider the frightening rate at which Sure Starts and children's centres have disappeared from our communities.

As we have spoken about data, it is important to say that although the Government's own figures show that hundreds of Sure Starts have gone, analysis I would call precise puts at roughly 1,200 the number of them closed since 2010, and certainly services have been hollowed out in the Sure Starts that are still standing.

Putting the number of centres aside for the time being, analysis provided by Action for Children shows a worrying trend in the usage of children's centres. It says that local authority spending fell by £327 million between 2014-15 and 2017-18, which coincides with a decrease in the number of children using the centres. That figure fell by 400,000, or about 18%. There has been no reduction in demand for support or in the need for support, so there is clearly a gap between the centres and the ability of families to access them. If anything, the rise in the number of children growing up in poverty can only impact on the pressure on those services. I am sure that concerns us all across the House. If we discuss an inter-ministerial working group or seek consensus on the early years of life, we must accept the reality of the situation for children's centres. It is often grave because of a lack of funding, and we must try to work towards a national strategy that ends the postcode lottery of provision.

One policy I want to talk about is the 15 hours of free childcare available to disadvantaged two-year-olds. The policy is there to help those children with their development and support them on their education path. We must applaud the direction of this policy, but I must ask the Minister—perhaps he will have an opportunity to answer when summing up—why it is that three in 10 of these children are still not accessing the care they are entitled to. Is he assured that the Department is using everything in its toolbox to make sure that eligible children are identified and that their parents made aware of the

entitlement and encouraged to take up the place? We know the difference it makes. We have heard about that from Members across the House today.

It is worth noting that the Social Mobility Commission recommends extending the offer of 30 hours of free childcare to cover households where one parent is working eight hours a week, rather than the current system where they must work for at least 16 hours a week. In the interests of social justice, I would prefer the policy to be universally available, but I hope that the Government look closely at that recommendation. Social mobility has remained “virtually stagnant” since 2014 and inequality exists “from birth to work”. Those are not my words, but the words of the Social Mobility Commission. I know we can do more to reach out to vulnerable children and their families.

In conclusion, of course we all want every single baby to have the best start in life and we accept that the challenges are great, but there is good work and innovation happening across our country. We have heard about it from many Members across the House. With initiatives such as Sure Start and children's centres, the advanced knowledge we have about health outcomes and the support of Parliament, we should be able to strive for the very best. It will require determination and significant resource, but if the next Prime Minister wants to build a legacy, I hope that he pays attention to today's debate and puts the first 1,001 days of a baby's life at the heart of his agenda from day one in office. As we have discussed in many previous debates, if billions can be given to businesses and wealthy individuals then I know that every single Member who has spoken in this debate will want assurances that money will be set aside to rebuild services for our most vulnerable children.

6.3 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) on securing this important debate on a Tuesday—pretty remarkable. I guess it is a question of knowing which levers to pull to make sure these things happen. I thank her for her tireless commitment to this very important area. I also thank her for all she did to drive forward the work of the inter-ministerial group on early years family support in her role as chair. Madam Deputy Speaker, I think you would agree with me when I say that we have had a debate that epitomises all the great things about our Parliament. It has been deep and well informed. The hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), who co-sponsored the debate, made an excellent speech. I have been up to see the school readiness work that she is doing with Andy Burnham and I pay tribute to his work, passion and commitment not only to this issue, but to looked-after children. He is a champion of those children who, through no fault of their own, we have had to take away from their biological parents.

The hon. Member for Manchester Central spoke about funding, and she knows that I am putting my best foot forward and preparing for the spending review as well as I can. Her compliments mean that my head will not get through the double doors behind you, Madam Deputy Speaker. She is right to highlight the extraordinary work of maintained nursery schools and their passion, commitment and the additional hard yards, as she put it, that they go to. In many ways, they will be the

trailblazers in Manchester for the joined-up, place-based, integrated early years delivery model. She also talked about workforce development, which I will return to later.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) made the point incredibly well about flexibility in working, which I hope a future Government looks at very closely. She also talked about shared parental leave. The hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) again referred to maintained nurseries, and his two maintained nurseries in Warwick and Whitnash, and I thank him for that.

It is almost impossible to compliment my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) on this—he has heard me say before that he is a fountain of knowledge on this area. He reminded the House that the strategic importance of children's mental health has come to the forefront in this place. He is right to highlight the number of debates and the number of colleagues who are now engaged in this agenda. I hope that he will continue his passionate backing for the troubled families programme and all the other issues that he rightly reminded us need support in a future Administration.

With my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), I visited Safeguarding Children in Banbury, which is for children who have been traumatised, and the work there is remarkable. She also mentioned the adoption support fund. The hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) is not in her place today, but we had a fantastic gathering yesterday for the report on the adoption support fund, which my hon. Friend cited. Ninety per cent. of children said that this helped them a lot in terms of the additional support that they needed.

My hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), who co-chairs the all-party group on fatherhood, rightly reminded us of the key role that fathers play and the fact that they are role models. I think of the work that I have seen, and we want to develop further the focus on not just mothers, but fathers. As a Manchester United supporter, it pains me a bit to say that Manchester City is doing remarkable work in early years outreach—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Manchester Central says “Four clubs” and she is quite right—I know. We will move on swiftly to my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley), who rightly reminded the House that children's services are challenged, and we need to look at that very closely when it comes to the spending review.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) talked about the Imagination Library, and I will certainly take a look at that. It is extraordinary, and it is testament to his incredible entrepreneurial—I think that word has been used a lot over the last few weeks—abilities to be able to identify it and bring it to Brigg and Goole and North Lincolnshire Council. It is remarkable that 95% of children are now signed up.

I am grateful for this opportunity to set out the Government's approach to the first 1,001 days. The evidence is clear that the first 1,001 days of a baby's life can have an impact on their social, economic and physical outcomes in later life. We all know this is a period of significant physical change for the mother and baby and a critical period of development, cognitively and emotionally, for babies.

The early years family support ministerial group has considered carefully how the Government can improve the co-ordination and cost-effectiveness of family support for children under the age of two and identify the gaps in available provision. It has now made its recommendations to the Secretaries of State, and they are considering them. It is important that the next Government continue that work and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire pointed out, report to the House in due course.

From the point of conception, we have the opportunity to ensure that all children get the best start in life. We start building our health asset as a baby in the womb. The transition to parenthood is a key opportunity to provide good information and support to adults on the importance of the child's first months and early years. There are clear benefits from early investment and support through pregnancy and the early years, and supporting early intervention means starting with good pre-conception care. The Government are committed to improving maternity services for vulnerable groups, and an enhanced and targeted continuity of care model will be implemented to help improve outcomes for the most vulnerable mothers and babies.

Positive adult-child relationships are key protective factors against adversity and trauma. The Government are committed to improving perinatal mental health services. The NHS long-term plan will increase access to evidence-based care for women with moderate to severe perinatal mental health difficulties and I hope benefit an additional 24,000 women per year by 2023-24. This is in addition to the extra 30,000 women getting specialist help by next year and the year after. We will be making care provided by specialist perinatal mental health services available from pre-conception to 24 months after birth, in line with the cross-Government ambition for women and children, focusing on the critical first 1,001 days of a child's life.

We are also expanding access to evidence-based psychological therapies within specialist perinatal mental health services so that they also include parent-infant, couple, co-parenting and family interventions. As part of that, we will be offering fathers and partners of women accessing specialist perinatal mental health services and maternity outreach clinics evidence-based assessments of their mental health and signposting to support as required. This will contribute to helping to care for the 5% to 10% of fathers who experience mental health difficulties during the perinatal period.

We are increasing access to evidence-based psychological support and therapy, including digital options, in a maternity setting. Maternity outreach clinics will integrate maternity, reproductive health and psychological therapy for women experiencing mental health difficulties directly arising from, or related to, the maternity experience. In addition, over the current spending review period, we are giving local authorities more than £16 billion for public health for all of the health functions they commission, including health visitors. The Prime Minister announced our commitment to modernise the healthy child programme to reflect the latest evidence on the importance of the first 1,001 days, including how health visitors and other professionals can support perinatal mental health.

Beyond the perinatal period, the first few years of a child's life are fundamentally important in achieving long-lasting outcomes. I am grateful to the shadow

[*Nadhim Zahawi*]

Minister for mentioning the 15 hours of free childcare for disadvantaged two-year-olds. It has reached 800,000 two-year-olds since its launch in 2013. I will certainly look at her points about targeting and take-up. We are spending £3.5 billion on our early education entitlements this year alone, which is more than any previous Government have spent. We are also supporting parents to improve the quality and quantity of adult-child interactions to support early language development in the home.

Following our successful home learning environment summit in November, we have continued to work with businesses and other partners. We have just launched the Hungry Little Minds campaign, a three-year campaign to encourage parents to engage in activities that support their children's early learning and help to set them up for school and beyond.

Looking beyond parents, we know that a skilled early years workforce is also key. That was one of the three points made by the hon. Member for Manchester Central. Children and families come into contact with a great many professionals in the early years. This is a huge opportunity, but it is not easy to get it right, particularly for the families who are the hardest to reach. We want to engage everyone, from frontline professionals to local system leaders, in our efforts to improve early language and literacy outcomes. Alongside our training for health visitors, we are investing £20 million in our early years professional development fund, which will offer training to practitioners in disadvantaged areas to improve, in particular, early language, literacy and numeracy outcomes.

Local areas have a key role to play in commissioning and delivering effective early-intervention services to meet complex and specific needs, and the Government are supporting them in that task. The Department's early years local government programme, in which we have invested £8.5 million, focuses on improving the way in which local services work together across health, education and early years to improve the outcomes of children aged five. As part of that work, multidisciplinary peer reviews will help councils to identify necessary reforms, and our early outcomes fund will provide an additional £6.5 million of grants for local authority partnerships to improve the delivery of services. I have commissioned the Early Intervention Foundation—this is an issue that has arisen repeatedly during the debate—to look into how children's centres and other delivery models can help to improve outcomes for the most disadvantaged children and spread good practice across the sector. When we have the data, we shall be able to focus on where we should spread that good practice. We also remain strongly committed to the What Works initiative, embodied in our three What Works centres.

Part of the Government's funding for the Early Intervention Foundation is being used to establish an early years transformation academy. The academy will provide a framework for the sharing of learning, including events and online material for leaders, commissioners and other stakeholders. The start of more intensive academy work began in June, and will provide further opportunities to pool learning.

Let me again thank my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire for securing the debate. We know that getting it right in the early years is key to

ensuring that all children have the best start in life. That is reflected in the excellent work that is already being undertaken across England at local and national levels, but we can certainly do much more. My right hon. Friend's legacy should be the IMG's continued delivery of what we agreed should be delivered.

6.17 pm

Andrea Leadsom: It is fantastic to see you in your place for the final bit of the debate, Mr Speaker. I can paraphrase what it has been about as “all you need is love”, and I know that you would subscribe to that yourself. It has been an incredibly positive and optimistic debate.

The hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) and I have worked on this for years. Members throughout the House are determined to see every baby get the best possible start in life, and ultimately that is all about love. It is about attachment, about good early years services, and about the Government working in a joined-up way. My hon. Friend the Minister has made huge strides in showing his personal commitment to progress in that regard, but I urge him, and the Government, to demonstrate that final commitment to getting the excellent work done by the inter-ministerial group over the line, so that we really do give every baby the best possible start in life.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House believes there is now overwhelming evidence of the importance of the first 1001 critical days of a new baby's life in determining his or her lifelong physical and emotional wellbeing; notes the work of the Inter-Ministerial Group led by the Rt. hon. Member for South Northamptonshire, the Thirteenth Report of the Health and Social Care Select Committee, HC 1496, on First 1000 days of life and the Eleventh Report of the Science and Technology Committee, HC 506 on Evidence-based early years intervention; and calls on the Government to take strong and decisive action immediately to ensure that every baby gets the best start in life.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr Speaker: With the leave of the House, I propose to take motions 7 to 9 together.

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

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

That the draft International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (Selective Capital Increase) Order 2019, which was laid before this House on 27 June, be approved.

That the draft International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (General Capital Increase) Order 2019, which was laid before this House on 27 June, be approved.

That the draft International Finance Corporation (General Capital Increase) Order 2019, which was laid before this House on 27 June, be approved. —(*Mike Freer.*)

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Droppingwell Tip, Rotherham

6.19 pm

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): I rise to present a petition of residents of the Rotherham constituency regarding the opening of Droppingwell tip. The tip was closed in the mid-1990s following a determined campaign by local residents and the site has now been returned to its natural state. A new permit to resume tipping operations at the site was issued by the Environment Agency in 2016. The agency did not consult local residents, nor did it even notify the council that an application had been made before reaching its decision. Planning permission for the site was originally issued in the 1950s and remains in force. As a consequence, no consideration has been made of the major changes that have happened to the area in the decades since the tip closed, let alone consideration of the 70 years since permission was originally granted. A youth football club and a world-renowned golf academy now stand adjacent to the site. It must be wrong that the site can be permitted to reopen without even the most cursory consultation and in the face of unanimous opposition from local residents, elected representatives, businesses and the local authority:

“The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to intercede and ensure that the landfill permit is rescinded by the Environment Agency.”

Following is the full text of the petition:

[Declares that the petitioners are deeply disappointed that Droppingwell Tip has been issued a permit by the Environment Agency to resume landfill operations, despite having been closed for many years; further that, as historic planning permission remains in force, no consideration of the objections of residents and local businesses at the resumption of operations has been given.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to intercede and ensure that the landfill permit is rescinded by the Environment Agency.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002493]

Batten Disease: Access to Drugs

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Mike Freer.)

6.21 pm

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Mr Speaker, may I begin by thanking you for allowing me this Adjournment debate and for your personal encouragement to me to bring it forward? My gratitude goes beyond that; I also thank you for the way you so encourage this House to hold the Government—the Executive: those who rule us—to account.

I am also grateful to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) and the terrific campaign she has been running in relation to Batten disease; she has done more than almost anybody else to highlight it. I note that two of my hon. Friends on the Front Bench, my hon. Friends the Members for Macclesfield (David Rutley) and for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew), have a great interest and a constituency concern in this issue, although they are not allowed to intervene on me for obvious reasons. I want to put their concern on the record. I know that others too might wish to intervene on this very important subject.

This evening's debate is about my constituent, Max. Max is a little boy; he is eight years old. He is a lively boy, and those of us who have children know what eight-year-olds are like—what a joy they are and how wonderful their spirit is. But Max has this horrible disease. Batten disease is perhaps the cruellest disease that one can imagine as a parent. We all see our children grow; we see them learn to walk and then to talk, and to run and to do all the things that children do. Batten disease means that they then go backwards. It tends to hit at about two—on a child who has shown no signs until then. The talking stops and the walking becomes more difficult. The average life expectancy of a child with Batten disease is between six and 12.

The blow to parents, and to grandparents and families, that this is and must be, is so hard to bear and so difficult; it is so sad for them to see a child who they would hope would be going on into adulthood instead declining, and declining steadily. It is a neurodegenerative disease. To put it in layman's terms, it is essentially dementia of the young: all that we see of Alzheimer's in people in their 70s, 80s and 90s is instead happening to a child.

But there is a drug that delays this. It is not a cure and it does not reverse the disease, but it seems to stop its progression—nobody knows for how long. It is called Brineura and it has been shown to be effective on a number of children who have taken it. So far in this country there are only two children for whom it would be suitable who are not receiving it, one of whom is Max. The others are receiving it as part of a trial that has been successful and is still being funded by the drug company—but that might not continue for ever, so there is an argument for them as well. I mentioned earlier the enormous contribution that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North has made, and I am very glad to see her in her place; without her, I do not think this really important matter would have achieved the publicity that it has received.

This drug Brineura has been given a quality-adjusted life years rating by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence of 30, which is the highest rating that it

[*Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg*]

gives. That means that the drug is thought to provide 30 extra years of life of good quality. That is a stunning achievement for any drug, and it has been given the highest rating and the highest amount of funding, but unfortunately that amount of funding is not enough. The pricing cannot be agreed between NHS England, NICE and BioMarin, the manufacturer.

BioMarin is a drug company that needs to make a return on the amount of money it has spent. To be fair to the company, it spent \$696 million last year on research and development and made a pre-tax loss of \$142 million, so it is not an enormously profitable, rapacious company that is being difficult. One might think, however, that having lost \$142 million, it might quite welcome a little bit of income from the national health service. If I were one of its shareholders, I might suggest that it would be a good idea to do something with the national health service so that the company could get some income back on its \$696 million of research and development expenditure in 2018. Without an agreement between the buyers and sellers, Max will not receive the drug and his standard of life will decline month by month.

Andrew Griffiths (Burton) (Con): My hon. Friend will know about my constituent, Michal Luc, who is in exactly the same situation. We talk to parents who see their children degenerating and dying before their eyes. Does he agree that they cannot understand how we can argue over money when their children's lives are disappearing before their very eyes?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I completely agree with my hon. Friend.

Generally, I recognise the need for public expenditure constraint. Money always has to come from somewhere; it has to be either taxed or borrowed. However, in a country that spends over £800 billion a year, and £120 billion or whatever it is a year on the national health service, can we not find just over £6 million a year for this small number of children who have a terrible disease that can be held at bay?

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): I very much commend the hon. Gentleman for securing this hugely important and timely debate. Does he share my concern that we seem to be witnessing a bit of a blame game between NHS England, NICE and BioMarin? Does he agree that they just need to get round the table and resolve this issue one way or another, even if it requires the Minister to bring them together and knock some heads together to get them to come to a resolution? The rapid-acting nature of Batten disease means that my constituents Nicole and Jessica Rich and the other children who are affected just do not have the time for this wrangling to carry on.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. The terrible thing is that in the month that has passed since I first raised this matter in the House, Max's condition will have slightly deteriorated, and in every month that goes on while we are debating this, not just Max but all the children with this condition will go downhill. That is what happens with this disease.

There are questions to be asked about the structure of policy on rare diseases, and about the Government's response and what powers they have. As I said at the beginning, accountability through this House is of fundamental importance. By law, the Secretary of State still maintains overall responsibility for the provision of healthcare in this country. It is the Secretary of State who is accountable. We cannot make NICE accountable; it has not been structured to be accountable. It does not appear in the Chamber to tell us what it is doing—that is done by second degree, through Ministers. We really need to know what, if any, reserve powers Ministers may have to be able to do something about the situation.

Can something be done? Can a budget exception be provided, so that funds may be made available for these rare diseases? Can something be done, as has been done for cancer treatments, to provide money where exceptionality can be seen? Of course these drugs are expensive: they affect so few people, and the drugs companies will not develop them if they cannot at least make their money back. Can something be done as in other areas, particularly cancer, to ensure that the drugs can be provided? Can the rule changes in 2017 that made it harder to fund rare disease drugs be reviewed and possibly reversed? Since 2017, the financial aspect has become much more significant than it was before.

Although I accept, of course, that there is a need to look at costs, when we are talking about eight-year-old children, we are not talking about a cost for people who only have weeks or months to live, but about a child who could have years of a high quality of life ahead of him. That must be where most of us as taxpayers think it is right to spend money and where we think that the moral case for spending money is extraordinarily strong.

Catherine McKinnell: Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern that the impact of rare conditions such as Batten disease is not just felt in the child's physical health, but in their mental health and the mental health of their wider family? The system for judging what is value for money and how our NHS should spend its money needs to take a much broader approach when calculating the value of these medicines in those circumstances. It needs to get it right.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady puts it so well—and it is not just the family, but the community. On Saturday, the village of East Harptree, a small village in North East Somerset, came together for its annual village fête. All the funds raised were to try and help Max. He is at the local primary school, East Harptree Primary School. The week before, they had the school races. All the children had gone back a few yards so that Max could win, for the first and only time in his life, the race at his school. That is such a wonderful example of community. If communities can do that, surely the Government can help too, because it is not just Max and not just his wonderful family who are trying so hard to do the right thing for him. A whole community would be pleased, and would feel it was being taken notice of, if Max were helped—all his schoolfriends and schoolteachers and the whole community in East Harptree.

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Gentleman gives a really powerful example. The whole of the community in Newcastle knows about Nicole and Jessica Rich and

is doing everything it can to support them in this journey. This not only affects those two beautiful children; it also affects their family in a huge way, and the whole community.

For that reason, I beg the Minister today to recognise that this is not only about reaching the right decision, but about doing it with urgency. Every day, there is an impact on their deteriorating health, and there is also the impact on the parents of supporting those children with a debilitating condition and living with the agony of not knowing what future lies ahead—whether the medicine that will save their children's lives will be funded or not.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I so agree with the hon. Lady. I am of course primarily talking about Max, my constituent, but to take the drug away from children who are already getting it would be unconscionable. I simply do not believe that any reasonable person—any politician or any administrator—would think that the right thing to do. It is bad enough not to give the drug to a child who could benefit; to withdraw it would be so utterly wrong that I cannot believe that that could happen.

When something can be done, it is hard for it not to be done and for us to allow it not to be done. It is frustrating that it is so hard to change and that there seems to be nobody who can decide it. Everyone one talks to says it is not up to them. NICE is bound by its guidelines, NHS England is bound by NICE, and the Secretary of State is bound by the legal interpretation of what the Health and Social Care Act 2012 provides, but none of that is good enough. We need action. Ultimately, it is Ministers, through Parliament, who are able to act.

Let me finish with what Max's father, Simon Sewart, who has been doing so much to look after his son, wrote:

"I have always understood that life is no fairy tale with a happy ending, but when you learn that your beautiful child has a disease, as horrific as Batten Disease, your world changes forever and your heart is broken.

NICE announced, just 24 hours after Max's diagnosis, that the first ever treatment for CLN2 Batten Disease will not be funded.

At a time when you should be taking care of your child, your other children, and enjoying precious time together as a family, you instead find yourself spending all of your time writing emails and letters, speaking to journalists and TV news programmes, communicating with your MP and with doctors in other countries where the ERT is available.

Expending all of your energy in fighting the extraordinary decision by NICE and NHSE. And all the time, you see your child decline, day by day. And all the time, you just want to expend your energy on them, on holding them, on playing with them, on laughing and smiling with them, on running with them, on walking with them, on talking with them, on looking around at the world with them; on all these things. With them.

This double-whammy is almost too much to bear. Reverse your decision NICE and let my family be."

Is that not what we all want for Max and his family? He has this terrible disease. It is not a disease that he can ever be cured of, but if he gets this treatment, he could have a higher-quality life and his family would be peacefully with him, enjoying his company for the years that remain to him. Please can the Minister do something about this?

6.37 pm

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinagen): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) on securing this important debate on what is a heartbreaking issue, as I am sure you will agree, Mr Speaker. He and other Members have spoken up movingly and with great passion about and on behalf of their constituents, and I am grateful to them for doing so. I understand how vital it is for patients and their families to be able to access new medicines as quickly as possible. This is one of the hardest types of debates that one has to respond to as a Minister, when we can put ourselves in the position of the families up and down the country who are facing such a desperate situation.

I will endeavour to respond as fully as I can to the issues that my hon. Friend and other Members raised, but I should begin by saying, sadly, that I am unfortunately unable to comment on matters relating to the availability of Brineura, a drug used to treat Batten disease, as this is currently subject to an active judicial review procedure.

As we have heard from hon. Members, Batten disease is a terrible condition that progresses rapidly, leading to loss of speech, mobility and vision, progressive dementia and early death. It is a rare genetic disease, and it is estimated that around three to six children in the UK are diagnosed each year, with around 30 to 50 children living with the condition. Current treatment options are limited to symptomatic relief and supportive care. I fully understand how vital any new treatment option could be to the families of children with this rare and devastating condition.

The Government want patients, including those with rare diseases such as Batten disease, to be able to benefit from effective new treatments. It is in the interests of all NHS patients that we have a system in place for making evidence-based—

Andrew Griffiths: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This important debate is about whether this drug is going to be available for these young children, and you will share my concern that we are not going to get the answers we want because it is supposedly prevented by a judicial review. Can you rule on whether we should be able to have the information we seek in this debate for the parents who are watching?

Mr Speaker: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. He anticipates me, because his discernment is such that he will have observed me in conversation with the Clerk at the Table. Let me say, for the avoidance of doubt, that the content of the Minister's reply is, of course, a matter for her, and it is not something with which I would seek to interfere. That is not for me.

However, for the purposes of clarification, I want to make this point. I am not aware that this matter is sub judice, as I have not received prior notification that it is. I am not aware that it is, I have not been informed that it is, and the Clerks have not been informed that it is. If it is not sub judice, nothing whatsoever precludes the Minister from commenting on this case. If it is sub judice, as colleagues will know, it is within the competence—I use that term in the technical sense—of the Chair to waive the sub judice rule, which it would most certainly be my instinct to do.

[Mr Speaker]

What the Minister says is a matter for the Minister, but it would not be right, as far as I can tell, to say that it is not possible, in a legal sense, for the Minister to comment on this matter. The Minister is the Minister, and the Minister's answer on the specifics is sought. If the Minister wishes to proffer that answer, she can do so.

Caroline Dinanage: Thank you, Mr Speaker. You have made my position even more difficult. I am very grateful for your advice.

The advice I have been given by the legal team within the Department of Health and Social Care is that anything I say could potentially influence the outcome of judicial proceedings that may be ongoing.

Mr Speaker: The Minister is nothing but solicitous and courteous. I have found her unfailingly courteous in her dealings with me over many years, and I certainly do not seek to make life difficult for her, but my concern is with the rights of Members of this House and of the people they are here to represent.

Frankly, if lawyers within the Department of Health and Social Care are of that view, it would have been courteous to consult the officials of the House. As far as I am aware, the officials of the House have not been consulted, and I have not been consulted about this matter. I am simply saying that if the Minister wishes to respond to the specifics, which manifestly the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) was going to raise—that is the rationale for the debate—it is perfectly open to her to do so.

If the hon. Member for North East Somerset is not able to secure satisfaction on this occasion—the Minister must judge what she wants to say in response—and if he wishes to pursue the matter further in another Adjournment debate, during the course of waiting for which further time will unfortunately have been lost, that debate will be available to him. I am determined that this matter will be effectively raised in the Chamber of the House of Commons by the hon. Gentleman and by other Members.

Caroline Dinanage: Thank you for clarifying that, Mr Speaker. I very much share the passion that I detect my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset feels about this issue, which I know is shared by Members on both sides of the House.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): On the basis of what Mr Speaker has said, surely if those who are taking this issue to the courts withdrew their challenge, or if the Minister gave them a satisfactory answer to help the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), it would not be sub judice. The Minister has the power to do that.

Caroline Dinanage: I am very tempted to do so, but I would like to try to make progress on some of the things I can say, and then we can maybe move on to a more satisfactory conclusion.

Andrew Griffiths: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Of course the Minister should have the opportunity to do so, but I think it is only right that I hear the point of order, if it is a genuine point of order.

Andrew Griffiths: Could you explain the rules to me, Mr Speaker? If it is proved that today's Adjournment debate is not sub judice and that the information could have been proffered to the House in a way that would have satisfied both my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) and you, would it be in order for the responsible Minister to come to this place to make a statement before the recess, so that those valuable days are not lost? Do you think it would be sensible for the Minister to make that commitment now?

Mr Speaker: It is certainly open to the Minister to do so, and I think that it would, without question, be to the advantage of the House if such an oral statement were proffered before the House goes into recess. What I should say to the hon. Gentleman and to other colleagues is that, to my knowledge—forgive me, but I am dealing with this matter literally on my feet—the case has not been set down; it is not listed for court consideration. There are no current proceedings dated. Therefore, as we understand it—my advisers and I—it cannot be said to be sub judice. Sometimes a judgment might be made about the possibility of prejudicing a case—that is a wider consideration—but the real issue is: is it sub judice? Our answer, on the best information available, is that it is not, and so I think a statement would be helpful. Alternatively, if Members wish to exercise their ingenuity in raising important and of course legitimate points of order, and the Minister wishes in the meantime to consult her officials so that a full and detailed response on the specifics can be provided, that is open to her. I recognise that that might be challenging at such short notice and she may not wish to do that, but it would certainly be helpful to have a substantive response, preferably this evening, and a full oral statement before we go into recess. I would say to the House that I am giving the ruling that I am giving both on the basis of a decade's experience as the occupant of the Chair and on the strength of top-quality procedural advice.

Caroline Dinanage: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am very grateful—

Mr Rees-Mogg: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. My point of order follows on from what you said and I hope it may be helpful to the Minister in giving her a moment to reflect on what you have just said. I would express a broader concern on this sub judice question, because, as you rightly said, it is always the prerogative of this House to discuss what it wishes to discuss, regardless of what is going on in any court. The sub judice rule has only ever been a self-denying ordinance of this House, to feel that it should not trample on things that were immediately before another court, rather than something that can be enforced upon us. In that respect, we are different from any other place in the country—other than of course their lordships' House—which would be subject to sub judice as a matter of law. We are subject to it only in so far as we feel that it is wise to be cautious and prudent, and not to interrupt another of the separated powers within our judicial system. Therefore, it seems to me that whenever Ministries

decide to cite sub judice rules, it would be wise to have consulted Mr Speaker or one of the Clerks in advance, in order to have some clarity before the debate begins.

Mr Speaker: Yes, it is a matter of prudence on the part of the House of Commons; it is not a cloak behind which the Executive branch should seek to hide. I know that the Minister would not attempt to do so, but any advice that might be thought to be intended to allow that to happen would be ill viewed by right hon. and hon. Members, and most certainly by their constituents.

Caroline Dinagen: I take on board all the comments that you have made, Mr Speaker, and indeed that hon. Members have made. I need to go away and reflect on this. I would like to make some progress with what I feel confident to be able to talk about today, and then, if inspiration does not approach me from anywhere else in this Chamber in the next few moments, I will commit to coming back with a fuller response if that is possible before we break for recess, if that would be acceptable to you, Mr Speaker.

Catherine McKinnell: I thank you for your guidance on this issue, Mr Speaker. I wonder whether the Minister would accept that the legal action that is being discussed would be unnecessary if NHS England, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and BioMarin got around the table and resolved this issue. On the broader point, on 21 May I and a number of colleagues, including the hon. Member for North East Somerset, met the Secretary of State to discuss this issue. He has since written to me to say that he is

“doing all he can within the legal constraints to resolve this”

situation. I was therefore hoping that the Minister could clarify what exactly that means, and what progress is being made as a result of that meeting and the representations we have made today.

Caroline Dinagen: I know that the Secretary of State met the hon. Lady and other Members recently, and this is something that he cares about passionately. We are doing everything we can in the Department of Health and Social Care to try to move the position forward. The hon. Lady is right to say that had this issue been satisfactorily resolved, we would not be having this discussion at all, we would not be talking about legal proceedings and the situation would hopefully be a lot easier to resolve.

I have only a short amount of time left to be able to give some sort of response to my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset.

Mr Rees-Mogg: We have 40 minutes left, Mr Speaker, so we are not short of time.

Mr Speaker: No, we have plenty of time. We can continue until 7.30. *[Interruption.]* Oh yes, we have plenty of time. And of course, there will be an opportunity for either a ministerial statement or an urgent question between now and Thursday, so we have, if I may say so, bucket-loads of time to deliberate on this important matter. I know that that message will be extremely well received by the Minister.

Caroline Dinagen: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The legal position, as I understand it, is that NHS England and NHS Improvement have been in discussions with the manufacturer BioMarin for some time to try to seek a deal that would enable NICE to recommend the drug for use on the NHS, but so far an agreement has unfortunately not been possible. As hon. Members know, and as I said at the beginning of my speech, NICE's assessment is currently subject to an ongoing legal procedure. NICE has published its draft recommendation and was unfortunately unable to recommend the use of the drug, despite its meeting the criteria for consideration under the highest cost-effectiveness threshold. NICE has not yet re-published its final word on this issue, and that may provide more clarity. In the meantime, it is of course open to the company to enter into an agreement with NHS England that would make the drug cost-effective and would make the legal procedure unnecessary.

Mr Jim Cunningham: If NHS England got a satisfactory agreement with the drug manufacturer, would that have any bearing on the decision of the Secretary of State or on NICE?

Caroline Dinagen: I do not think it would contravene any legal recommendations if I were to say that if the manufacturer, NHS England and NICE were to get around a table and agree a satisfactory price, there would be no need for the legal challenge. In actual fact, the desperately poorly children we have heard about today would therefore be able to get the treatments that they desperately need.

Catherine McKinnell: Does the Minister share my concern that one reason why NICE turned down Brineura is that there is not enough long-term evidence about the drug's effectiveness? That does prompt the question, which I am sure people at home would wonder about: how can we secure that long-term evidence when the treatment is so new—yet so effective, in my view—but is not even available on the NHS in this country? How do we ever find enough evidence to match the criteria that NICE is looking for?

Caroline Dinagen: That is a really good question, and I think that is one reason why NICE is looking again at its systems. It must be possible, because around 80% of new drugs are recommended for NICE approval and approved by NICE. It is clearly possible for new drugs to make it through even when they have not been around for a long enough period to see the very long-term consequences of their impact. It is really important in cases such as this, in which the opportunity—

Andrew Griffiths: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I seek your advice, because we have a precedent for a situation that can arise on numerous occasions. In the nine years I have been in the House, I have heard of many debates in which right hon. and hon. Members have brought forward demands for treatments for rare diseases. We call the Minister to the Dispatch Box to answer—to be accountable. If we have a situation, going forward, where the Minister can claim sub judice, on advice from officials—it is not the Minister; she is taking advice from her Department—and be allowed to hide behind that cloak of anonymity and prevent the House from doing its job, which is to establish the facts and find out the truth behind the matter, that clearly prevents the House from being able to do its job.

[Andrew Griffiths]

You would share my concern, Mr Speaker, that that would prevent Members in this House from serving their constituents in a way that they would be expected to do. Therefore, can you ensure that you will go away today and look at this situation and make sure that, if this procedure has gone wrong, Departments are told very clearly that they cannot hide behind sub judice and that they must be candid with this House, regardless of the advice they have been given by officials.

Mr Speaker: That is a most helpful point of order from the hon. Gentleman, to which, essentially, the answer is a simple yes. I will happily go away and reflect on how Departments might usefully be advised to proceed in these matters. Beyond that, there are two points. First, as I have been advised, the matter is not sub judice. It has been suggested to me by a very constructive member of the Treasury Bench that advice to the effect that the case might be sub judice was proffered, though not to the particular Clerk whom I have been consulting, but that advice was not judged to be correct. Put simply, as far as we can see, the matter is not sub judice.

Secondly, however, and this is an extremely important point in the context of the specific debate that the hon. Member for North East Somerset has secured, the issue is that of ministerial intervention, and therefore whether or not the case is sub judice—I repeat that I am advised that it is not—the matter of ministerial intervention is manifestly one for Ministers, and it is therefore a matter upon which a Minister from the Bench can comment and would widely be expected to do so. Frankly, this question of the legal status is not germane to the capacity of a Minister to respond to the specifics of the debate. That is the situation.

Caroline Dinanage: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I do apologise for the further confusion that is here today. We are trying to seek further guidance on this—

Mr Rees-Mogg: Will my hon. Friend allow me?

Caroline Dinanage: In a moment.

The advice that I have been given is that I have to be very careful on the legal procedure because of the fact that it is not a legal procedure between individuals and the Department, but between individuals and NICE. I do not want anything that we say potentially to negatively impact on a family's opportunity to get these very important drugs for their children.

Mr Speaker: Very important decisions are subcontracted to NICE, but policy responsibility, as the hon. Member for North East Somerset has pointed out, is that of the Government. We do not have Government by NICE; we have Government in the case of health policy through the Department of Health and Social Care.

Caroline Dinanage: I give way.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I understand that discussions have been rapidly going on while we have had points of order and various other things happening in this Chamber. I am not sure whether this is orderly, Mr Speaker, but I

happened to notice that there has been a return to the officials' box of advisers. I wonder whether inspiration might now be forthcoming and heading in the direction of the Minister and whether I am now giving time for such advice to be passed through, or whether the telephone calls that I heard were taking place have not been as fruitful as I might have hoped.

Mr Speaker: I am not in a position to know that immediately for the simple reason that the Speaker does not possess eyes in the back of his head, and I have been focusing on the hon. Gentleman, the Minister and other colleagues, rather than on the occupants of the officials' box. I have seen a note that has been circulating and a Minister is attempting to assist one of my advisers. I assume the Minister is attempting to do so on the basis of information provided. Whether there is something that is so valuable that the Minister in question is about to furnish the answering Minister with it, I do not know, but I am allowing a suitable opportunity for that missive to be passed to the Minister for Care, who is, of course, entitled to digest and reflect upon its contents and to decide in the light thereof how she wishes to continue, but I repeat that there is no shortage of time. I am very grateful to the Minister for her characteristic courtesy.

Caroline Dinanage: We are in a difficult position because the advice that has been forthcoming from the Department of Health and Social Care is not the same as the advice being given by the brilliant Clerks here. That puts me in a very difficult position, which is why I would like to commit to returning to the House with a statement once I have been able to pursue this matter a little bit further.

The Government want patients, including patients with rare diseases such as Batten disease, to be able to benefit from effective new treatments. It is in the interests of all NHS patients that we have a system in place for making evidence-based decisions on whether new medicines should be made routinely available to patients. That is why we have NICE, which makes independent, evidence-based recommendations for the NHS.

7 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Jackie Doyle-Price.)

Caroline Dinanage: NICE now operates two separate programmes for the assessment of new medicines: first, a technology appraisal programme through which NICE assesses the vast majority of new medicines; and secondly, a highly specialised technologies programme that is reserved for the evaluation of very high cost drugs for the treatment of very small numbers of patients suffering from very rare diseases in England who are treated in a handful of centres in the NHS.

Where NICE recommends a treatment for use on the NHS, NHS commissioners are legally required to make funding available so that it can be prescribed to patients. This is reflected in the NHS constitution as a right to NICE-approved treatments. The intention of NICE is to have a system that means that the public can have confidence that the price paid by the NHS is consistent with the improvement in health outcomes that the medicine brings, ensuring fairness and the best possible use of funding for patients and the NHS.

As I said to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), NICE has recommended around 80% of products it has assessed. Through its important work, many thousands of patients, including patients with rare diseases, have benefited from access to effective new treatments.

It is right that NICE's processes continue to evolve with developments in science, healthcare and the life sciences sector. That is why it keeps its methods and processes updated through periodic review that includes extensive engagement with stakeholders, including patient representatives, drug manufacturers and clinicians. In this spirit of continuous development, through the 2019 voluntary scheme for branded medicines pricing and access, which was published in December, the Government announced that NICE would be undertaking a review of its methods and processes in 2019-20 for both its technology appraisal and the highly specialised technologies programme.

Andrew Griffiths: I thank the Minister for the honourable way in which she has played a straight bat in what is a very sticky wicket; I am grateful to her for that. She mentioned that she was prepared to come back and make a statement to the House, for which I think we are all grateful. Would she just confirm whether she intends to make that statement before the House rises for the summer recess?

Caroline Dinanage: Yes, I will come back and make that statement before the House rises for the summer recess, with the correct legal recommendations.

The NICE review of its methods and processes has now begun. That will be quite helpful for some hon. Members who are questioning whether those processes are as they should be. Although I do not think it would not be appropriate for me to pre-empt the review by commenting in detail on its scope, I can assure hon. Members that it will be wide-ranging and will be carried out with full consultation with stakeholders.

My hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset spoke about access to the new drug Brineura for his constituent Max. NICE is currently developing recommendations for the NHS on the use of Brineura through its highly specialised technologies programme for the evaluation of drugs for the treatment of patients with very rare diseases. It has not yet published that final guidance. I understand that NHS England and NHS Improvement have been in discussions with the manufacturer of Brineura, BioMarin, for some time to seek a deal that would enable NICE to recommend the drug for use on the NHS, but an agreement has unfortunately not been possible so far. As I said at the beginning, NICE's assessment of Brineura is potentially going to be subject to legal proceedings.

Let me move on to individual funding requests. Where a treatment is not routinely available on the NHS, including where NICE has not yet made a recommendation on its use, NHS clinicians are able to apply for funding through an individual funding request. This can be done when a clinician believes that their patient is clearly different from other patients with the same condition, or where their patient might benefit from the treatment in a different way from other patients.

In the absence of NICE's final recommendations on Brineura, I am aware that NHS England and NHS Improvement have recently considered an individual

funding request for my hon. Friend's constituent Max that it has unfortunately been unable to support, because he would not be regarded as an exceptional case to existing policy. I understand how devastating that decision will be for Max, his parents and all those involved. However, if my hon. Friend's constituents and their clinicians think that the process has not been followed correctly, they can ask for a review of the decision within 28 days. If a patient's situation changes or more clinical evidence becomes available about the effectiveness of a treatment, they may also submit additional information to be considered and discussed.

Catherine McKinnell: Does the Minister understand how deeply hurtful the situation is to those families who are receiving this treatment on compassionate grounds from the drug company and how difficult it must be for them to listen to this debate? Not only are the Government seeking to hide behind sub judice rules when in fact they should be giving the answers that those families deserve; they are also sending families round and round, suggesting that they make applications based on individual circumstances and that they appeal decisions, when they just want to care for their very sick children. Is there nothing more that the Minister can offer those families who are listening to this debate?

Caroline Dinanage: I completely understand what the hon. Lady says, and I completely agree with her. I would love to be able to solve this problem straightaway and give these children the lifeline they need. Unfortunately, that is not the case today. I have committed to make a statement before the House finishes for recess at the end of next week, so I will come back shortly with all the information I am allowed to give. I really do not want her to think that this in any way suggests that I do not understand how the families must be feeling. I can only begin to imagine how desperate it must be to have such a poorly child.

Mr Jim Cunningham: I do not want to be difficult for the Minister, because she is doing a very difficult job, but could she clarify something? I got the impression from something she said a minute or two back that if NICE and NHS England concluded negotiations and agreed a price with the drug manufacturer, that would be acceptable to the Government.

Caroline Dinanage: My understanding is that if the manufacturer of this vital drug gets around the table with NICE and suggests a price within a reasonable scale, NICE would be very open to listening. That is my understanding. Certainly, I understand calls from Members across the House for NHS England, NICE and the manufacturer to get around the table to try to find a solution. That seems to me to be the most sensible way forward.

Andrew Griffiths: I thank the Minister for giving way again. The language she is using is the same as that we hear in a lot of these debates. She has said that many of these families and young children are receiving the drug on compassionate grounds from the drug company. For a parent whose child is not getting that drug to be told that somebody else's son or daughter is getting compassion but theirs is not—the Minister is a mother herself, so she will understand this—is like a dagger through the

[Andrew Griffiths]

heart. Will she do all she can to ensure that that compassion is extended to all those mums and dads who are looking on tonight?

Caroline Dinenage: Of course I will commit to doing everything I can to making sure that all the very valid and easy-to-understand sentiments that have been expressed by Members across the House are sent to all the parties involved in this discussion. I completely share Members' desire to find a resolution to this and ensure that families get the answers they need. In the meantime, I thank all Members for the part they have played in today's debate, the questions they have asked and the great interest they have shown in this issue. As I say, I will come back to the House shortly with fuller answers to some of those questions.

Mr Speaker: Ordinarily, the proceedings would now conclude, and they will do so shortly. However, I think it important that our proceedings should be intelligible not only to right hon. and hon. Members but others who are interested in our proceedings but are not Members of this House. To try to achieve that objective, I want to add, by way of conclusion, the following.

I am advised by my officials that the Department of Health and Social Care claims that this matter—the subject of the debate—is sub judice because an application for a judicial review has been made. In the light of that, let me explain. Under the sub judice resolution of this House,

“Civil proceedings are active when arrangements for the hearing, such as setting down a case for trial, have been made”.

The Department has not supplied evidence that this test is met. Therefore, I stand by what I said earlier on advice.

By way of conclusion, I say to the Minister—echoing, I think, the sentiments of colleagues—that her commitment made in the circumstances, at very short notice, to return to the House before the summer recess to make an oral statement is appreciated, and we look forward to that statement taking place either tomorrow or on Thursday. Policy is a matter for the Government and not the Chair, but the hon. Member for North East Somerset and other colleagues who are similarly interested may rest assured that, for so long as this matter is not resolved to their satisfaction and they wish to bring it to the House for questioning, interrogation and debate again, as far as the occupant of the Chair is concerned, there will be multiple opportunities for them to do so. The matter will not go away.

I thank the Minister once again for her courtesy and consideration in difficult circumstances, and I thank all Members who have contributed to the debate not on their own accounts but in the interests of their constituents, very anxious parents and families, and sympathetic people right across the country.

Question put and agreed to.

7.12 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 16 July 2019

[MR CLIVE BETTS *in the Chair*]

Defence Spending

9.30 am

Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered defence spending.

It is a pleasure to lead this important debate on defence spending, and to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting us time to discuss the funding of our nation's defence at a time when our world is more unstable than ever and detractors wish the western liberal way of life and our values harm.

It is rare for us to be able to discuss money in this place. Today, we must consider what value we place on our nation's defence, how the huge sums of money allocated to it are used, the interconnectivity of the Foreign Office's assessment of global instability, our world-class military tacticians' understanding of how we can protect our citizens and allies, and what we need to have in place to do so. We need to understand why projecting our cultural and economic values and ethos, and promoting Britain's and our allies' economic stability and prosperity, is vital.

The question is: is a percentage figure the way to judge whether we are investing enough? We need to look ourselves in the eye and ask why there is so little appetite among politicians to invest properly in defence spending. The issue is simply not in our postbags. The NHS is now in receipt of a huge extra budget of £20 billion a year by 2024. The Prime Minister agreed to such an enormous increase because it was clear from the hundreds of colleagues who spoke up on the matter that their constituents had too much unmet need and that resources needed to be increased. We needed to address old age—that great success story of the NHS—and mental ill health, because we want a healthy and happy population, and we now realise that it makes economic sense. In wishing to improve the lives of our constituents, the Government assessed that a step change in funding was required.

Defence, on the other hand, does not feature in our postbags. Commanding officers are not allowed to talk to MPs about the problems they are experiencing, including a lack of investment in the sites that they manage and resources to support their serving personnel, who have no choice about their location and environment. There is no mechanism to share concerns about kit provision or whether we will be able to sustain a long conflict. Due to secrecy or national security, the politicians who should be speaking up about whether more investment in defence is needed have too few facts to assess the reality of the situation.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. Does she agree that this is about not just how much money is spent, but

where it is spent? The national picture is one thing, but there are huge regional disparities in defence spending. For example, it is just £60 per head in Yorkshire, compared with more than £900 in the south-west. That obviously has a huge impact on the jobs that are supported in the defence industry.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I thank the hon. Lady for that point. It is important to look at how we spend that investment for UK prosperity. The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) is nodding—he is thrilled that the south-west is doing particularly well out of the regional disparities. I agree that we need to think about how the funding is allocated.

In the busy life of a constituency MP, it is often too easy to assume that all must be well in our defence investment. Surely no Government would fail to meet their first duty of governing—to protect their people. When budgetary constraints are imposed, our military leaders cannot talk directly to MPs to tell them whether funding is getting to the frontline or into the investment paths that they need to deliver what we ask of them.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. I want to make a technical point about defence spend. We can spend now to save later, but I draw a distinction between capital spend and revenue spend. Everything I have looked at on defence spending in my short two years here suggests that the Ministry of Defence is not being very clever. Going down the capital route, rather than the revenue route, would be much more efficient in the longer term.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The hon. Gentleman pre-empts some of what I am going to talk about. He is absolutely right.

Our doctors and nurses tell us directly and bluntly if the funding systems for the NHS are not working properly so we can do something about it and advocate for them. However, that is not an option for our defence chiefs, so it is hard for us to know whether their resources would be sustainable and resilient if there were a major crisis. The question is not only whether enough funding is going into our defences but whether we are spending it correctly—a narrative that ran successfully after the strategic defence and security review in 2010, when the country was in dire financial straits and the former Member for Whitney had the unenviable challenge of trying to put it back on to a stable financial footing. SDSR '10 declared—conveniently, perhaps, to match the financial crisis—that the Ministry of Defence, like other Departments, had to find efficiencies. There is no question but that that was the right thing to do.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): First, I resent the use of the word “efficiencies”. Basically, that is Treasury speak for cuts, and it would not face up to that. Secondly, the hon. Lady is clearly under a misapprehension: the country was on a very steady path to reducing the deficit. Owing to the crash-and-burn tactics of Mr George Osborne, we went into a recession, which lessened the revenue coming in, deepened the crisis and worsened the deficit.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: As ever, the right hon. Gentleman is a great defender of his party's financial position. I would not choose to pick a fight with him, because he is a staunch defender of all matters defence.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (John Spellar) on the use of the word “efficiency”. It is a fact—there is no reason to hide from it—that the Conservatives in the coalition Government cut the defence budget by 16%.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his comments.

The challenge is that the premise of SDSR '10 was not just financial; it was that there was no longer an existential threat to the UK. It said that Russia was no longer a nation that we had to watch and fear. That has turned out to be a false premise, if it was ever anything other than an excuse to reduce defence spending. We were told that, owing to the sudden outbreak of global neighbourliness, we could return our Army from Germany. The freedom to move safely around international waters was assured because the middle east had become stable and unthreatening to the 20% of the UK's energy requirements that travels by sea through the strait of Hormuz, so a reduction in the size of the ageing fleet was a perfectly sensible idea. Global airspace was going to be full of fluffy clouds and rays of sunshine, so there would be less need to patrol the skies or deliver force from the air to those who wish our allies harm, and we could reduce the number of airframes we would need. All that has, perhaps not surprisingly, turned out to be a false premise.

The Government seemed to make a conscious choice conveniently to forget that new equipment, recruitment and high-tech training takes time and money if we are to maintain our military advantage by having the best and most advanced equipment with the best-trained men and women in the world. I am afraid that SDSR '10 was allowed to set out that false premise due to financial pressures. There was a realignment, as those in post realised that the position that was set out was not right. The work done for SDSR '15 started to assess more honestly the instabilities across the globe and their risks to UK safety and prosperity, but the cash needed did not follow that strategic assessment.

It is a pleasure to see the Minister for the Armed Forces in his place; it is not him whom I challenge, but our Treasury Ministers. The pertinent question is, after setting out what was eventually understood to be required to meet minimum security risks in SDSR '15, why have we not funded it properly to get the outputs that we know we need? We must be able to look our constituents in the eye and promise them that we can defend them. This is about not just the level of GDP that we use to invest in a larger force, but whether we are meeting future need.

In SDSR '10, the MOD declared that we should reduce RAF aircraft numbers substantially while pushing forward with the aircraft carrier class of warship, but by SDSR '15, those decisions had evidently proved incompatible, given that we need to increase aircraft numbers once again. We need to think holistically about transformation—the time it takes, the training requirements to achieve it and the best value-for-money methodology for doing it. As the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) said, that is the invest-to-save model, and the Treasury needs to help the Department. Short-term decisions for annualised cash-flow rules simply

do not work for our defence programme and produce an output that meets our defence needs or our value-for-money rules.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): The hon. Lady is making an excellent speech, and I congratulate her on securing this debate. Her point about through-life costs is very powerful. Does she agree that there should be more scrutiny—possibly independent—of the increase to the overall cost of projects caused by changes early in the cycle? I am, of course, thinking of the decision to delay the vote on renewing the deterrent submarines, which has added a significant amount of risk and cost to the project. Many of us said that to the Government at the time, but there was no ability to assess independently what the increased costs would be.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The hon. Gentleman's point is well made. I will refer to submarines later. We need to challenge the Department continually on whether Committees such as the Defence Committee and the Public Accounts Committee, on which I sit, have the tools to look pre-emptively at the risks of those sorts of decisions.

There is also a mantra that technology is changing how we do everything and that it will, as if by magic, solve all challenges. It is implied that it will make everything cheaper, and that we can stop doing things the old way because there will be a whizzy, less manpower-hungry solution. Although it is true that world-leading UK defence businesses are creating extraordinary cutting-edge kit, that is not the only tool for solving our defence challenges. From Florence Nightingale and her medical advances to Alan Turing, the urgent need to gain advantage over the enemy has always brought out the brilliance of our citizens' inventive genes. Defence has always been at the forefront of innovation because defence in action stretches human ingenuity under the insane pressures of war.

John Spellar: I congratulate the hon. Lady on her excellent speech. However, for industry to be able to respond, there needs to be an industry. That requires the British armed forces and the Treasury to put orders into British factories and British yards, rather than applying a model of international competition that takes no account of the prosperity agenda and no account of the long-term sustainability of the defence industry and its ability to innovate.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: That question of sovereignty and the prosperity agenda—the third pillar of defence's remit—is one we need to continue to challenge. As a Brexiteer, I am happy to say that I think we will have more authority to speak in how we choose to do that—

John Spellar: That's not true.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: Well, that is my opinion. Leaving the EU will give us more flexibility to bring the various parties together and will enable UK businesses, which are world leading, to make their case as effectively as possible.

John Spellar: The hon. Lady should not allow herself to be misled by Treasury-speak. In both European regulations and the Treasury Green Book, the Ministry

of Defence has all the tools it needs to support British industry. The problem is a lack of will. It does not help to blame the EU. The problems are in Whitehall, not in Brussels.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I thank the right hon. Gentleman. The Minister will have heard his perspective.

One of the key issues for defence is its people, who are flexible, selfless, uncomplaining and serve willingly—indeed, alongside the Minister, who puts his life on the line to serve his country. Equipment changes constantly—if it did not, we would still be sending our Navy to sea under sail—but the quality of our people is always critical. We spend more than a third of our defence budget on people. I say that that is an investment, since they are highly trained and we invest in their training throughout their careers, in a way almost no other employer does. However, we classify them as a cost, so departmental behaviour fails to look after them—our human capital—as assets.

We would not fail to repaint a warship—clearly, that would make her less seaworthy or less capable of dealing with the scars of battle—yet we are perfectly content to fail to invest in the personnel who serve, by not looking after their families and by failing to demonstrate what the armed forces covenant should mean: that if someone has served or is serving, this country genuinely thinks they and their family should not suffer disadvantage. It is imperative that we change the financial models the MOD is allowed to use so that our human capital can be classified as an asset. Service chiefs cannot determine how to reward their personnel, because they are not allowed to use their budgets freely to maximise the benefit to their people and their service. For small change—in both senses of the word—the behavioural changes achieved by flexibility would be substantial and immediate.

I believe the reason change is not happening is that the Department and the Treasury fail to understand the nature of military preparedness, and do not seem to question our resilience if we need to put our military under pressure. Although we put kit that is small, plentiful, cheap and speedy to resource on to the soldier, we put highly skilled men and women, who take years to train, into equipment in the Royal Navy and the RAF that takes years to build. A modern warship or fast jet cannot be whipped up in a few months. It is at the mercy of international supply chains, the risks of which, as the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar) mentioned, perhaps are not properly understood.

Importantly, that equipment would take a long time to replace if lost. Although bullets for small arms can be produced at speed if necessary, the missiles sustaining our warships and Air Force cannot be churned through a production line at speed if they are suddenly required. Training a submarine commanding officer or fast jet pilot takes years of investment—it takes time. Too often, it feels like the Department's financial models simply refuse to acknowledge that and fail to understand the human capital investment that is being made, leaving us with huge risk from poorly assessed decisions.

We must consider the key tenets of successful defence and assess whether we are investing enough to sustain them. The first is deterrence. Deterrence works. Nuclear is the ultimate deterrent, but we must never forget that conventional deterrence has greater utility and that

strong power generates respect. Let us consider for a moment our nuclear deterrent in its 50th year in our Royal Navy. Our continuous at-sea deterrent is an extraordinary feat. I always refer to it as our best weapon of peace, because the threat of nuclear war has ensured that we have had no more global wars. Humanity understands genuine existential threat, and the CASD is the embodiment of the UK and USA's global policing, which reminds any rogue state why using a nuclear weapon would be a bad decision. But do we invest properly in our submarine service?

John Woodcock *indicated dissent.*

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head violently. I have talked about the CASD repeatedly in the House since I was elected in 2015. It strikes me as bizarre that the long-term nature of that critical weapon of peace is stuck in a funding framework that stubbornly refuses to allow long-term planning and flexible funding. All credit to the former Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Gavin Williamson), for persuading the Treasury last year to bring forward £600 million of funding—not additional funding but simply to reduce future financial risk—to assist in making efficient decisions to move the Dreadnought programme forward a little more effectively. Deferred cost is always increased cost. I speak as an accountant who has done this many times.

Mr Kevan Jones: The money the hon. Lady refers to was already in the contingency budget. Does she agree that the delay under the coalition Government in making a decision to build the Dreadnought class of submarines not only delayed the programme but added cost to it?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I agree completely. Deferred cost will always be increased cost in such big projects. We need more financial flexibility to get better value for money. Why did we have to battle so hard last year to get the Treasury to move on that £600 million? Why is the Treasury not doing its long-term cash-flow thinking in a rational way? If we are going to keep the CASD—there is overwhelming support for that across the House and the nation—it would make financial sense to allow a multi-year rolling financial commitment so Ministers can make rational decisions.

John Woodcock: The hon. Lady is making a superb case. Is there not a case for going so far as to make good on the commitments, which have been made at various points of the successor programme but then conveniently forgotten when there have been changes of personnel, to properly insulate the programme and remove it from the conventional defence budget? That would allow it to be managed as a proper long-term national endeavour capital commitment, rather than being subject to the in-year in and out of defence spending on other programmes.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I completely agree. Both I and the hon. Gentleman have pushed that campaign. I would not dare to suggest that I want another general election in a hurry, but we attempted to put that in the Conservative manifesto at the last election to bring about a change. I will continue to do that as and when the appropriate moment arises.

[Anne-Marie Trevelyan]

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: the MOD is not like any other Department of State. It has these 20-year programmes, which should be funded in a different way—a more intelligent and stable way. We need to get the Treasury to hear us and realise that the financial models need to be separate so that, exactly as he says, those programmes are treated as national endeavours. In the same way we funded Crossrail through a separate fund so it could roll forward as effectively as possible, despite the often challenging technical issues as we create state-of-the-art kit, we should give those working on these programmes the best financial framework to work within.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Lady is making a very effective case for multi-year spending and the need to reappraise entirely the Green Book principles. Does she agree that, in this instance, the restrictions on multi-year spending for programmes—particularly the Type 26—put at risk our sovereign capabilities, such as the electric motors factory in Rugby, which manufactures critical components for anti-submarine frigates? That may have been lost had the MOD not responded. We cannot continue to fight a war of attrition; we need a strategic approach.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I completely agree. We must continue to hammer home the importance of sovereign capability and work with industry to build opportunities. I say again, despite the criticism of the right hon. Member for Warley, that there will be opportunities once we have left the European Union to think more coherently than we have before—I think we have chosen not to do that—and for us parliamentarians to challenge the system more aggressively on the question of what sovereign capability should look like in the long term. Getting our shipbuilding strategy right will be critical to ensuring that we have throughput of work and know that, if we get into times of crisis, we have the supply chain we need within our borders.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): Some time ago in her speech, the hon. Lady mentioned the Army covenant. I am sure she agrees it is vital that the covenant is implemented in full to servicemen and women in Northern Ireland. Doing so may cost a little more money, but the benefit to those people suffering from post-traumatic stress and mental health issues far outstretches that.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I absolutely agree. In my role as chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on the armed forces covenant, I have spent some time in Northern Ireland, where we have some real challenges at the grassroots level—not the political level—to try to help those who need day-to-day support to look after themselves. I have met some extraordinary women and extraordinary wives—I take the opportunity to say they are extraordinary—who are looking after very damaged former soldiers, some of whom are the hon. Gentleman's constituents. They deserve all credit.

The world is not a safer place, and while the nature of warfare may be changing, at the end of the day we need to be able to reach wherever the threat is, bearing in mind that, as my son always reminds me, five sevenths

of the globe are covered in water. Ships are therefore a critical tool, and our shipbuilding strategy must reflect the importance we play as a United Kingdom, and a critical part of NATO.

The key point is that presence is influence, and with influence come positive outcomes. We cannot do deterrence if we are not there. We saw that demonstrated in stark images on our TV screens last week when HMS Montrose in the strait of Hormuz assured the safe passage of a BP tanker, protecting it from the insurgent threat of Iranian military attack. If Montrose had not been there, I dread to think what might have happened. Freedom of navigation around the world's seas and oceans is critical to our economy: 95% of all our imports come by sea, and it is NATO's navies that keep the sea lanes open for commercial traffic. We would all be very cross indeed and notice quickly if Felixstowe or Dover were shut down by enemy attack. In the same way, just because we cannot see the huge areas of oceans from which our goods and energy are being brought to us, that does not mean we should forget that we need to police those waters, too.

Jamie Stone: What the hon. Lady is saying about the Royal Navy is music to my ears. I look forward to participating in the armed forces scheme next year.

The F-35 is a splendid aircraft that I fully support us buying from the Americans, but the bitter fact is that, as we all know, we will never own all the intellectual property of that aircraft. We will never know exactly how it works because of security aspects. Why should the Americans tell us? That is one reason why keeping manufacture here in the British Isles as much as we can is crucial. Only if we make it, or do so in partnership with others, will we know everything there is to know, with that information being secure.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The hon. Gentleman's point is well made.

The question today is defence spending. Let me therefore share with the House the assessment the Public Accounts Committee made of the latest equipment plan:

"In May 2018 we reported that the Ministry of Defence...did not have enough money to buy and support the equipment it needs."

Bear in mind that buying is 50% and supporting is 50%. Our report continued:

"the Department has made little progress, continuing to delay the difficult decisions needed to make the Equipment Plan...affordable, particularly around which programmes to stop, delay or scale back. It now estimates a most likely affordability gap...of £7 billion across its Plan... It also estimates that the gap could widen to £14.8 billion, but even this looks to be unlikely and overly optimistic. The escalating and continuing affordability issues have led to short-term decision making which has only worsened the longer-term affordability risks."

We continue to watch that on the Public Accounts Committee, but the sense of anxiety just builds as we keep seeing a lack of change in policy frameworks. Instability across the globe is increasing, so if we do not build the equipment we need to achieve our SDSR '15 goals, let alone what those in SDSR '20 might look like, we will simply not be able to meet politicians' requirements.

Politics is about making choices and we need to think carefully about this one. Our military will always offer their political masters choices and solutions as required,

but they may have to bend themselves out of shape with collateral damage, gaps and risks elsewhere in order to do so. I do not believe that we can expect them to do so if we, the politicians, do not give them the funds they need to meet at least the SDSR '15 asks. If we do not show confidence in our military personnel with, in the scheme of things, a very small amount of cash investment in human capital, which is utterly vital to success in warfare, we will continue to lose too many people who have been willing to commit their lives to defending us and our families.

We must not leave our armed forces with the impossible decision of robbing Peter to pay Paul. Short-term decisions on finances can have long-term implications on recruitment, retention and equipment capability and availability. Defence is an insurance policy, so if we get our deterrence right, it stops wars and attacks on us or our allies. That is success, but it costs to achieve that, and it is invisible. No soldiers on our TV screens battling in the desert does not mean that we are not maintaining a global presence to deter those who would wish us and our allies harm. Military personnel are defending us and our way of life invisibly 24 hours a day.

We all have house insurance not because we expect our homes to burn down, but because a roof over our family's head is so important that we plan to protect ourselves just in case. Our armed forces are our nation's "just in case." I worry about how our political leaders sleep soundly at night thinking that we have only a budget insurance policy and hoping that we will never have to claim on it. The budget is large at £40 billion a year, but, without the right decisions and an acceptance that that is not quite enough for what is needed to keep us all safe, the shortfall in funding and financial frameworks leaves us horribly exposed to unknown threats.

We must bring the defence budget up at least to the point where the political ambitions set out in our own SDSRs are matched by the funding for our military experts to deliver those for us. To do that, I estimate we need an increase of some £4 billion a year to the budget and, equally importantly, flexibility to fund long-term projects intelligently for best value and speediest output. It cannot be right that we allow our military personnel to be put at greater risk than they need to be by failing to invest properly in our Army, Navy and Air Force.

I do not mind if the Treasury wants to invest more because it is morally the right thing to do to ensure we can protect our people, our trade and our allies, or simply because it is the right financial method to make better use of taxpayers' money over the long term to get real value for money. If the financial models set out in the Green Book do not deliver that, we should change them so that they do.

We are in charge of our country's destiny and we can set the framework to maximise the positive outcomes for this great nation of ours, which is respected around the world for its military prowess and its people. I thank the Minister for his loyal support of our armed forces, and I hope that the Treasury is listening.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): Order. There are slightly more speakers than we had anticipated, so I will introduce a time limit of three minutes to try to get everyone in. We may have a squeeze at the end if people do not follow that.

9.56 am

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): There is one thing the Conservative party is, and that is consistent. Its Members call for more defence expenditure while in opposition, and when they come into power they cut defence expenditure. In 2010, defence was not immune from austerity and the budget was cut by 16%. The smokescreen the Government put up—that they had inherited a £38 billion black hole in the defence budget—was complete and utter nonsense.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Jones: No, I will let others make their speeches.

Ministers kept repeating that claim. I kept asking them about it, but never got an explanation. I think it came from a National Audit Office report from 2009 that said that if the equipment budget was flat over the next 10 years, that might get us to £36 billion; if it rose with inflation, it would be about £6 billion in the defence capital budget. The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) was talking about the two budgets conflated.

We then saw slash and burn, with stupid decisions such as the scrapping of Nimrod and the Harriers, vicious cuts made to people's pay, and redundancies. That led us to a situation where we have an Army that, at 82,000 personnel, is the smallest it has ever been. No one has yet explained to me how that figure was set.

We are told that the defence budget is rising, but the foundations are shaky. If we look at the 2015 SDSR, we see a huge amount of it is based on billions of pounds of efficiencies that have not yet been and cannot be met. To return to the claim that Labour somehow left a £38 billion black hole, if the situation was so terrible, it is strange that two years in, the right hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond) eliminated it overnight.

In defence, we need honesty. There is a degree of consensus across the House on the support needed for members of our armed forces and for defence. What we need now is an honest stocktake, looking at our commitments and what we want to do in the world, and ensuring that, as the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) said, we fund not just the capital side—equipment is important—but the people. I hear all the time that we can do more with more sophisticated equipment, but as any military technician will say, mass and people are still important. We must invest in them over the long term.

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): The hon. Gentleman can have an extra minute, because the Front-Bench spokespeople have agreed to take only five minutes, so hon. Members have four minutes each.

Mr Jones: I always liked the Minister; he is very good.

Investment in people does not just mean balancing the in-year budget, which I suspect is what has happened. How was money taken straight out of the defence budget in 2010? It happened in two ways: by taking equipment out, as the Government did by putting a wrecking ball through the Nimrod and Harrier programmes; and by slowing the recruitment pipeline.

[Mr Kevan Jones]

That will lead to problems in future years as people develop and we find that we have capability gaps, not in equipment but in people's skills, which are important.

Regarding the Conservative party's commitment to defence expenditure, let us hope that the promises made by the two contenders to become the next Prime Minister hold water. I will support any Government who want to increase spending and, more important, invest in the people we rely on every single day for our peace and security.

10.1 am

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): In the four minutes available, I propose to make two points. First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) on a masterly introduction to the debate. Her timing could have been better—to secure a debate so close to the arrival of a new Prime Minister is perhaps chancing her arm. Nevertheless, if we are to get the issue in the news, we need to link it to that, so I will quote the responses of the two remaining candidates in the race to be the next Prime Minister to my letter of 26 June, which asked about their defence policies.

On 2 July, my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), the former Foreign Secretary, replied:

"The armed forces have done some exceptional work of late in attempting to live within an increasingly stretched budgetary environment. I can give you an absolute commitment to fund defence fully. I believe Military spending should be dictated by the threats we face—and, it is clear that these threats have multiplied in both scale and complexity in recent years. I guarantee, of course, that we will exceed the minimum 2% NATO spending target and the Defence Budget will continue to grow at a minimum of 0.5% annually."

On 8 July, the current Foreign Secretary replied:

"In this leadership campaign, I have given more attention to defence spending than any other candidate. I have pledged to increase the defence budget to 2.5 per cent of GDP over five years. I have argued that additional funds would need to be—made available, I think he means—

"for new capabilities and not simply plugging gaps in existing plans. Were I to become Prime Minister, I would consider the path of further increases in spending once the 2.5 per cent had been achieved."

That is their position.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr Lewis: I had better not, because of time pressure.

Secondly, to coincide with the debate, the Defence Committee has updated its April 2016 report, "Shifting the Goalposts? Defence Expenditure and the 2% pledge", in which we set defence spending in context. We showed that, while we spent similar amounts on education, defence and health in the mid-1980s, we now spend 2.5 times more on education than defence, and 4 times more on health.

Our latest report, which was published today—HC 2527, for those who are interested—has recalculated the figures for the last few years and brought them up to date. It shows that, in the last three years, we have spent 2.1% on defence, if we calculate it from NATO's point of view and bring in extra things such as war pensions,

which never used to count towards the total. If we exclude them, the new report shows that our like-for-like defence spending is only 1.8%. Is that credible in an age when the profile of the threats we face includes an adversarial Russia and the revival of a terrorist threat in the form of Islamist terrorism? When we compare it with the 1980s, when we regularly spent 4.5% compared with 1.8%, or 5% compared with 2.1%, we can see the shortfall.

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): Slightly unusually, if an hon. Member takes an intervention, I will not add on time, because that would push somebody else out at the end and they would not be able to speak.

10.5 am

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): It is good that the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan), who I call a friend, has secured the debate. We disagree on nearly everything except defence, so it is a good place to be.

As Devonport's MP, I talk a lot about defence and defence spending—and rightly so, because it is the country's largest naval base. It is home to the Type 23s with tails, which are soon to be replaced like for like by the new Type 26s; our amphibious capabilities, Albion and Bulwark, although sadly we lost the HMS Ocean due to Conservative cuts earlier in this Parliament; and the basing for the fantastic and underappreciated flag officer sea training arrangements. In Babcock, we have a refit capability that is second to none around the world; it is currently refitting HMS Vanguard and our hunter-killer class.

Devonport is also where we tie up old nuclear submarines; there are 13 awaiting spending to ensure their safe and sustainable recycling. That is why a defence spending debate is important, because those nuclear submarines—those big expensive tickets—frequently drop off the bottom of the priority list. They get left and tied up not only in Devonport but in Rosyth. That is why we need to get our defence spending level right.

The argument that I and the hon. Members for Berwick-upon-Tweed and for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman), who represents Rosyth, have made is that we should use a different funding mechanism to support the recycling of those submarines. We know that the defence budget does not have enough pennies in it and that there will always be a greater priority than recycling old nuclear submarines. Our cross-party argument is that, instead of putting pressure on the Minister, who already has many demands on his time and on the pennies in his budget, the civil clean-up programme that is cleaning up our civil nuclear power stations should be extended to those nuclear submarines.

We have to find a way to recycle those submarines. If we wait for the Ministry of Defence's budget to provide the funds, I fear that we will wait as long again as we already have—many decades. The first submarine was tied up before I was born; we cannot wait that long again for it to be done sustainably. That is why we need to look at the issue carefully.

I agree with the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) on the need to value the whole-life costing and to invest to save. That is certainly

what we need to do with our submarine programme and our future capabilities in naval warfare in terms of the basing arrangements.

I look forward to meeting the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), to talk about the refit of the Stonehouse barracks as an interim measure. It is not right that when at home, not on operations, our Royal Marines are being asked to reside in blocks without hot water or decent heating. That is not acceptable to Plymouth, which is a military city that is proud of its Royal Marines, and it should not be acceptable to any hon. Member. I hope we can put cross-party pressure on Ministers.

We could go into the line-item spending on defence, but we need to start from the top. What are we trying to do with defence? Where is our strategy for it? The 2010 and 2015 strategic defence and security reviews were fronts for cuts; all hon. Members present know that, because we are the defence-focused MPs from every party. They were excuses for cuts and did not portray a decent strategic analysis of where we are as a nation or the threats against us. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed was polite in her description of the 2010 SDSR, but we need a proper review that looks at the real threats that face us and that has a properly funded plan to address them, including long-term industrial strategies for combat air, naval procurement, autonomous marine and autonomous aerial. There is a lot to get right, and we should start with a decent strategy that enables us to look at it properly.

10.9 am

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) on securing this debate and introducing it with such brio. I am delighted to see how many colleagues are present to debate these important matters.

On the defence budget, I was reassured to hear from the Chair of the Defence Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), that my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), who is most likely to win the leadership election, told that Committee

“I can give you an absolute commitment to fund defence fully.”

In the nicest possible way, we should bank that and endeavour to hold him to it if and when he becomes our Prime Minister.

Having been a Defence Minister—I have great respect for the Minister, as he knows—I have always believed that there is a kind of asymmetric conversation between the Ministry of Defence and the Treasury. I will exaggerate slightly for effect, but it essentially goes as follows.

The MOD view is, “Those people over the road don’t know what they’re doing. They don’t understand us. They don’t realise the relentless operational pressure that we have been under for 20 years, or the pressure on our people. They ask us to scrimp and save at every possible opportunity to make false economies that are injurious to the defence of the realm.”

The Treasury view goes something like this: “Those people across the road don’t know what they’re doing. They have £36 billion a year. They don’t manage it very well or control their contractors properly, and waste a vast

amount of it on procurement programmes that go way over budget and come in years late. All they ever do is bleat like children for more money so that they can waste it on more procurement programmes that go wrong.”

Those are the asymmetric views, and the truth probably lies somewhere in the middle. If we are to deal effectively with the defence of this country, rather than that adversarial relationship, which is how I have seen it happen for so long, we have to get those two Departments to work together positively for the benefit of our country and its defence. In fairness, the MOD does have to be better at managing its budget. Some contracts are shocking and the MOD has been deficient in holding contractors to account. The military flying training system is a disaster, partly because of the unavailability of Hawk, and on that, BAE Systems needs to look to its laurels.

The Defence Infrastructure Organisation is not the most efficient part of the Ministry of Defence—the maintenance contract with Amey is awful. The other day, the DIO told the Public Accounts Committee that there was a 64% satisfaction rate, but there is not. In the armed forces continuous attitude survey, the satisfaction rate is actually 32%, which is an appalling statistic. The A400M has been an absolute procurement disaster—it is known as “the dog” by the crews that operate it at RAF Brize Norton—at a cost of £2.6 billion for aircraft with an appalling reliability rating, bad engines and gearbox, and an inability to deliver paratroops. Finally, as the Minister knows, it would be unlike me not to mention my great friends “Crapita,” whose army recruitment contract is utterly hopeless. While the number of applications goes up, the number of people joining goes down.

There is a way through this: whoever they may be, the next Defence Secretary and the next Chancellor—I wish our outgoing Chancellor the very best of luck in his posting in outer Mongolia—need to work together for the benefit of this country’s defence.

10.13 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is always a pleasure to speak in these debates. I congratulate the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) on setting the scene, and thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have contributed.

Like others in this Chamber, I am massively concerned about defence spending, as every hon. Member in this place should be. We are known as a world leader, and for that to be in any way meaningful, it must follow that our defence is top class and that the men and women who wear the uniform of this great country—the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—are irrefutably the best in the world. The very clear fact is that we do not do as well by them as they do by us.

We sit at the NATO target of 2% GDP for defence, but I cannot quite figure out why that figure means that we are doing okay. Some have outlined to me that while the paper trail can look like 2% GDP, the reality is very different. The Chair of the Defence Committee, the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), mentioned the figure of 1.8%, which would not be in order.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Does my hon. Friend agree that when looking at historical defence expenditure, the UK’s defence spending as a

[Mr Gregory Campbell]

percentage of GDP has been reduced by more than 50% over the last 40 years? That is a real indictment of Governments of all types and descriptions. We need to do better by our armed forces.

Jim Shannon: I would adhere to and agree with my hon. Friend's figures.

The obligations on our armed forces are incredible. From war zones to giving aid in peace zones and every area in between, such as simply helping Commonwealth nations to do the right thing on the world stage, as we often do, our men and women are the first on the scene doing the best job, but we stretch our resources in every operation or every time we lend a hand. I put on the record that some of the other NATO countries need to make an effort to meet their obligations. Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania have met theirs, but where is Germany on its NATO contribution?

All that heaps pressure on the everyday running of the forces, on their recruitment processes, and on the training for the next generation. I am not stuck on a figure for military spending, although I would aim high, and while I understand that a bottomless budget is impossible, an adequate one is not—it is essential.

Between 2018-19 and 2019-20, defence spending is planned to increase by an annual average of 1.4% in real terms. Defence spending in 2019-20 is planned to be £1 billion more in real terms than in 2016-17. That is good news, but if that is the figure we are aiming for, will it do the business? Is it enough to ensure that our armed forces personnel have the right equipment at the right time for the battle, the right training for the situation and the right support for when the fighting is done?

At present, what I am hearing is that we simply are not there. Recruitment officials cannot afford to run high-end campaigns to attract the next generation. We do not have the funding to give new recruits the appropriate training in different situations to ensure that they are as prepared as possible. On the frontline, we are certainly lacking in top of the range and fit-for-purpose equipment.

On recruitment, the armed forces have always recruited highly in Northern Ireland, and I understand that the campaign there is going well. Will the Minister give some idea of the recruitment figures? I commend the gallant Minister for his service and for his commitment and interest. I know that when he responds, we will get a reply that we will be happy with. Are we sourcing as much equipment as possible from our own shores to support local industry? Will the Minister ensure that everyone across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland benefits? We also need funding to address the mental health of veterans of all ages.

Our Navy, Air Force and Army are simply the best. We need to do better by them and that is why I support the calls for an increase in defence spending above and beyond the schedule and the target.

10.17am

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) on securing the debate. As someone who represents RNAS Culdrose in my constituency, I

cannot stress enough that base's value to our local area, to our community and to the skills and opportunities afforded to our young people and those who work there.

My hon. Friend was right to challenge us to understand the full value of defence, both of the realm and of UK plc. I do not want to repeat what has already been said, but I will touch briefly on the issue of recruitment and retention of armed forces personnel, starting with where they live and work.

I have seen for myself the standard of accommodation that we expect our armed forces personnel to live in. If we value them as we say we do, and if we want them to join and stay in the armed forces, we must find the money to improve where they live. I challenge the Minister to challenge Government on how serious they are about the climate change emergency, because the Committee on Climate Change clearly recommended an improvement of our accommodation. It is right that we challenge the Government to fund quickly the improvement and retrofitting of armed forces accommodation. That would not come out of the defence budget, but would meet our national and international commitments. Is the Minister prepared to challenge the Government on their commitment to improving the living accommodation of our servicemen and women and their families?

On the working environment, one does not have to go to many bases—I have been to a few—to see that real investment is needed in the places that our armed forces work. There has been a multimillion-pound investment in RNAS Culdrose—it is an amazing piece of work but it has taken us an extremely long time to get there. We used to have hangars that had not been useable for some time. I am pleased to see the work going on there, but I recognise that more is needed there and elsewhere. That is not an easy thing to do when also trying to provide the right kind of kit—the technical expression for our carriers and so on—but it is right that wherever our armed forces are based and work, we give them the safest and best working environment possible.

I will touch on one other area briefly. The armed forces community, as defined in the armed forces covenant, includes regular personnel, reservists and veterans, but not the merchant navy or the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Service. That is relevant to my constituency. The merchant navy is not the armed forces, but it is tough on the children. Mums and dads can be away for the entire school holidays, which will be the case for some of my constituents this summer. They can be caught up in aggressive and intimidating situations around the globe, in particular with attacks by pirates and other rogue individuals elsewhere on the planet. As a result, schools in my constituency have to handle difficult situations. That is not about defence spending, but I would like the Minister to consider whether modern-day threats and the modern-day role of the merchant navy justify including the merchant navy—such as those of my constituents who serve—in the armed forces covenant.

10.21 am

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Betts, for calling me to speak. It is a pleasure to do so in this debate, which was ably introduced by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan).

The figures are stark. Certainly in my lifetime, over the past 30 years, the defence budget has halved as a percentage of GDP. During the austerity programme in the UK over the past decade alone, it has in effect been cut by a quarter. Furthermore, looping in additional spending items such as pensions, as alluded to previously, is fanciful in the extreme as a way to save us from embarrassment by padding out the defence budget. It is certainly not reflected in operational capability, which is at the core of what the budget should be a measure of. Nor was I particularly enamoured of the claims by the possible successors to the Prime Minister of their commitment to defence spending. Even the most extravagant proposal will only return defence spending to the level under the previous Labour Government when they left office in 2010, at 2.5% of GDP. That is not a dramatic transformation of the defence budget, because even then defence faced significant resourcing challenges.

One of the biggest aspects of defence expenditure—and the measures applied to it by the Treasury—to have a deleterious effect on operational capability is multi-use and generational spending, as alluded to by the hon. Lady. That was a critical part of Sir John Parker's report which, unfortunately, did not make it into the final national shipbuilding strategy—I wonder why. The critical piece of advice, or observation, on the failure of existing capital programmes was to do with the lack of an assured capital budget, as well as a lack of a grip on design trade-offs at an early stage in the programme. Crucially, the advice was not incorporated into the national shipbuilding strategy, and that will lead to significant increases in programme inefficiency.

The Ministry of Defence itself has calculated that an increase of 1% in the delay to programme time leads to a 0.38% increase in programme cost. Why then, for the sake of balancing the budget in year, was the Type 26 frigate programme's drumbeat increased from 18 months to 24 months—a 33% increase? By my calculations, that leads to a baseline increase of 7% in the overall programme cost over that time. That does not include the fact that it also militated against investment in the capital infrastructure that would have delivered an upper-quartile shipbuilding industry in the UK—"upper quartile" refers to being benchmarked against other shipyards around the world. Getting our processes and methods correct—world-class—was militated against by the need to balance in-year budgets. That acted further against increased efficiency, throughput and, ultimately, combat effectiveness, and against the increased size of the Royal Navy.

That is the ultimate absurdity in the vicious cycle perpetuated by the existing funding model. That is why I welcome the Labour party's commitment to tear up the Green Book, because it is thoroughly unfit for purpose when it comes to major defence equipment programmes. We therefore need a thorough review of how we ensure assured capital budgets for major defence procurement programmes. I hope that the Minister will allude to how the Type 26 programme's increase from 18 to 24 months is an effective use of public money.

Also, why are this Government not invested in the upper-quartile shipbuilding facilities necessary to further maximum benefit to this country from the Type 26 programme? We have already seen its huge export success. Furthermore, the Australians and Canadians are investing in upper-quartile facilities, but the UK is not. That is a

sad indictment of a failure of the investment cycle in UK defence procurement. The Government need to get a grip on that and to sort it out quickly. Moreover, Sir John Parker's report is not reflected in the national shipbuilding strategy, and I encourage the Minister to consider that critical and glaring omission, and to incorporate it into revisions of the national shipbuilding strategy to ensure that we maximise the impact of our defence budget on operational capability.

10.25 am

David Warburton (Somerton and Frome) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I join with others in paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) not only for securing this debate but for her consistent championing of our armed forces.

It is worth putting the debate in the context of our international alliances. This year, NATO celebrated its 70th birthday. Despite discussion about its long-term future, I think that future looks bright. Since the 2004 Wales summit, non-US spending among the other member states has increased by \$87 billion, and the UK's record of consistently meeting the 2% target—although there is debate about that, which I understand—is symbolically and politically important.

NATO faces some real challenges. The UK's spending commitments are therefore more important than ever. Given the geopolitical situation, it is no accident that Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia have been among those most keen to see their defence expenditure meet the 2% target that has already been met by the UK and US. Furthermore, as we leave the EU, 80% of NATO forces will be contributed by non-EU members. Given Brexit, however, our commitment to co-operate with our European allies must remain a key element of our strategic direction and spending.

Despite all the successes achieved as a result of British defence spending—whether our strong record of meeting our NATO target, the fact that we are the only country to meet both that target and the 0.7% on aid, or the Government's increased support for our cyber-capabilities announced in last year's Budget—we need to address the real financial strains faced by our armed forces, as we have rightly heard about. The Public Accounts Committee has identified a £7 billion funding gap in Ministry of Defence expenditure, which could double over the next 10 years. As hon. Members also know, the nature of defence procurement can often lead to a Catch-22, in which piecemeal spending on capital projects can cause delays and consequent increases in expenditure.

When the new Prime Minister, whomever it might be, gets his feet under the table, a real priority will be to make a clear-eyed and long-term assessment of those capital projects, with a commitment to increased defence spending. I was pleased to hear the potential new Prime Minister's words in that respect.

As the Defence Secretary said recently, however, the value of our defence industries, supply chains and armed forces goes beyond what we think of as specifically military activities. UK defence spending provides employment right across the country, not least in my constituency. The £293 million contract signed between the MOD and Leonardo helicopters in Yeovil was welcomed across the south of my constituency, not just

[David Warburton]

by Leonardo employees but by those whose companies are part of the supply chain. Beyond the purely economic, the Defence Secretary was right to highlight the role that our armed forces play in increasing social mobility, binding communities together and exemplifying those real values which they are called on to defend.

The three objectives set out in SDR '15 remain of paramount importance: protecting our influence; projecting our global influence; and promoting our prosperity. As we take stock of whatever Brexit resolution is achieved in future, it is vital that it does not undercut either our commitment to the security frameworks that have guaranteed peace on our continent, or Britain's ability to project its power in defence of our values and interests.

10.29 am

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) on securing this timely and important debate, and on her enthusiasm and support for and her commitment to our armed forces and veterans. That is fantastic.

I must respond to the remarks of the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), whom I consider a friend, on how when Conservatives come into office we have to make some pretty tough decisions. The reason for that is very simple: every single Labour Government in history leave a mess to clear up, and we cannot defend our country if we are broke. As we regain our status as a sovereign, self-governing country—*[Interruption.]* I did not interrupt the hon. Gentleman, so I ask for the same respect.

It is important that the UK is both a credible partner and a reliable ally. That means that the UK has to remain a tier 1 military power. We must retain a global reach and, if necessary, a sustainable level of effort either as a coalition partner or unilaterally. To achieve that, we must be able to field top-of-the-range equipment that can go up against any near peer competitor. We must not return to the situation when we deployed troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, where our forces were nicknamed “the borrowers” because we did not have adequate funding from HM Government to deploy and protect our people on those operations. We must also understand the threats that emanate from non-state actors or terrorists who seek to undermine our way of life and denigrate our resilience by attacking our critical national infrastructure in a cyber-attack. All that requires investment and a sustainable defence budget.

In the time I have left I will focus on the benefits of defence spending to our economy. The Royal United Services Institute estimates that for every £1 spent by Government on orders in the UK defence sector, well over a third—36%—is returned to the Treasury via taxation. The UK defence industrial sector is one of the world's strongest, with an annual turnover of £22 billion, and it supports 260,000 jobs, many of which are highly skilled and well paid. I am proud to represent a constituency that is home to many of our world-class defence manufacturers, as well as the Ministry of Defence's defence acquisition service at Abbey Wood, which employs roughly 8,000 people.

I am passionate about social mobility and apprenticeships. The Ministry of Defence is the largest provider of apprenticeships in the country; it has enrolled 53,000 civil service and armed forces apprentices since April 2015. Over 90% of military non-commissioned personnel now gain an apprenticeship as part of their trade training and first assignment. In 2018 the UK defence sector employed 4,400 apprentices. They are crucial to develop and continue our sovereign defence capability, and to develop the skills of our military personnel so that when they go back to civilian life after their service, they have the electronic and cyber skills and all the things they could need in future. As I said, 250,000 jobs are supported, so there is a huge argument for having a sustainable, properly funded MOD when we get to the comprehensive spending review.

Most of us would agree that we should, at least, maintain our minimum commitment of 2% of GDP: most would argue it should be nearer 3% to sustain what we are trying to do on a global stage and to continue our global reach. For social mobility, apprenticeships are a vital route to provide engineers and scientists, of which we are already short, and to give employees the necessary skills for our country for the future.

10.32 am

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) on her passionate advocacy on all occasions and on the very valuable and insightful points that she made.

In the 1990s, we saw a supposed peace dividend. I suggest that was illusory then and, in the face of a revanchist Russia, is folly now. We live in a world of great power threats, where there are diversifying, multiple non-state actor threats, too. It is right that we invest properly in our armed forces.

We tend always to have this debate in the context of kit. I welcome the fact, as the Minister will probably remind us in due course, that we are due to see two new aircraft carriers coming on stream, and the F-35s too. Of course, we need enough to make sure that we can operate both carriers, but that may be a point for another day. I welcome the Poseidons coming on stream; the first British-marked example flew only last week. I very much value that, but we must not just see all those as expensive baubles that are signature-tick projects to show we are investing in defence. We need a holistic approach to our armed forces.

I am grateful that my hon. Friend mentioned deterrence—she is quite right—but she will realise, as I am sure most hon. Members do, that we need layered defence deterrents for them to work at all. It is no good simply relying on the nuclear deterrent, because that is devalued hugely if there are not the layers to support it. What we have done in the past is simply to salami-slice the defence budget—chop a programme here and a capability there, in order to make ends meet. That simply will not do. We need a strategic assessment of the threats we face and what kind of power we want to be: do we want to be a full-spectrum tier 1 power? If we do, we need to fund our forces appropriately for the threats we wish them to defend against.

We have to see the value of the kit beyond just the capability it provides. I always refer to the glory of the 1960s aviation industry in this country—multiple companies producing wonderful multiple aircraft—but that world simply does not exist anymore. We could buy cheap, capable kit off the shelf from the Americans. That is one philosophical approach we might take, although I do not think we should and I doubt many of us do, because we would lose our sovereign capability and investment in industry.

We have to accept, therefore, that if we want sovereign capability, it requires the Government to invest not just in money but in strategy. In the past, we have taken neither approach; we have bought a bit of kit; we have invested in some kit; we have built some kit ourselves; we have collaborated in other kit, but with no overall holistic approach. My view is unequivocal: we should have that sovereign capability for reasons of national defence and because it employs hundreds if not thousands of people in our industries. We are very good at it, and it provides the skills that our young people would like, but it requires Government investment in planning.

I very much welcome the shipbuilding and combat air strategies but, as has been referred to, we need plans for a number of other things, including autonomous capability, helicopters, transport tankers, carriers and training—there are probably others. Above all, we need the Treasury to recognise the value of defence and not the cost. I see that when representing RAF Brize Norton. It is difficult to expect bright young people to serve if they cannot get a hot shower in the middle of winter, or if they see that their accommodation is nowhere near as good as what their friends have in the private sector. Those bright young men and women do have options.

I will just make a plug with the Minister for the REEMA sites at RAF Brize Norton, which need redevelopment—I know it is not his fault. We have brownfield sites there. It is having an effect on west Oxfordshire's housing stock and on the young men and women who serve at RAF Brize Norton. I appreciate that is not the Minister's fault but the Treasury's. The Treasury must see the value, not the cost. It needs to revalue the Green Book and see defence not as a cash drain but a net gain to the UK economy.

10.37 am

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) for securing this important and most interesting debate.

It is crucial that the UK has robust and reliable combined armed forces that are well trained, properly equipped and ready to respond as required to keep our nation and its people safe and secure. That is ever more important as the threats to our nation evolve in intensity, intertwined with ongoing scientific and technological advances. Hopefully, the modernising defence programme launched in January 2018 is taking account of those somewhat fast-moving developments.

Having worked in the emergency services, I appreciate that our armed forces personnel are going into situations that others are escaping from. Added to that, they will engage in conflicts where the norms on law, order and safety no longer apply. The Government must consider their duty of care to armed forces personnel prior to,

during and after committal; no doubt, their health and wellbeing underpins any successful mission. Armed forces personnel may be called on to put their lives on the line to protect us from harm, and we need to afford them the best protection available. That certainly will mean spending more money on personal protective equipment or military equipment. Surely, it is preferable for all involved to spend money by choice than to be decreed by a court to pay compensation, which has an impact on the morale of our service personnel and those wishing to join.

The Government have taken much needed and welcome measures, as has been mentioned, to improve housing provision for armed forces personnel, increased allowances and tax reliefs, and facilitated access to rehabilitation centres. However, I hope they will not rest on their laurels, but continue to review that important aspect of defence spending as part of a continuous improvement programme. We heard earlier that there is much more to be done on housing for our service personnel.

Our involvement is further afield, too. As was the case with our forebears in the two world wars, our armed forces may be called upon to assist in defence partnerships with other nations. I hope—like many others, I am sure—that responding in anger will seldom be required in future, but with that will come a greater focus on peacekeeping assistance throughout the world and the opportunity for the armed forces to bring their unique skills to bear on local civil contingencies. That said, for our children and grandchildren, cyber-space may be the war zone of the not too distant future.

Let us be clear: funding for our armed forces depends on a strong economy, which only the Conservative Government can fund; not the fairy tale finances that we hear about from other quarters. UK defence spending over the last five years has been stable at around £36 billion in real terms, increasing this year to around £38 billion. Minister, is that really enough?

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): Despite the future of RM Condor in my constituency and jobs across Scotland being secured by the UK Government, does my hon. Friend recognise that we have not seen a firm commitment from the SNP that they would still be secure in an independent Scotland?

Bill Grant: I recognise that there has been little or no comment about defence for Scotland from the SNP, but I welcome the investment in Scotland by the Ministry of Defence, not least in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Finally, in relation to the defence transformation budget of £160 million ring-fenced from the defence budget, I would be grateful to know if the Minister expects the stated possibility of a further £340 million to be raised as part of the spending review.

Our regular servicemen and women, in addition to the reservists who balance a civilian life with commitment to the armed forces, are talented people from a diverse range of backgrounds. They deserve our fullest support. That means investment in our armed forces and those who serve in them.

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): We now come to the contributions from the Front Benches. Please do not exceed the guideline of six minutes, as that allows a minute for the mover to wind up.

10.41 am

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): It is always good to see you in the Chair, Mr Betts. I sincerely congratulate the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) on securing the debate and the fine way in which she opened it.

The hon. Lady invited us to consider the issue of defence spending in its purest sense. How does one fund a public service, the most critical public service that the Government can fund and preside over? In her opening remarks, she urged us to consider not just the sum of money spent on defence but how that money is spent across the Department. As we say in Scotland, there has been a fair kick of the ball on that issue here today, but we again find ourselves with the Defence Minister—it is always good to see him on the Front Bench—and not with a Treasury Minister. For those who are new to defence debates, although most of us here are regulars, that is something we have yet to use our collective ingenuity to achieve.

When considering defence spending, in my mind there are three clear elements that the process should contain. The first is to analyse the threat picture. It has been mentioned this morning that it is increasingly complex, fast-changing and differing day to day, hour to hour. There is then a decision to be made on the capability that is required in order to meet the threats that we face. The third step is to fund, fund and fund that necessary capability.

There is an entirely legitimate political debate to be had—indeed, the public would expect no less—over how well served we are by the current set-up. It is a debate about which Members here today, certainly those in my party, have tried to encourage some thinking outside the box. At the moment, we have a Department that is constantly chasing its tail and is ill-served by political posturing, some of which regrettably has been on display here this morning; there are warring political factions in the governing political party and Government Departments are set off against each other.

Indeed, the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) said that the Treasury does not understand the Ministry of Defence. I will come back to that, but he said something even more revealing: he asked us to go to the bank with a promise from the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), the likely next Prime Minister, that he would fund defence fully. Well, he is hardly going to say he will fund defence partially. The right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford might run to the bank, but we need detail, and we have not had that from either of the prospective Prime Ministers, despite the warm words.

If we go back to the first step in how I see devising how much is spent and how it is spent, we need a greater, more robust and more sophisticated discussion in the House about the threat picture that we face. When we get on to how we fund the capabilities required, we need a shift to multi-year defence agreements—something I raise in just about every debate we have.

There have been interesting and subtle shifts in the language used, particularly by Conservative Members when they talk about multi-year arrangements. I have asked previously if the Government are looking at bringing in proper multi-year defence agreements, similar to the model used in Denmark, for example. The previous

Minister for Defence Procurement, the hon. Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb), said that was being looked at; the current Minister for Defence Procurement says that is being looked at. I ask the Minister, when can Parliament expect to hear some more detail? I think that would lead to the end of tin-eared design and outcomes, such as the closure of the Royal Navy base in Rosyth, which is the only Royal Navy base in the north-east of these islands.

I disagree vehemently with other Members about nuclear weapons; look at how they have done nothing but haemorrhage money as though it were going out of fashion. That is before we get to other issues, such as submarine decommissioning, that I know the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed has an interest in. We would have an end to National Audit Office reports, detailing a black hole of up to £15 billion in the equipment plan.

People are the greatest asset the Ministry of Defence has; they are the real deterrent. When she opened the debate, the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed adumbrated the need for a long-standing SNP policy—perhaps she did not mean to—of having an armed forces representative body to better represent those in the armed forces, veterans and their families, and so get better outcomes for them. It is often said that defence does not win votes, but it can certainly lose them. I fear that collectively this House is getting that wrong.

Last, I encourage Members to read an excellent academic paper called “Military Strategy of Small States: Responding to External Shocks of the 21st Century” before they come to the next defence debate. It is written by three Swedish academics, and it is about the relationship between the threat picture, the money that is spent and the political discussion, which needs to be more sophisticated in this place.

10.47 am

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I congratulate the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) on securing this important debate and on setting out the case. She highlighted the fact that defence does not feature in our postbags, as we are all aware, and as a result it does not get the focus it needs. She also talked about the conscious choice by Government in recent years to reduce Government spending on defence, which, as she said, was based on a false premise.

There were some excellent contributions to the debate, from my right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), the right hon. Members for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) and for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois), my hon. Friends the Members for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) and for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney), as well as the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon), for St Ives (Derek Thomas), for Somerton and Frome (David Warburton), for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti), for Witney (Robert Courts) and for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant). One point of consensus that all the speakers highlighted in different ways was the need to increase defence spending.

Labour is committed to spending at least 2% of GDP on defence, in line with our NATO commitments. The last Labour Government consistently spent well above the 2% figure. Sadly, since then we have seen a sharp fall

in the real-terms value of the defence budget. Independent analysis by the House of Commons Library has shown that defence spending in the last financial year was £9.3 billion lower in real terms than when Labour left office.

The debate is ongoing on the appropriate level of defence spending, with both candidates for the Conservative leadership adding their thoughts. That is particularly galling when both of them have consistently voted for budgets that have slashed defence spending to what it is today.

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster): In his haste to criticise the leadership candidates for their commitments to increase defence spending, can the hon. Gentleman point to a single speech where the Leader of the Labour party—not its defence spokesman—has indicated that he wishes to increase defence spending?

Gerald Jones: I was not attacking the comments of the candidates for the Conservative party—they are welcome. I was saying that it is galling that they voted for cuts. The Leader of the Opposition has highlighted, as did the last Labour party manifesto, our commitment to a 2% minimum for defence spending, in line with the NATO commitment. He has also said that we cannot do defence on the cheap. He is as committed as our party to spending on defence.

Added to the squeeze on defence spending is the fact that the MOD's purchasing power has suffered from the fall in the value of sterling after the Brexit vote. Of course, what matters is not just what is spent, but how it is spent. As we debated last Thursday in this Chamber, we need to use the defence pound to support UK prosperity and to back UK defence workers. Labour wants more MOD defence contracts to be awarded here in the UK, and we would like to start with UK-only competition for the fleet solid support ships. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (John Spellar) highlighted, that is a matter of political will. Not only is it vital that we support the UK defence industry to retain our sovereign capability; we also know that investing in the UK leads to additional revenue coming back to the Exchequer in taxation, higher national insurance contributions and lower social security payments—not to mention the value of apprenticeships and spending in the wider economy.

We know from reports by Oxford Economics that the UK defence industry has an output multiplier of 2.3, which means that a £100 million investment in the UK industry generates some £230 million to the UK economy. Its reports have also highlighted the fact that each additional job created in the manufacturing element of the defence industry results in a further 1.8 jobs being created in the wider economy. I am sure that the Minister will want to convey that message to the Treasury. Of course, sufficient levels of defence spending depend on an economy that is growing, so I hope that the Minister will join the Opposition in opposing a harmful no-deal Brexit, which would be damaging to our GDP and would therefore threaten all Government spending, including spending on defence.

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): I thank all the Front Benchers for co-operating in reducing the time they take on their speeches.

10.52 am

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) on introducing the debate. There can be few in Parliament so passionate about the armed forces and I am not surprised that it is she who called the debate. It has been highly constructive and has demonstrated a gratifying commitment to the defence sector on both sides of the House. We should start on a note of agreement: clearly everyone in the Chamber wants the defence budget to continue to rise, and that is gratifying. It is tempting to pick up on another point where we all agree—that it is the Treasury that is the enemy; but I cannot possibly say that. With a reshuffle coming next week, I do not want to limit my options too far. They are already pretty narrow, so let us not go further.

Mr Kevan Jones: DEFRA beckons.

Mark Lancaster: I doubt it.

As has been said, the first duty of any Government is the safety and security of the British people at home and abroad. I am proud that the Government have delivered on their NATO pledge to spend at least 2% of GDP on defence. They will be spending more than £186 billion on equipment and equipment support between 2018 and 2028. Aside from ensuring that our armed forces have the latest and best capability, our investment of around £19 billion a year underpins a world-class British industry, providing direct employment for 115,000 people and nearly 400,000 more across the wider supply chains. That substantial and sustained investment is not only vital to our national capability and prosperity and to supporting economic growth. It is also vital to our ability to counter the rising threats that menace us and all NATO members, including a resurgent and increasingly assertive Russia, and extremist terrorism across the world.

This year NATO celebrates 70 years as the foundation of our mutual security. The UK is one of very few NATO members that meet both their core spending guidelines by spending 2% of GDP on defence, of which 20% goes on major equipment and associated research and development. Defence spending in many NATO states is still too low, and although our allies are making progress on burden sharing, they must do more. The increase mirrors rising defence spending across the world, which makes it vital that the UK maintains its position as a leading player on the world stage.

The upcoming spending review is an opportunity to reprioritise our national investments across defence, ensuring that we can meet whatever the future may throw at us in an era of intensifying threats. The Department has done a great deal to drive out inefficiencies in defence, and there is more to be done, but we must also invest in new capabilities and in transforming the way defence operates, so that we can continue to defend the UK and project our influence.

First, we must mobilise defence to meet rising threats. The international situation is darkening. The rules-based order that has kept the peace for so long is under constant pressure and the external threats that confront us increasingly come from multiple directions. Despite

[Mark Lancaster]

the coalition's success in degrading the power of Daesh, the threat of terrorism is still with us, while malign cyber-warfare and proxy warfare are rapidly changing the face of conflict. The nation's approach to future spending decisions must reflect those new realities.

Secondly, we have to modernise and innovate—to embrace new technologies to ensure we have a competitive edge over our adversaries and to identify opportunities to sustainably reduce our cost base, which will require some up-front investment. The Department is investing about £800 million through the defence innovation fund to keep us ahead of the curve, and ring-fencing £160 million of its budget this year for the new transformation fund. Thirdly, on efficiencies, defence has to transform the way it does business by liberating new industry thinking and tackling the behaviours and practices that have racked up excessive costs in the past. That means tackling the mindset of short-term decision making that leads to poor value for money. We must invest in technology now for long-term savings.

I want to answer a couple of points raised in the debate. The MOD does not collate defence expenditure figures for regions, but the average spend per person in the UK was £290 in 2017-18, and the MOD spends some £19 billion a year supporting 115,000 jobs. That means that one in every 220 jobs in the UK is in defence. On the accusation that there have been cuts under the present Government, since 2014 defence spending has increased year on year and we now spend £39 billion—rising to £40 billion by 2020. [Interruption.] I would also say to the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), having served in Afghanistan in 2006, that the sort of commitment that we had, with so many of our troops serving on operations overseas in Iraq and Afghanistan, made for an environment very different from today's. With the different threats we face at any one time, it is sometimes difficult to compare like with like. Our relationship with strategic suppliers in the UK defence and security sector is vital. The armed forces support an industrial base in the UK providing employment to about half a million people.

I was delighted that many Members raised the issue of mental health in the debate. In the autumn Budget the Chancellor announced £10 million to support veterans' mental health and wellbeing needs, and in January the armed forces covenant fund opened a £3 million funding programme to fund innovations and improvements to veterans' community centres. We are considering investing more in veterans' mental health. Accommodation is another key issue for many service personnel. We are looking closely at the new accommodation model, which is aimed at giving choice to service personnel. Equally, on pay, the Armed Forces Pay Review Body has recently presented its latest findings, to which the Government will respond in due course.

I end on a note of consensus again. I am delighted that in this Chamber at least we are committed to armed forces personnel, and to a rising defence budget.

10.58 am

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I thank all colleagues and the Minister for their continuing commitment to the armed forces and for speaking out so that those who have no voice of their own know that many of us in the House understand the incredibly difficult role they play in our defence. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) said, they run towards danger as most of us are running away from it. It is extraordinary that there are people willing to do that—as he did as a fireman—in defence of our nation, security and children. The issue is not a percentage figure; it is about making sure we can meet the operational requirements, whatever problems arise.

As ever, I thank the Minister for his support and his willingness humbly to agree that it is the Treasury we need to continue to fight. We will find a way, as the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) said, to bring the Treasury to us to listen to the arguments. I think we all agree that funding for defence is not like funding for any public service Department and we must find new, more effective ways to spend taxpayers' money.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered defence spending.

Public Health Funding: Enfield

11 am

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (IGC): I beg to move,

That this House has considered public health spending in Enfield.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts.

I requested this debate to highlight some of the harsh realities stemming from the Government's decision to slash the public health grant to our community, and to draw attention to the fact that the ongoing uncertainty around long-term funding is prompting a crisis in public health. Our council's ability to deliver a range of public health services aimed at preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting good health is being seriously affected.

The Government's national health service long-term plan may have put prevention at the heart of its policy but, to quote David Finch, senior fellow at the Health Foundation:

"The sustained cuts to the public health grant clearly run counter to these aims. The public health grant is not a nice-to-have. Without urgent reinvestment, we will continue to see a direct impact on people's long-term health".

Last month, the Health and Social Care Committee said that cuts to public health services were a "false economy". Cancer Research UK and more than 80 other organisations have come together to call on the Government to provide a sustainable solution for public health. Ministers must take immediate and positive action to increase investment in public health, to reduce health inequalities and to support our health and social care system.

I will take this opportunity to pay tribute to the work of the Enfield Over 50s Forum and its president, Monty Meth, who is sitting in the Public Gallery today with many of the forum's members. Their typically dogged campaign to highlight the cuts to Enfield's public health grant and the disparity in per-person funding between our borough and other councils in London has forced this issue to the top of our community's agenda.

The Minister should be well aware of the forum's work on this matter, given the number of letters that its members have written to her and her Department in recent weeks and months—although, sadly, their letters have not received a considerate ministerial response. Instead, they have received a reply from the Department's correspondence unit that, to put it mildly, leaves a lot to be desired.

One constituent with impeccable manners, who forwarded me a copy of the letter he received, described the response as "baloney." Another resident labelled the reply "meaningless" and "full of Whitehall gobbledygook", and it is hard to disagree with that analysis when they are treated to phrases such as:

"The formula is designed to generate target allocation shares of a funding envelope".

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, because the baseline funding has been set from 2013, it takes no account of changes in the population of Enfield to do with age, poverty and other factors that might hugely affect the funding that Enfield actually deserves right now?

Joan Ryan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; that is a key factor in this whole scenario.

On the kinds of responses that constituents are receiving, surely responses from Government Departments to citizens raising legitimate concerns on important issues should seek to clarify and not to cloud matters? I do not raise this point as an attack on civil servants, but to urge the Minister—and it is her responsibility—to provide some clear and full responses to the concerns I raise today on behalf of the Enfield Over 50s Forum and our whole community in Enfield.

Given that the population in London boroughs—including Enfield, as my hon. Friend has said—is growing twice as fast as in the rest of the country, the pressure on already strained public health resources is only set to intensify over the coming years. Enfield has some of the most poverty-stricken and deprived wards in the country, and we all know that poverty and poor health are inextricably linked.

According to a recent report by the Child Poverty Action Group, our borough is one of the 20 local authorities in the UK with the highest levels of child poverty after housing costs are taken into account. There are almost 40,000 children in poverty, or four in 10 children in the borough. Obesity rates for children in reception class are higher than the average in London and in England, and more than four in 10 year 6 children in Enfield are either overweight or obese, the eighth highest rate of all London boroughs.

However, it is not just children affected by serious public health issues in Enfield, but adults and the elderly too. Our rates of diabetes are higher than the London and England average. Cancer Research UK recently revealed that being overweight is a bigger cause of bowel, kidney, ovarian and liver cancer than smoking. More than six in 10 adults in Enfield are overweight or obese, a significantly higher rate than in London in general. Our bowel cancer screening rates for people aged 60 to 74—one of the best ways to diagnose bowel cancer earlier—are only just over 50%. That is lower than the average in England and far lower than the rate of 75% of eligible people taking part recommended by Cancer UK.

One of the most pressing issues facing our community and our country at the moment is the impact of serious violence and knife crime. I held a packed community meeting on Saturday on this issue, talking about how to keep our young people and our streets safe. Earlier this year, Enfield had the highest rate of serious youth violence in the capital. In 2018 alone, North Middlesex Hospital had to deal with the consequences of 1,457 assaults, including stabbings and gunshot wounds.

To protect staff and patients on site and reassure the local community of their continued safety whenever they visit the hospital, North Middlesex increased its security spend by an additional £149,000 and had to hire two additional overnight security guards in its busy accident and emergency department, at a cost of £3,000 per week. North Middlesex Hospital should not have to use its already stretched budget to address a situation that is not of its making. Every penny that is spent on these interventions is money that is diverted away from essential patient care.

Both the Government and the Mayor of London want to tackle the knife crime crisis with a public health response. That is an important and welcome initiative,

[Joan Ryan]

but if the Home Secretary is going to implement a legal duty on the police, councils and the NHS to share information and intelligence, then those bodies will need the resources to make it effective.

The public health system is already at crisis point. We require a public health budget that addresses the desperate needs of our community in the immediate and long term. But where is the support from the Government? The Prime Minister has declared that austerity is over, so where are the resources to reverse the cuts suffered by our public health services?

When the NHS long-term plan was launched the Prime Minister said:

“We also know we need to...support prevention and public health, both for the benefits they bring in themselves and to relieve pressure on NHS care.”

In 2018, the then Health Secretary, the right hon. Member for South West Surrey (Mr Hunt), told the House that “there cannot be a transformation of the NHS without a proper emphasis on public health.”—[*Official Report*, 18 June 2018; Vol. 643, c. 61.]

The current Health Secretary has said that prevention is one of the three pillars of his stated priorities. He also said:

“Each year, we are spending £97 billion of public money on treating disease and only £8 billion preventing it across the UK—that’s an imbalance in urgent need of correction.”

What urgency has he shown to fix this imbalance? That statement was made more than eight months ago.

While parts of it were leaked to the press over the weekend, we still await the formal publication of the Government’s Green Paper on public health and the future of funding. Analysis by the Health Foundation shows that the public health grant is now £850 million lower in real terms than the initial allocations in 2015-16. Last month, the Health Foundation and the King’s Fund stated:

“With the Spending Review likely to be delayed, key funding decisions will be postponed and as a result, the grant will face a further real-terms cut of £50 million in 2020/21 under provisional plans...With population growth factored in, £1 billion will be needed to restore funding to 2015/16 levels.”

Enfield is one of the communities to really bear the brunt of these savage cuts. Our borough’s grant is the 9th lowest in London, at £48 per head of population, compared with the London average of £71—a gap of £23—and we are getting £2 less per person this year than last year. In total, we are receiving £440,000 less from the public health grant this year than in 2018.

In addition, Enfield is one of five London boroughs that make up the NHS’ north central London sustainability and transformation partnership, which has pledged to reduce health inequalities for its 1.5 million residents. Haringey, Camden and Islington receive £70, £99 and £104 per head respectively for public health funding. I recognise that these boroughs also have considerable public health needs, but I do not understand how the disparity in public health funding between boroughs in the same area can be so large. There is then the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, which is allocated £130 per person for public health—almost three times more per head than Enfield. Where is the evidence that Kensington and Chelsea’s public health needs are almost three times worse than Enfield’s?

It is not as if Enfield Council can step in and plug some of the gaping holes in public health funding. Up to 2018-19, the core funding the council received from the Government to provide vital services was slashed by an average of £800 per household. Ongoing Government cuts and increased demand on services mean that the council has to find another £18 million of savings this year and then £12 million more the next. Austerity is clearly not over in Enfield. The cuts will continue to bite for the foreseeable future unless the Government do something about it.

What I find so frustrating is that the extent of these cuts to our public health system, and to local government, are so short-sighted; they have immediate and long-term adverse consequences. In April, when I asked the Minister for her assessment of the correlation between the levels of public health funding allocated to Enfield and the effectiveness of the provision of public health services in our borough, the response I received was:

“We have made no specific assessment of any relationship between funding...and the effectiveness of services in Enfield.”

Really? Maybe this type of assessment is required so that her Department can gain a better understanding of the public health situation in Enfield, as well as in other communities across the country. Will the Minister resolve to look again at this issue?

Given the pressing public health issues in Enfield I have outlined today, is the Minister willing to commit, at the very least, to reinstating the £440,000 cut in public health funding suffered by our borough this year? Does the Minister accept the need to increase the level of public health funding allocated to our borough to at least the London average each year? And does the Minister agree that Enfield urgently needs its public health system to be put on a sustainable footing? More widely, I want to hear from the Minister about the future of public health funding. Can she provide any indication of when the Green Paper will be released? Can we hold out any hope that the calls from the Health Foundation and the King’s Fund to reverse the £1 billion a year cut to public health funding will be acted upon?

There is a lack of clarity on the Government’s previously announced plans to phase out the public health grant to local authorities by 2021 and to instead fund public health through the proposed 75% business rates retention scheme. Cancer Research UK says that the continued uncertainty around the public health funding formula means it remains concerned about the potential negative implications of business rates on local service delivery. There is no point in Ministers extolling the virtues of a robust public health system if, in reality, all they do is weaken the prevention agenda by slashing funding for services. The success of the Government’s NHS long-term plan will be built on the foundations of improvements to public health, but these foundations will crumble, and the investment in the NHS’ long-term future will be undermined, if the Government fail to increase investment and make prevention a top priority.

Finally, I return to the work of the Enfield Over 50s Forum. Reading one of its recent newsletters, I was struck by this succinct but perfect encapsulation of why achieving fairer funding for public health in Enfield is so important:

“Improving public health is not just an over 50s issue. It concerns every single body and soul in the borough—toddlers, teenagers, every family with young children. This is one case when we are really all in this together.”

I look forward to the Minister’s response.

11.17 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Seema Kennedy): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I thank the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) for raising this issue. She is a great champion for her constituency, as is the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous) for his.

I reassure the right hon. Lady that the Government are fully committed to improving public health. We want to place prevention at the heart of our health and social care system, because that is the only way to make the NHS sustainable in the long term. That is challenging, as we all know. We need to tackle the root causes of poor health, not only the symptoms. The population of our country is growing. As both the right hon. Lady and the hon. Gentleman pointed out, growth in London boroughs is particularly acute and has been rapid over the six years since the formula was put in place, and we recognise the demand on the NHS, social care and other public services. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and the Prime Minister are aware of the great gaps in life expectancy in London boroughs and across the country. We also know that lots of diseases that people die from nowadays are preventable, which is why we want to put prevention at the heart of what we do. The Prime Minister's ambition is to extend healthy life expectancy by five years by 2035 and to reduce the gap between the richest and the poorest. We have made great strides in many areas.

Childhood obesity is an international problem, but we are being ambitious on it, as well as on air quality and tobacco. All these measures have the potential to make a real difference to people's health and wellbeing. We have reduced sugar in fizzy drinks by 11%, we have cut average calories per portion by 6% through the soft drinks levy, and by 2020 the NHS diabetes prevention programme will support 100,000 people at risk of diabetes across England each year. On screening, the right hon. Lady will be aware that Professor Sir Mike Richards is undertaking a screening review at the moment, so issues such as those she raises about bowel screening will be brought up. That review will report later in the year.

The Green Paper is coming up and I hope that that will take us even further. We need action across local government, central Government and the NHS. Of course, the over-50s group to which the right hon. Lady has referred is an important part of that, because only through everybody working together will we be able to tackle the determinants of health and be far more successful at improving and protecting health outcomes.

To move specifically to public health and where it sits now, we gave back to councils responsibility for public health in 2013. That was important. They recognise what is relevant for their communities and are uniquely placed to use the full range of their activity—levers such as planning, transport, housing and the local economy—to promote better health.

Joan Ryan: I realise that there is not a great deal of time today, but the Minister says that the funding given to Enfield Council is relevant to its needs. Is she saying that the funding that it has been given is adequate to cover the public health requirements in Enfield?

Seema Kennedy: I will move on to the specific issue of the funding formula, how it came into being and how it might change. Of course public health is a question of the investment that national Government put in and how local authorities spend it, but there is a lot of innovation. I applaud Enfield Council and all local authorities for what they have done, because different authorities have used it in different ways. They are adopting innovative approaches. They are renegotiating contracts that perhaps had been untouched for years before the 2013 transfer. I will address funding later in my remarks. Councils are adopting new service models that have the potential to reach communities that have often been left out by traditional service delivery models.

I recognise that in the last spending review, there were difficult decisions to be made to ensure the sustainability of public finances, but over the five-year period, £16 billion has been available to local government for use on public health, including £3 billion for the current financial year.

The right hon. Lady raised a very important issue about the distribution of funding for local authority public health activity. I recognise the pressures that she has referred to specifically in relation to Enfield. When responsibility for local health functions moved from the NHS to local government in 2013, funding for relevant services was transferred to individual local authorities. That was based on historical local spend for the NHS, and the process revealed huge variation across the country. The funding for Enfield is based on what the NHS had been spending there up until 2013.

The Government are now carefully considering how to allocate public health funding in a more needs-based way, rather than continuing to allocate funding based on NHS historical spend. We recognise that Enfield's per capita funding breakdown is different from that of other London boroughs, but a per capita basis is not actually a meaningful way of comparing allocations or the best way of determining funding. That is precisely because it takes no account of different levels of need and it disregards significant variables that have a major influence on the need for public health interventions. An example is the age profile of a local authority's population. We will look carefully during the next spending review at future funding arrangements and the best way to allocate funding to each local authority.

On the letters from the Enfield Borough Over 50s Forum, if the right hon. Lady would like to distil those messages into a letter to me, I will happily respond to her and she can make that response available to her constituents.

Bambos Charalambous: A future funding formula needs to take account of need. There should not be the current differentiation. Kensington and Chelsea receives £82 per person more in funding than Enfield. It cannot be right that two boroughs that are about 8 miles apart have such a variance in funding. Will a future funding formula take more account of local needs?

Seema Kennedy: As I have said, the Department is looking at the funding formula. The hon. Gentleman says that the boroughs are only 8 miles apart, but we know that in areas that are very close together, life expectancy and, importantly, the length of time a person lives in good health can vary hugely. That is why we

[Seema Kennedy]

need to look very carefully at all the factors before the new formula is created. That will be assessed in the next spending review in the light of all the available evidence.

I am committed to working closely with local government, and with other partners and colleagues, to build on the achievements of the last six years. We need to act on a local, national and global level to meet the public health needs of the present and to rise to the public health challenges of the future.

Question put and agreed to.

11.25 am

Sitting suspended.

Children and Mental Health Services

[MARK PRITCHARD *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Andrew Griffiths (Burton) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered children and mental health services.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. We could not be in better hands. It is a delight to have the Minister here. I know she comes to this issue with great personal interest and a commitment to deliver for all our constituents. It is fantastic to see so many right hon. and hon. Members from across the House here to take part in the debate. That is testament to the interest in this place and the concern across the country about mental health, particularly that of children.

I praise the Government for what they have done to date. When it comes to mental health, there is no doubt that this Government get it, making it a priority like no other. They have tackled the stigma of mental health and put in much-needed resources, but although they have done great work, like Oliver, we would all say, "Please, Minister, can we have some more?" because although we are getting on board with the issues, and royals, TV stars, politicians, and people from sport and all spheres talking about mental health, the problem is snowballing, getting bigger and bigger. Such are the pressures and stresses placed on our children's mental health that this is an ever-increasing problem, which demands our attention, resources and commitment as a Government.

One in eight five-to-19-year-olds—12.5%, or 1.25 million children across the country—have a mental health difficulty, according to the Government's own survey of November 2018, "Mental Health of Children and Young People in England". The Local Government Association says that children's services are seeing more than 560 cases of mental health issues every day. Some 75% of adult mental health illnesses begin before the individual turns 18 and over 50% start before the age of 14. Some 23% of the population are affected by mental health difficulties at some point each year. The economic and social costs of mental illness in England total £105 billion.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. About 10 or 11 years ago I introduced a Bill that would have provided a specialist to a cluster of schools, to help teachers to identify children with health and mental health problems. Does he agree that the Government should think about that? Secondly, and most important, employers do not recognise the problems young people have with mental health when they start out in industry, nor do they recognise adult mental health problems. Does he agree that more could be done in that area?

Andrew Griffiths: I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman. It is a pity that more people did not share his foresight, so that we could have acted sooner. We are laying the foundations for mental health problems in adulthood. Childhood mental health has a lifelong impact, so it is important that we do not waste a moment. Rates of depression and anxiety among teenagers have increased by 70% in the last 25 years.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman for securing this important debate. My constituent Elodie Fleet, who is now 18 years old, experienced anxiety, which came to a head at the age of 13. She wanted to see the school counsellor, but her needs were not deemed to be urgent enough because “she hadn’t tried to hang herself or taken a blade to her wrists.” I hope the Minister will say how we can get more counsellors in our schools to deal with people such as Elodie, because she is not alone.

Andrew Griffiths: The hon. Lady makes a powerful point. It is true that her constituent is not alone. When I publicised this debate on my Facebook page, I was amazed by the number of parents who got in touch. I was overwhelmed by parents who have either battled through and managed to get to the other side, or are in the midst of fighting to keep their children alive, safe and well. As a parent, I realise what a scary thought that is.

Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab): To reiterate that point, does the hon. Gentleman agree that this is a state of emergency? In my constituency, the parents of a 12-year-old boy are being advised that there is a 72-week wait for their son to get help, even though there is a risk of serious self-harm.

Andrew Griffiths: I agree that we are in a crisis. The Government are putting record amounts of money in, but the hon. Lady is absolutely right to say that that is an unacceptable wait. I will discuss waiting times later in my speech. Any parent would be terrified at the thought of that long wait and their child being further harmed by it.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): The statistics the hon. Gentleman is outlining are horrific. Some years ago figures were released showing that across the whole of the United Kingdom, over 10,000 young people under the age of 10 were manic depressives. That is a horrendous figure. Such a situation puts horrendous pressure on parents and carers.

Andrew Griffiths: I have spoken about my own mental health challenges and my battle with depression and anxiety. As an adult it was very difficult to cope with, but for a small child it must be an incredibly hard to have to deal with.

Andrea Jenkins (Morley and Outwood) (Con): On the social and economic effect, does my hon. Friend agree that we need a more joined-up approach across Departments? Earlier this year, I met chief superintendent Paul Hepworth of West Yorkshire police, who is a fantastic guy. He mentioned that nationally there is a lack of forensic beds for children with severe mental health issues. He told me the story of a young girl who was in police custody with a severe illness; she was suicidal, self-harming and violent towards others. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government must address this issue, to offer safe space and support for people in dire risk?

Andrew Griffiths: I point my hon. Friend to some of the work done in my area by Matthew Ellis, the Staffordshire police and crime commissioner, and the work done by

the Prime Minister when she was Home Secretary on how we treat mental health in our police stations. That is very important, but it is even more important for vulnerable young children. She makes a valid point. I will canter through some more points before taking more interventions.

The Government’s own survey shows that one in four children with a mental health disorder are seen by a mental health specialist and over 400,000 children are receiving no assistance at all. The NHS is managing to see only a fraction of the young people who have problems. My hon. Friend talks about cross-departmental working. I am delighted that the Minister is here, because she has done a huge deal to bang heads together and make this a priority. It involves the NHS, local government, the police and so many different areas, which we need to bring together.

The Children’s Commissioner’s analysis of NHS figures from 2017-18 shows that 325,000 children were treated by community services, while another 5,000 are in hospital—less than 3% of the population. Around £700 million is spent on child and adolescent mental health services and eating disorder support. By comparison, services for adults received 15 times more, despite the fact that children represent 20% of the population. While it is important that we are putting money into mental health services, we are turning it on its head. We need to put more money into children’s services, not only because there is such a great demand, but because if we can nip problems in the bud by making that early intervention, we can avoid those services being needed later in life.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate; he is making some very good points. As he recognises, CAMHS are the Cinderella services of the Cinderella service—mental health is still woefully underfunded in comparison with many other parts of the NHS. Does he also recognise that CAMHS recruitment is a real challenge? The August 2019 fill rates for higher trainees in the UK stand at only 63% for those entering CAMHS specialist training and at only 23% for learning disabilities, which means that almost 80% of new posts in learning disabilities for new trainees will be unfilled. Does he agree that that is a key issue for the Government to address if they want to improve CAMHS provision?

Andrew Griffiths: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, whom I congratulate on his work in our NHS; I am grateful that he does such a great job on mental health work in the community. He raises the very important point that it is all very well wanting to deliver these services and putting the money in place, but if we do not have the staff to deliver on the ground, we will always be running to catch up.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Gentleman is giving an excellent speech. In York, we have seen a 26% increase in referrals into CAMHS over the past five years. As a result of such high demand, one referral in four is turned away from the service, including children who are self-harming and have experienced abuse. Surely we need to focus on investment in the workforce, as well as on funding.

Andrew Griffiths: The hon. Lady is absolutely right, and we must not underestimate the immense added stress and pressure for families whose child is self-harming. She makes a very good point.

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. May I follow up on the point made by my colleague the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) about the figures for York? Are not parents under huge stress because of these referral figures? In York, CAMHS referral times are peaking and troughing, which has a lot to do with not getting the resources needed. Sometimes referral times are down to six months, but at other times they are longer than 12 months, which has a huge impact on the children involved. It also means that schools are having to take action and exclude young people before they can get the treatment they need.

Andrew Griffiths: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, not only about the impact on schools—I will say more later about what we can do in schools—but about the pressure on CAMHS and the massive importance of getting children seen as soon as possible. Just imagine if one of us were having a mental health episode and were told that we could see someone in 12 months who would then refer us for treatment. CAMHS are not the doctors or the psychiatrists who see the patient. They are not the help; they are the doorkeepers to getting help—the triage, as it were. Even when someone gets through the CAMHS door and jumps over the very high bar for getting treatment, it could be many months before they receive it.

It is a great challenge. I know that the Government take it seriously; their 2017 Green Paper “Transforming Children and Young People’s Mental Health Provision” outlined their ambitious new plans for delivering mental health support in schools, and the announcement this week of the mental health services trailblazers is a welcome part of that strategy. I am delighted that my area, Burton, is to be in the second phase of those trailblazers, which I genuinely believe will make a difference. However, figures from the Children’s Society suggest there has been little expansion in the provision available in schools since 2015, so we are starting from a low base. In particular, the figures point to a worrying lack of awareness among parents about the counselling offered in their children’s schools: just under a third are not aware of what is available at all.

I am pleased that the Government have announced that every school, college and alternative provision across England will be offered training as part of the £9.3 million mental health services and schools and colleges link. However, even though my area is one of the trailblazers, priority access to mental health training for schools and colleges will not be available in my constituency until next year. It is clearly needed now. There are so many MPs, constituencies and constituents who want access, so how can we roll it on quicker? To use my “Oliver!” analogy again—

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. May I ask him to reflect for a minute on the particular issues for rural communities, including the distances? The lack of broadband means that the opportunities for dealing

with those distances are missed. It seems to me—perhaps we will hear more from the Minister about this—that the Government could use technology more effectively in rural areas. We will certainly not get the help we need in time otherwise. My schools will not be getting help under the new scheme any time soon—we are not even one of the pilots. My teachers are very concerned that they will have more burdens, rather than an added resource.

Andrew Griffiths: My hon. Friend, who is always a champion for rural communities, makes an important point about rural isolation. We have known for a long time about the mental health challenges of farmers and rural communities, but it is all the more difficult for young people who are isolated from their friends. We talk about the social media pressure on young people with Facebook, Twitter and so on, but it is even more difficult for kids in isolated rural communities, because they are even more separated. That social media connection is often their only chance to talk to their friends.

Dr Poulter: My hon. Friend is making one of the best speeches that I have heard in this Chamber for some time, and is going into granular detail to make his case. In the medical workforce, the numbers of mental health nurses have fallen nationally over the past decade, and we know that there are challenges with CAMHS and LD recruitment. We cannot deliver mental health care without bodies on the ground. Unless we get the workforce challenge right, it will just be rhetoric. We need to start turning rhetoric into reality by recruiting the right number of staff on the ground to deliver high-quality mental health care.

Andrew Griffiths: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is about not just the psychiatrists and the doctors, but the mental health nurses out in the community. I have witnessed their great work at first hand, so I know just how important they are.

The extensive roll-out—as the Government rightly claim it to be—over the five-year pilot is great, but it will address just 20% to 25% of the country’s need. So many young people will miss out on support until at least 2023 or perhaps even later. The mental health training for schools and colleges announced in the past week is fantastic, but under the NHS long-term plan, an extra £2.3 billion is due to be put into mental health services by 2023-24. That is a lot of money, and I want us to make sure that as much of it goes into children’s mental health services as is humanly possible. If we spend it wisely, it can have a double-whammy effect.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree about the importance of bereavement counselling for children with mental health issues? As shadow Police Minister, one of the most common factors that I see among young offenders is a close family bereavement in their childhood, yet so many children languish on waiting lists for bereavement counselling. Indeed, I had a young constituent who waited for bereavement counselling for three years. Unfortunately, his life was taken by another teenager. That just shows the absolute importance of getting in there and delivering that mental health care.

Andrew Griffiths: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. Trauma in young people's lives is often the trigger, whether it is sexual abuse, domestic abuse, violence perpetrated by other young people, or bereavement. All those triggers set off a train of deterioration in young people's mental health that is often lifelong. It is so important that they get the access they need.

Several hon. Members have mentioned waiting times for CAMHS. I have certainly found that my constituents cannot get on Facebook quick enough to tell me about their CAMHS experiences. I do not want to denigrate CAMHS, which have great people doing great work; the problem is that there are just not enough of them and they are under too much pressure. As the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) noted, CAMHS are turning away nearly a quarter of children who are referred to them. In 2017-18, they turned away 24.2%, meaning that at least 55,800 children were not accepted for treatment. Of those who were referred, the average waiting time was 34 days for an initial assessment and 60 days for treatment—significantly longer than the four-week standard set out in the Government's Green Paper. We can all point to examples of much longer waiting times in our constituencies.

One constituent contacted me to say that her son had been self-harming for years. It took them months to get an appointment with CAMHS, and when the appointment happened, her son suffered a meltdown. That is not unusual, due to the pressures that those appointments put on young people. Because he is 15, their GP cannot prescribe anything for him. My constituent has had to watch her son throughout the night to make sure he does not do any permanent damage to himself. Another parent told me how her daughter was discharged from CAMHS, with it saying there was nothing more it could do to help with her anxiety.

Young people have told mental health charity Mind—I am very lucky to have Burton and District Mind in my constituency, which does a great job—that the wait for support is one of the most difficult issues they face. They say that sometimes, they find that their mental health deteriorates while they are waiting; the wait actually makes it worse. In England as a whole, half of those accepted for treatment during 2017-18 were still waiting for treatment at the year's end. That proportion was lower in my area, east Staffordshire, where it was just over one third. However, that is still a substantial figure.

A school counsellor from my constituency contacted me to say that the waiting lists for referrals to child services outside of school can be months long. She believes that when it is established that a child needs help, a counselling session needs to happen within 48 hours. She goes on to say that too much red tape is preventing children from getting the help they need. I think we all recognise, as the Government have done, that support in school, delivered in a way that is accessible to young people—they feel comfortable asking for it, and know of other young people who have accessed it—is a real help.

One parent told me that she decided to fight to get her son's care commissioned outside of the county they lived in because of her disappointment with the support she had received. She says that early intervention is key, and that there have been too many endless reports and not enough action has been taken. Another parent in

my constituency said that she took her daughter to the GP two years ago. She was referred to That Place in Burton, which is a fantastic facility; she took her for assessment, only to be told that her daughter was not old enough to be accepted. Yet another constituent told me that after a referral for her daughter, aged nine, it took three years for them to see a psychiatrist. That kind of wait is difficult, and all the time, the young people are getting worse.

There is also a problem with the transition from childhood to adulthood. According to the British Psychological Society, about one in six 17 to 19-year olds have a mental health disorder; according to the Children's Society, 16 to 17-year-olds are the biggest service users of mental health services. However, young people often face barriers to accessing support, and end up falling through the cracks of adult and children's services as they transition. Some young people who are discharged from children and young people's mental health services at 18 find it can be very difficult to get a referral to adult mental health services at all, and can end up completely isolated. In some circumstances, young people are not accepted into either children and young people's or adult mental health services, due to them falling between the gaps.

Again and again, I hear that CAMHS discharges young people on their 18th birthday, and that there is no provision at all for them. The challenges those young people are facing do not magically disappear when they become adults. Just last Friday, I met with a constituent who was getting ready to leave CAMHS and had been left to organise her future on her own. She was not automatically transferred to adult services, and had to organise a private therapist in order to get the ongoing treatment that she needs.

One of my constituents sums the problem up better than I could:

"All the time the kids are getting no support, becoming suicidal, becoming adults with even more complex issues, families are breaking up because of the pressure, parents quitting work to do the job of education/social care/health, and all of this causes more and worse financial pressure later on. No one sees the bigger picture because they can't afford to. No one sees long term because that's too expensive. Early interventions are crucial but they aren't funded. We will reap the whirlwind then wring our hands and say 'how could we have prevented this'".

That is absolutely pertinent.

The Government have set a five-year forward view for mental health, which is for one in three children and adolescents with a mental health disorder to access NHS mental health community services by 2020-21. In the new long-term plan, they have set a target that 100% of children and young people who need specialist care will be able to access it by 2028-29. However, that is so far down the track.

Anne Marie Morris: I totally agree with my hon. Friend: it is so far down the track. Does it not further concern him that in that same 10-year plan, the NHS talks about "parity of esteem", but that is in 10 years' time, and it is very unclear what will be done about the timelines for getting there? As my hon. Friend has said, 10 years is much too long to solve the problems we have today.

Andrew Griffiths: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. During that time, babies become children, children become adults, and the problem gets worse and worse. I

[*Andrew Griffiths*]

do not deny the Government's commitment and determination in this, but it is just not happening quickly enough.

The other thing we need to bear in mind is that, although we have heard about CAMHS and the pressures on the workforce, a huge number of brilliant voluntary sector organisations are also delivering these services. I am very lucky to have in my constituency an organisation called Youth Emotional Support Services, which delivers in schools in Uttoxeter, as well as Burton and District Mind. There are so many great organisations. However, even in my own patch, I have heard that a tendering process is currently going on in which the bar is so high, the requirements so difficult and the boxes to tick so numerous that third sector organisations simply feel unable to compete. The challenge is that the tender to provide the facilities goes to a private company, and the experience, dedication and benefits of those voluntary sector organisations are lost.

I was staggered to learn that some of the children's mental health charities operating in my constituency are providing 85p of frontline services for every pound they receive. That is tremendous value, representing help for young people, and few businesses could get anywhere near matching that. However, the tender process that we go through makes it impossible for voluntary sector organisations to compete. I hope the Minister will look into that; I will be raising with her my particular issue in Staffordshire.

I think the Minister recognises that in this place, we are simply voicing the real concerns and fears of parents up and down the country. Like a snowball coming down a hill, young people's mental health is under greater pressure than ever before, and as a result they are self-harming, committing suicide, or getting themselves into a situation in which they will, in future years, suffer from greater mental health disorders, addiction, and so many other long-term problems. I hope that the Minister will go away feeling that she has great support across this House for her campaign to get even more resources and focus on mental health services, particularly for children, because quite frankly our children's lives depend on it.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): I do not propose to enforce a formal time limit of four minutes, but I ask colleagues to be mindful of the number of people who wish to contribute to the debate.

2.58 pm

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): Thank you for calling me early, Mr Pritchard; it is a pleasure to serve under you. I apologise to the hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) for arriving late. I was in the main Chamber for the domestic abuse statement, which unfortunately ran over a little. I commend him and those who made interventions on what I heard them say. I am sure that throughout this debate we will be given shocking examples of how this is truly a nationwide crisis. Any Government of any hue must, as a first step, be honest about the scale of the problem and how much is being stored up for future generations, as was said eloquently by the hon. Gentleman.

I will give the Minister and the Chamber a couple of the many examples I have received from constituents who have got in touch. Drew is a nine-year-old boy whose mother contacted us in March last year in a desperate state. On a weekly basis, Drew talked about killing himself; he would regularly go so far as to put a rope around his neck. Obviously, they were seeking urgent medical help for Drew.

Fifteen months later, Drew had his first appointment with CAMHS. That was 15 months when that child was at risk and that family was going through something—it is really hard for parents to imagine their child in distress, desperately reaching out for help and just being put on an interminable waiting list. Drew's mum is left wondering how best to house her family. Her benefits have been reduced because of the bedroom tax. The need for Drew to have a separate room is not acknowledged, despite the fact that he is aggressive and sometimes violent towards his sibling. His mum is now forced to confront the prospect of Drew sharing a bedroom with her. That is deeply inappropriate and a sign of a system that is broken locally.

Another example is a child who was deemed to be a clear suicide risk. A significant amount of resource was placed into multidisciplinary team meetings for the child, but in meeting after meeting, for whatever reason, CAMHS did not show. The process to provide appropriate help for that child could not go ahead and deeply scarce resources were being burned up. It was only after the intervention of our team that we managed to bring CAMHS to the table.

Professionals want to do things. No one goes into this field wanting to do the wrong thing; they go into it to help, but the resources are not there and often the system is inefficiently resourced. I briefly pay tribute to the work of the local commissioning group, which as of last week has put in some resource for mental health professionals to work across schools, but it does not come close to the level needed. I beg the Minister to listen and to do what she can to get the Government to act.

3.2 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) on securing this debate. I concur very much with all that he said in his opening speech.

Because we have only a small amount of time, I want to address one specific issue that has been brought to my attention. We all agree that we have a growing challenge with mental health conditions among young people across the country. It is right to acknowledge that the Government recognise that and are acting. We are grateful in Cornwall that, as I speak, a residential unit for children with mental health conditions is being built, after many years of not having a residential unit and our children having to be sent all over the country to be cared for. That unit will be open soon, which is very welcome.

I am particularly concerned about the amount of pressure we are putting on our schoolteachers when it comes to caring for children with mental health conditions. We are expecting more and more of teachers in that regard when it is not their role or responsibility. I am concerned about the impact that is having on our teachers.

I am also concerned about another aspect of education, which is authorised absence. I know that is not the Minister's direct responsibility, but I hope she will take the remarks on board and feed them back to the Department for Education. Many parents are coming to me saying that they are struggling to get the school to support them as a family when they need to take their children out of school because of mental health concerns and conditions, including to attend appointments with CAMHS or other organisations.

In one case, the school was refusing to recognise absence from a particular child who was suffering from a mental health condition until that condition had been formally diagnosed by CAMHS. As we have heard today, it can take many months—I have heard it is up to 18 months—to get a diagnosis from CAMHS. The school was sending warning letters home to the parents about the amount of time the child was having away from school and threatening to take legal action against them. All that was doing was exacerbating the problem and putting more pressure, more stress and more distress on the family at an already difficult time.

Through the Minister, I appeal to the Department for Education that we need our teachers, and our headteachers in particular, to be more understanding and more compassionate. They are being driven by a heavy-handed approach from Ofsted in meeting attendance targets. It seems that those targets, above all else, are the most important thing for schools. No recognition or allowance is given for the real challenges many families face when they have a child who is suffering with mental health conditions and is therefore unable to attend school regularly. They are being put under huge pressure.

Many children are aware of what is going on, and I am concerned that they are encouraged to bury the issue and go to school because they do not want the pressure put on their parents, rather than opening up and getting the help and support they need. We need to ensure that schools work with parents and families when they have a child facing these issues. They should not add to the problems or the pressure that the family is under. I ask the Minister to take that on board. We can do better in getting schools to recognise the concerns and conditions that many families find themselves facing and in working with families, rather than exacerbating the problem.

3.6 pm

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I applaud the hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) for securing this debate. Children and young people's mental health is incredibly important. I appreciate the contributions of other Members. I have similar situations of children suffering in my constituency, but I will not repeat them.

I want to focus on three issues that are important to the mental health of our young people. First, I want to raise the issue of young people's mental health within our judicial system, which I spoke about in this Chamber only a few months ago when I highlighted how young people with mental health issues had been forgotten in the Government's response to the Justice Committee's report on the disclosure of youth criminal records. I

emphasise that when we look at the Government's funding plans for young people's mental health—they are welcome, but could stand to go further—we should not forget the vulnerable young people who have been taken out of mainstream schools and placed under the care of the UK's judicial system. Many of those young people may not understand why they are there, and they are placed under stress and pressure that even we as adults would struggle to cope with. We must ensure that does not lead to the degradation or further degradation of their mental health, which may damage their chances of rehabilitation.

Secondly, I want to raise the issue of personal, social, health and economic education—also known as PSHE, and formally known as citizenship—for those young people still within our education system. Frankly, the provision is woefully inadequate for the issues it is trying to tackle. There is little to no guidance from central Government, and how the provision is conceived and delivered is almost completely up to the school. That has produced an almost laughable system where each school can have a completely different interpretation of the curriculum and its requirements. One school might require just 15 minutes a week during form time, yet 30 minutes down the road, another school might give an hour's lesson once a week.

Within that time, teachers are expected to cover everything from mental health to how mortgages work, to sexuality, to how Government and this place works, all with little to no guidance. Many schools simply do not provide the time required to tackle the subjects properly. The lesson material is often put together by a teacher who happens to have the time or by a third-party company that knows little to nothing about it. Neither of them may have the necessary subject matter expertise. I call on the Government to get to grips with the issue and make PSHE a statutory subject with guidelines on the content of the subject area, so that the situation does not essentially amount to, "It's up to you." There should be a key focus on mental health, which is too important to have such vague guidelines.

Finally, I want to touch upon the subject of loot boxes in video games. For those who do not know, loot boxes are a mechanic in video games that require someone to pay money to get a box or a pack. Within the box, they might get a piece of very good equipment, a rare boost or a character that will give them an edge when playing online against other people, or they might get something that is rubbish. If they already have it, it is virtually useless to them. To put it in plain English, loot boxes or "surprise mechanics" are essentially gambling. The mechanics also have no impact on the age rating for a game, meaning that young people of all age ranges can be exposed to what are basically gambling mechanics.

I am not someone who believes that video games are bad for young people and rot their brains, as some would put it, but such gambling can have a negative effect on young people's mental health and cause addiction. There is a reason why we have age restrictions for fruit machines and gambling websites. Even then, we can see the negative effect on adults. I therefore call on the Government to follow the lead of countries such as Belgium and step in to deal with gambling mechanics and their impact on the mental health of our children.

3.11 pm

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. One in nine young people aged between five and 15 has a diagnosable mental health condition, so I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) for securing this vital debate. The issue becomes more pressing as figures suggest that those children are twice as likely to carry mental illness into adulthood. However, the Government are taking some action and have invested £1.4 billion to improve specialist services for mental health, but we are playing catch-up.

Pressures on the younger generation are at a new high with the advent of social media. There is a constant pressure to keep up on platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook, which is compounded when we look at their exposure to image and celebrity culture. Although social media can be a power for good, it is clear that such platforms can have a detrimental impact on children's mental health. We have already had some truly devastating cases, such as that of Molly Russell, whose suicide sparked this important conversation nationally. I welcome the current review by the chief medical officer, Dame Sally Davies, who is assessing the impacts that social media has on a child's mental health.

Another mental health condition on the rise, especially in young people, is eating disorders. I recently met a constituent, Lizzie Speller, here in Parliament, with the charity Beat UK, which supports people with eating disorders. Lizzie spent several years fighting anorexia. She overcame her long battle and got the help that she needed. It is fantastic that four fifths of young people with eating disorders now receive treatment within one week. Lizzie is doing a lot to help others. She has set up Mental Health Mates walks, a Chichester community group that has a monthly city walk. My husband and I joined them earlier this year. It is an opportunity to meet and talk about things that concern people. The role of Beat is important in spreading the network across the country.

Another Beat ambassador is my goddaughter's sister, Isabella Tee, who worked hard to overcome anorexia as a teenager and now works to support others at York University. Schools have a vital role in offering support and spotting the signs when people need help. Many schools in my constituency—Chichester High School and Bourne Community College, to name just two—have done a lot to support mental health in schools and have trained mental health first aiders and pupil mental health ambassadors. On the ground, visible services are exactly what we need, and I look forward to seeing the impact of the new mental health support team pilot in my area, as the Coastal West Sussex CCG is taking part in the first wave.

Getting to grips with mental health is important, as the consequences of not doing so are unimaginable. On 17 July 2017, one of my constituents, Jo Marsden, had her life turned upside down when her 20-year-old son, Ned, took his life at Witley station. Ned had been excluded from school earlier in his life, and over the years had withdrawn from his family and friends. His mental health issues were well masked and not identified at school or later when his doctor tried to identify signs. I have met Jo several times now, and she is an inspiring

woman. She has created Ned's Fund, which offers vocational courses to young people who drop out of school. She said:

"My dream is to help as many children as I can by funding vocational training. I'm not a fairy godmother but nothing would bring me greater happiness."

The impact of suicide on a young person is truly devastating, as my family knows from personal experience because my young cousin, Sallie Gibson, took her life some years ago.

People across Chichester continually come together to improve each other's lives. Tackling mental health issues needs a comprehensive approach where, in every part of a young person's life, someone is available to give a much needed helping hand.

3.15 pm

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) for securing this debate. It is important because the simple way to change attitudes around mental health in this country is to talk about it. The more we do it in Parliament, the better. I pay tribute to all those, including charities such as Rethink Mental Illness, that have made a real step change in the way that we consider mental health in this country. I also give credit to the Minister. She obviously does not know what will happen next week with the change in Prime Minister, but she has been a great champion for mental health in not only doing the work that she does, but caring about it. Sometimes we get a Minister who simply goes through the motions, but this Minister cares deeply about the subject and has made a real difference.

The point about finance is important in mental health. That point has been made over the years not only in respect of adult services, but in respect of children's services, and it has been made again today. Having the proper workforce is also important. I do not want to relegate those two issues because they are very important in this debate, but the other thing that often does not get spoken about is having a proper pathway into a service, which is a mess at the moment, partly as a result of reorganisations in the health service. We have also had cuts to local authorities and they can no longer afford to fund voluntary sector organisations. Sure Start centres have been cut, and the cuts are having an impact on people's access to services.

I pay tribute to CAMHS. They get a bad name, but they are trying their best in the impossible job that we give them. We have to try and turn down the pipeline of people going into CAMHS services. The only way we can do that is if we have a proper triage system before going into CAMHS, so that people know whether they can get help elsewhere. We often over-medicalise mental health conditions. The Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys mental health trust in my area has a good pilot that pays for a psychiatrist to sit in a GP's surgery so that a mental health professional can triage cases as they come in. I do not want to criticise GPs, but they are not mental health professionals. They should have a mental health professional who can triage the cases that need to go through to CAMHS or other adult mental health services and then they can try to help the others.

We need a local network of support organisations, whether it is the voluntary sector, as the hon. Member for Burton rightly pointed out, or others that do fantastic work. He put his finger on the issue of how we tender

for mental health services. I am sorry, but the ones that I speak to in County Durham have contracts that are too big and they do not have the capacity to take them on, but they do valuable work in the community. In some cases, it is a way of taking pressure off the pipeline going into CAMHS and adult mental services. Parents want to know where to go, so we need signposts and pathways so that people do not wait 12 months or longer to get into CAMHS, thinking that will somehow answer their questions.

Andrew Griffiths: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way and for his great speech. Does he agree that one of the reasons why they tender in that way is because they want to have a uniform approach across the whole country? In reality, if someone wants access to a service, people understand the local charity and are much more aware of it, and more likely to go to it for that very reason.

Mr Kevan Jones: I do agree. In my experience the best local examples of mental health support are what is being done by local charities, most of which, frankly, run on a shoestring. They do not ask for huge amounts of money. I think it would be cost-effective for the taxpayer if we directed services into that, but we need that joined-up system. If we do not have it, we can pour as much money as we like into the system and it will not work.

I want to mention one last thing—students' mental health, which is being highlighted in universities. Will the Minister contact Northumbria University, which is doing innovative work on using new technology to track students and highlight those who are vulnerable? I saw it a few weeks ago on a visit to the university. It is a new model, which could have implications nationally, and I think it is worth looking at. I will finish by just saying, let us keep on talking about this subject.

3.20 pm

Faisal Rashid (Warrington South) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) for obtaining this important debate. I imagine that not a single Member of the House would diminish the importance or severity of this issue. We all want every child to get the best possible start in life, but that is an empty commitment if we do not make sure that the right level of support and help is available for children who suffer from mental health conditions, just as we would for children with physical injuries. We would never allow a child with a broken leg to suffer alone, without professional treatment. Nor should we fail to provide a child suffering from depression or anxiety with the support they urgently need. In the past, the issue has not been given the priority it clearly deserves, so I am glad that finally a consensus is starting to build around the importance of improving mental health services for children and young people.

Despite the acknowledgement of how much needs to be done, the Government have failed to act decisively on the issue. Identifying a problem is all well and good. What we need is real leadership, concrete solutions and properly funded services. At present they are failing on all three fronts. Not enough has been done to address

the inadequacy of funding for services or to reduce the number of children who do not have access to mental health support at all.

The Government's children's services early intervention grant has been reduced by almost £600 million since 2013. It is projected to decrease by another £100 million by 2020. Children's services now face a funding gap of £3 billion by 2025. That underfunding is taking place in the context of a rising demand for children's mental health services. Underfunding leads to a vicious cycle, as the support necessary for good mental health—provided through services such as housing, education and family support—is gradually cut away. When those resources are unavailable, early intervention becomes impossible and mental health problems are left to fester and deteriorate, until finally they require urgent medical intervention. Children are not suffering from more mental health problems at random: the conditions for mental ill health are being created by austerity.

That is why I support the recommendations of the Local Government Association's "Councils Can" paper, which calls for the empowerment of local government to lead communities and improve young people's mental health and wellbeing. The point about signposting pathways and helping charities is important. Properly funded housing, education and family support services need to be given priority to ensure the wellbeing of children and young people. Councils are uniquely placed to do that. That is why they need to be properly funded and at the heart of our efforts to address the issue.

Inequality is also a huge issue in the delivery of mental health services for children and young people. Research this year from the mental health charity Mind found that vulnerable people in some regions struggle with little more than half the NHS funding of those in the best-resourced areas. For example, in Surrey Heartlands health and care partnership, the average annual spend on mental health services per head of population is just under £125, but in South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw sustainability and transformation partnership the figure is over £220. The Government need to act as soon as possible. The crisis is absolutely huge.

3.24 pm

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate the hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) on obtaining the debate and on his excellent speech, which I almost wholly agree with.

I carried out a constituency survey on mental health services for young people and the responses showed that my constituents are worried and concerned and feel that the situation is getting worse. Of the top issues when we analysed the results, No. 1 was long waiting times, No. 2 was that people get care only after self-harming, and No. 3 was that the police were having to intervene to protect at-risk young people. The young people were coming to the notice of the services far too late. For example, a parent said they had had to visit the GP three times and it was only after their child self-harmed that they were referred to CAMHS. Another, speaking of her daughter, said:

"Her future has been robbed by mental illness and the NHS didn't have the staff or resources to make a difference when it counted."

The hon. Member for Burton and others have clearly outlined the need for more funding. If the Minister needs ammunition to help her with her arguments in the

[*Ruth Cadbury*]

spending review, just think of the cost to the nation of not adequately funding early intervention and CAMHS before things reach crisis level for young people.

I want briefly to discuss early intervention in schools. Universal services—in education, family and youth services, as well as voluntary services—are a vital part of early intervention, identifying at-risk children and signposting them towards dedicated services. That is why we need fully funded universal as well as specialist services. However, cuts to Sure Start centres, youth services and school funding mean a loss of welfare support and other forms of support. The people in those services are the ones who pick up issues, give support and make referrals. That is why austerity in the context of mental health is not just an issue affecting CAMHS; it is about all those services. My local authority, the London Borough of Hounslow, has lost 40% of its total income through a cut of more than 80% in Government grants. That has meant that it has had to cut direct and commissioned services. Now we can see that cut after cut has a detrimental impact not just on young people's life chances but on their physical and mental health.

Schools are a vital part of early intervention, as other Members have said. When we discuss the role of education in relation to mental health, we need to remind everyone that our schools are facing a funding crisis. They have had to implement a real-terms funding cut of 9% since 2010. In further education it is worse. FE colleges are losing an average of 20% in funding. That is certainly happening at my local FE college. It affects their ability to support young people in crisis. Teachers and school staff are already overworked, and welfare and teaching support have had to be cut. Often teachers can spot problems, but they are not trained to treat mental health issues. In addition, because of the nature of teacher training, there is often no space for teachers to learn about neurodiversity—dyslexia, dyspraxia, autism, ADHD and so on. It takes even teachers a while to recognise what the problems are. That in itself causes mental health problems. Even when they do identify at-risk students and refer them, those students face long waiting times.

We are lucky in Hounslow. We have been successful in getting £820,000 in grant funding for specialist mental health staff based in hub schools, which is good. It is one of 25 pilots. However, that is not enough and I am afraid I do not agree with the Government when they say they are spending a record amount in this area. There have been so many cuts that I believe a lot less is being spent than was funded under the Labour Government.

3.28 pm

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate the hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) on securing this important debate, and my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), who secured a debate on the issue in the main Chamber last week.

Good mental health is important to us all, especially in childhood and adolescence. If mental health problems in childhood and adolescence are not properly treated,

they can continue into adult life. It is not a problem for just one part of the country. It is truly a national crisis. I appreciate that much of the debate will focus on children's mental health services in England, but I want to highlight the situation in Scotland. The number of young people in Scotland who took their own lives increased by 50% last year—I repeat: there has been a 50% increase in suicides among young children in Scotland. We are losing young people, who have so much to offer, but who find themselves suffering in silence. It is a national tragedy across the UK. The Scottish Government pledged to reduce the number of suicides in Scotland by 20% by 2022. If that pledge is to be met, there needs to be some serious action to improve mental health support for children and young people in Scotland.

The children and young people's mental health taskforce made a series of recommendations, including joint working between the Scottish Government and local government, to reform the way that mental health support is provided. I urge the Scottish Government to enact those recommendations in full. I back the call of the Scottish Children's Services Coalition for an increase in investment in specialist mental health services, and I hope that the Scottish Government respond positively.

Investment alone is not the answer, however; we need to tackle the underlying causes of mental health issues among children and young people. Some 60% of young people in Scotland say that the pressure to succeed has led them to feel overwhelmed or unable to cope. One in five young people say that they are ashamed of the way they look. Others have experienced mental health issues as a result of their school environment.

We have to look for new ways to support the mental wellbeing of children and young people, which is why I welcome the "Give Youth A Chance" petition, started by the families of three young men who took their lives in Lanarkshire. The petition calls for suicide prevention and mental health support programmes to become mandatory in schools across England and perhaps the UK. That would be a positive step to ensure that the mental health support needed by children and young people was more readily accessible.

The state of children and young people's mental health services is a national crisis. They are being let down across the UK by inadequate funding for specialist services and growing waiting lists. It is time for the Scottish Government and the UK Government to listen.

3.32 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) on securing the debate.

It is a tough time for children to be children. When I was a child, which was not yesterday, I went to school, came home and did my chores, then went out to play with the rest of the children. We did not have much, but it was all we knew. That is not the case now. Children are under so much pressure to have the best gear, go to the right places and look and behave a certain way. There is no closing the door at night to get away from the pressure; social media follows them everywhere.

I was horrified, but not surprised, to read that one in 10 schoolchildren in Northern Ireland has a diagnosable mental illness, and that 35,000 children had been treated by child and adolescent mental health services in 2018.

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee has just done an inquiry on education and health that reinforced those figures. Indeed, I have had parents in my office whose child is on the waiting list for the CAMHS team and who cannot get on it, and there are many more who should be on the list and are not, so the real number must be well above 35,000.

Schools find themselves on the frontline of dealing with day-to-day anxiety and trying to help, but it is not enough. An article quotes Dr Phil Anderson, a consultant psychiatrist in CAHMS with the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, who says:

“The research shows there has been an increase in the emotional difficulties in children, a 50% increase since 2004.”

That is an absolutely horrendous figure. He continues:

“There are various reasons given for this. One is social media and the rise of cyber bullying and screen time. Some people have said it’s as a result of rising economic inequality and, of course, academic pressures.”

We do not have the tools to deal with that, but our young people are crying out for help.

A young lady in my constituency, Katie Graden Spence, who recently shadowed me in this place, has been open about her struggle with anxiety and mental health. She published a poetry anthology, “Searching for freedom”, which paints the scene of emotion in many young people. Katie was a finalist in a prestigious category of the Pramerica Spirit of Community awards in recognition of her poetry and fundraising for Action Mental Health, as well as her work to outline her proposals on peer-led mentoring in schools to the Department for Education and the all-party parliamentary group on mental health. She is inspirational and inspired. She is fighting those battles for herself and for others her age whom we are failing. We must ask ourselves about that.

I am thankful to the hon. Member for Burton for raising the issue, but I will be more thankful to learn how we are going to radically change how we deal with children’s mental health in the UK. Children are struggling. They need us to do more. I look forward to hearing how we will put funding in the right places and guarantee controls on social media to prevent cyber bullying and trolling, to ensure that young people know that they are loved and important, and that they matter in their home, their community and here in this place.

3.34 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I thank the hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) for securing this extraordinary debate, in which there have been many contributions from both sides of the House and many interventions, which shows that the issue is a high priority in our constituencies. It is important that the subject was brought to this Chamber. His speech was detailed, extensive and passionate. I congratulate him on being an assiduous representative of his constituents.

We have heard about the main issues; I will not go through them all again but point some out. Workforce is obviously a problem, as are training, access to services, prevention, treatment, trauma and eating disorders. We have also heard about social media and how technology

can be helpful in signposting people, but can also undermine mental health in young people, so appropriate safeguards must be put in place.

We have heard constituency cases from across the United Kingdom. The Office for National Statistics shows that the highest rate of suicide is in north-east England and Wales, but all Governments across the United Kingdom need to make tackling suicide a priority. I thank the Minister, who has been working hard on it and has made significant progress. The problem is, however, that we had such a long way to go that we are not yet where we want or need to be.

I thank the British Psychological Society and the Paediatric Psychology Network UK for sending me their updates and views. They pointed out the problem with access to child and adolescent mental health services and that the services continue to be run on medical models, so if a young person presents with suicidal thoughts or behaviours, unless they have a concomitant mental disorder such as depression or an eating disorder, they do not always gain access to the treatment part of CAMHS. That is wrong, because not every young person will be medically classified as having a disorder, but may need access to coping skills, treatments, counselling and perhaps family therapy. They may have social issues, rather than a condition that requires a medical diagnosis, but they still need access to crisis care to prevent suicide.

That has been brought home to me in the last couple of weeks, as we have suffered our own tragedy in East Kilbride. Ryan Coleman, a young man with his whole life ahead of him, took his own life. This weekend, I am going to a tribute event to mark his life and what he had accomplished in such a short space of time, and to support his family and friends. Families should not have to go through such tragedies, however, and Parliament must do more.

I thank the Trust Jack Foundation in Stonehouse, which has set up young people’s services to bridge the gap and make sure that something happens between a referral to CAMHS and being seen by CAMHS. It gives young people access to support from other young people who experience mental health issues and to support-based activities and therapies. Again, that came out of a personal tragedy—the loss of Jack—which his mother, a wonderful woman, has turned into a positive thing for other children across the area. I cannot thank her enough.

Transitions are important; we need to focus on the transition from child to adult mental health services, and services in colleges and universities. Will the Minister think about the children who have lost a parent serving in the armed forces, and update me on that? A couple of weeks ago, I went to an event with the armed forces parliamentary scheme where I found out that there is a lot of work going on in the US to support young people who lose a parent in service, but there is no much support, treatment and access to services in the UK. Obviously, children who lose a parent serving in the armed forces also lose their home and support network. They have to make dramatic adjustments, and for young people, that is a critical time.

Governments across the United Kingdom are trying their best to improve services, but we have a very long way to go. I want to help everybody in Westminster and the other Governments to achieve the progress we need.

3.40 pm

Mr Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate the hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) on securing this important debate. I thank hon. Members on both sides of the House who have contributed some extremely moving testimony from their own lives and their experience as constituency MPs. I will refer to some of their contributions during my speech.

Fundamentally, children's mental health services are in crisis because the funding is inadequate and prevention has been cut at a time when the pressures on children are higher than they have ever been. Difficulties in childhood, such as growing up in poverty or experiencing neglect, abuse or childhood bereavement, which my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) spoke about, can have a huge impact on a child's mental health. There are also new pressures that affect all children, which many of us did not experience, such as the increase in exams and tests at school and the rise of social media, which has created new forms of bullying and has put new pressure on children in relation to their self-image and how they feel about their bodies.

I want to explore the issue of childhood trauma a little more, because it plays an important role in developing higher incidence of childhood mental ill health. There are three high-risk factors that indicate that a newborn baby's life chances will be dramatically reduced: having a parent who is addicted to drugs or alcohol, having a parent with severe mental ill health, or witnessing a parent being subjected to domestic violence. Any one of those three factors creates a significant risk for the child, but shockingly 16,000 babies are born every year in this country to parents with all three of those risk factors.

Without intervention and support, those children have very little chance in life. They will become the young people committing knife crime. They will end up in the care system. They will fill our prisons, as my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer) pointed out. They will end up living on the streets, develop mental ill health and die younger. My hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney) pointed out the alarming increase in the rate of suicides.

One in three mental health conditions relates directly to adverse childhood experiences. A study by Safelives shows that more than half of children who witness domestic violence develop behavioural problems and have difficulty forming relationships later in life. Their fragile young minds are deeply traumatised by seeing their mother beaten up by a violent and abusive partner in their home, which should be a safe space in which to grow up. Professionals do not always recognise that the problem underlying what they may term "difficult behaviour" may be mental ill health caused by traumatic experiences in earlier childhood. Professionals who work with children are not routinely trained in how trauma can affect behaviour, so the child does not get the help they really need. We need services to get dramatically better at identifying when challenging behaviour comes from trauma so we can treat the problem at source, rather than continuing to fail the child, who had precious little chance from the moment they were born.

Mental ill health affects not only the most vulnerable young people, of course. As we have heard, one in eight children experiences mental ill health, yet the recent NHS mental health prevalence survey found that only one in four young people with a mental disorder is seen by a mental health specialist. My right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) is right to call for better access to care. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) said, on average it can take three visits to a GP before a child is referred for specialist assessment. They then have to wait an average of six months for treatment to start. Of course, there are far worse waiting periods. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero) spoke about a 72-week wait, and my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) spoke about a young man, Drew, waiting 15 months for a CAMHS assessment. In that time, the child's mental health condition gets worse. It is a very long time for the child, with very serious implications for the rest of their lives.

Many more severe mental health problems could be avoided if we invested more in early help and prevention. We know it works, but the cross-party Local Government Association points out that children's services face a £3 billion funding shortfall, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (Faisal Rashid) referred. That means that the lack of early intervention work is now reaching an absolute crisis point. This country is failing some of the most vulnerable children in our society and then blaming them for our failure to provide the help that they needed. Thousands of young people did not have a chance from the moment they were born.

I have the highest regard for the Minister from our previous interactions on related issues. I know that she is deeply committed to these issues, so I hope she will act on what she has heard today. I have some questions of my own to ask before she responds. Will she ring-fence NHS mental health budgets and require that they be spent on mental health services, rather than being reallocated elsewhere, as we are currently seeing? Will she invest in prevention and early help, rather than waiting for mental health problems that develop early in a child's life to turn into crises as they grow up? Will she ensure that children's services professionals are trained to recognise trauma and provide appropriate care that meets the child's needs, rather than blaming them for behaviours that have arisen because of the trauma that they have experienced? Will she make sure babies born to parents with the highest risk factors get the support they need from the moment they are born, rather than allowing their lives to be written off and wasted? I hope very much that we will hear positive responses from the Minister, because no country that loves its children can keep treating them like this.

3.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): I thank all hon. Members who have contributed to this afternoon's debate, which has given me a lot to think about and a lot to address. I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths), who gave an excellent exposition of the challenges before us. I welcome the contributions of all Members. We have covered a lot of content, and I will do my best to address all the points that have been made—there are a hell of a lot.

As the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) said, for a long time we have not talked about mental health enough. It has been a taboo subject, and these issues have been left to fester. As a consequence, mental health has been a Cinderella among public services. People with mental ill health have suffered discrimination at the hands of the state in many ways.

We have identified that children's mental health services have been underfunded for generations, and we will have to fix that—of that there is no doubt. Unfortunately, that takes more than a magic wand. It requires investment and all commissioners to step up to the plate. It requires good partnership working between NHS organisations, local authorities, schools and everyone involved in the system. It is, frankly, a massive culture change, but we need to deliver it. We have heard examples this afternoon of individual children who are being failed by poor service. Frankly, that is the state's failure, and we are all duty-bound to put it right.

I am grateful that hon. Members have given me these examples, challenging though they are, because they are a helpful reminder to the system that these are individual people. People like Drew should not have to wait 15 months for an appointment. The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) and I have talked about the challenges in Cumbria. In terms of delivering the transformation and improvement we are aiming for, we are seeing a real lack of consistency in the speed and quality of services as they are rolled out. Again, that is a challenge for us as a system. In my contacts with NHS England, I am keen to ensure that we get more uniformity in provision.

In answer to the point the hon. Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed) made about ring-fencing funding for mental health services, NHS England will challenge CCGs very directly about how much money they spend on mental health services. We are very clear that they should spend more than the increase in their budgets. Although we have always rejected the suggestion of a ring fence on the basis that they can often be seen as a ceiling, which we do not want, there is now room for some very challenging comments. We really need to start thinking about whether what we have in place is delivering the outcomes that we in this Chamber and we as a society ought to be able to expect.

There is so much to cover that I am sure I will miss something, but there are some points that I really want to emphasise. The right hon. Member for North Durham talked about the role of the voluntary sector. That was music to my ears. I have said repeatedly that good support for people with mental ill health does not necessarily have to be medical—in fact, the wrap-around service that can be provided by just company and comfort is far better delivered by organisations in the voluntary sector, but it is part of our health offering. I am very challenging in telling CCGs and commissioners that they should be thinking about commissioning services from the voluntary sector. Taxpayer funding should deliver the outcomes we want, and the voluntary sector can do that better and cheaper than we can by medicalising the problem. I cannot emphasise that enough.

On delivering more efficient pathways, clearly, the ability to triage people to services that are not medical, are more fleet of foot and can react more immediately provides an opportunity for early intervention that will deliver the better outcomes we want for people.

Looking particularly at individual groups, we heard reference to people with neurodiverse conditions—people with ADHD, ASD and dyslexia. Often, those things go undiagnosed. We need to ensure that, in schools, those people are not just treated as difficult but signposted to places where they might get additional help. We know that earlier diagnosis of those conditions can be the difference between developing mental ill health and not, so we must do better on that. Obviously, the next wave of delivering a transformation for children will involve continuing our pressure on the need to deliver a better mental health service for children, but key to that for me is getting earlier diagnosis of autism and ADHD.

I am not shy about articulating the benefit of that for society; early diagnosis is not just for the benefit of those children, although of course they deserve the best services. We heard about the impact of trauma, and everyone who mentioned it was absolutely right. We have no excuse for failing those people and not putting support around them when they need it. Not only do they deserve that, but by doing so, we win as a society. As I said, those people end up in the care system at best and in prison at worst. Our prisons are full of people who have been failed by the state because we did not give them that hand up when we needed to. We must grasp this issue, and I am not shy about raising that challenge. Yes, it is good value for money—I am sure I speak for all hon. Members when I say that I would rather spend more on health than on prisons, thank you very much. We must ensure that we support people when they need it and recognise the impact of trauma.

Hon. Members will be aware of the work that my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) led when she was in Government on the support given to people in the first 1,001 days of life. She has a debate on that subject in the main Chamber later this afternoon—in fact, she is speaking now. I am sure she will echo some of the points the hon. Member for Croydon North made. We can see the children who are at risk. The state has every opportunity to support those people and, frankly, we should be a lot more assertive in doing so. As I said, those individuals will benefit, society will benefit and, of course, the taxpayer will benefit because we will not be spending money on failure.

The hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney) spoke movingly about the increase in suicide among young people. Collectively across Government, we need a better understanding of the pressures facing young people, which seem to be a lot more acute than they were when I was growing up. Bluntly, I used to play at "Charlie's Angels"; I did not expect to look like them. That might seem a trite thing to say, but body image puts massive pressure on our young people.

We used to think that kids would be safer in their bedrooms than if they went out to play on their bikes. That is no longer true, because the way people are routed through content when tackling social media leaves them very much at risk. Although we can celebrate the revelations and opportunities that the internet and social media have given our young people, they bring with them risks, and we need to be a lot more on top of those. I am glad to say that I am now in regular dialogue with those companies. To be fair, they are stepping up

[Jackie Doyle-Price]

to the plate at this stage, but that is not to say that we should not consider legislation where we can see that that would bring value in protecting young people.

Obviously, we have made commitments to increase funding. We will continue to do that, because we need to ensure that we meet the unmet need that was alluded to. As I say, money spent early is money spent wisely and money spent less, so we must absolutely continue to do that. The value of early intervention is totally unarguable when expenditure on acute service is so much costlier.

Waiting times were mentioned, and I will take that away. We need to get a much better handle on areas with particularly long waiting times. We have set targets. Some 80% of young people with urgent cases are seen within a week. Again, this comes back to the extent to which we triage services. The really important thing about early intervention and getting support to children at an early stage is our proposals for mental health support teams to work directly with schools—my hon. Friend the Member for Burton alluded to the project starting in his constituency. Those teams will be able to equip the schools themselves with more material and support to help them embed mental wellbeing throughout the curriculum, but they will also be the place for additional support and the place where services are referred.

I thank all hon. Members who contributed to the debate. We are on it, but I would be the first to admit that we still have a long way to go to deliver mental health services for children that we can all be proud of.

3.58 pm

Andrew Griffiths: At a time when the public look in on this place often with derision and sometimes with desperation about how we behave, this debate has shown Parliament at its best. There was lots of consensus, lots of cases were mentioned in a heartfelt way, and we heard lots of determination to make a difference. I think we all recognise that these issues involve young people in a desperate state and parents who are equally desperate about the future of those children. If we can come together and deliver the early intervention and support mechanisms that can make such a difference later in life, we can literally save the lives of those young people. I thank everybody who contributed to this really positive debate. I hope it is just a springboard for us to go further and ensure we deliver for all those young people across the country.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered children and mental health services.

No Deal: Agriculture Tariffs

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

3.59 pm

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I beg to move,

That this House has considered a proposed tariff schedule for agricultural products in the event that the UK leaves the EU without a deal.

Diolch yn fawr iawn, Mr Hollobone. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship once again.

On 13 March this year, the British Government published their temporary tariff regime for a no-deal Brexit. At the time, the announcement gained little political attention as it was the policy of the period to avoid no deal at all costs. One of the greatest failures of the current Prime Minister is her use of the phrase,

“No deal is better than a bad deal”.

She fell into a bear trap set by the extremists in her own party. When the British Government switched strategy in summer 2018 to warn explicitly about the dangers of no deal as a means of gaining parliamentary support for her deal, it was too late. The infamous phrase had legitimised the totally reckless policy of a no-deal Brexit.

With the Prime Minister’s demise, the leadership election for the Conservative party has been dominated by the question of who can puff out their chest the most on Brexit. The debate has occurred in a parallel universe, far divorced from political realities. However, one conclusion we can safely assume is that it seems inevitable that no deal will become a viable option for the next Prime Minister, so all aspects of British Government policy in relation to a kamikaze Brexit deserve greater scrutiny.

A key aspect of a no-deal situation is that, on 1 November, if the likely next Prime Minister sticks to his Halloween promise, the British Government will have to introduce an independent tariff schedule for goods entering the newly formed UK customs area. A major consequence of leaving the EU with no deal is that the territories of the British state will no longer inhabit the safe harbour of the EU customs union.

I could have concentrated on a whole range of goods that will be impacted, but I want specifically to debate agricultural products for two reasons. First, Carmarthenshire is a proud agricultural county, and therefore leaving the EU customs union will have a disproportionate impact on the communities I serve. Secondly, tariffs on agricultural products are traditionally far higher than on other goods. That is especially true of the European Union, the destination for the vast majority of Welsh produce.

As part of the EU customs union, Welsh farmers are protected by those high tariffs, which has enabled our food producers to develop high-quality goods with unhindered access to the most lucrative and largest market in the world. The agricultural industry faces not only the loss of unfettered free access to its main export market in Europe; the new tariff schedule and its accompanying quotas offer precious little protection for the domestic market from being flooded by lower standard food products from around the world. That

double hit would be too much for many farmers in my constituency and beyond. I cannot emphasise the dangers to the industry enough.

Both farming unions in Wales agree. John Mercer, Director of NFU Cymru, said:

“It is absolutely clear that a no deal scenario will be catastrophic for Welsh and indeed British agriculture. A scenario where Welsh farmers have to operate under the ‘no deal’ default of WTO tariffs will have devastating effects and will severely threaten the livelihoods and business of Welsh farmers.”

I am delighted to report that Mr Dafydd Jarrett from NFU Cymru is watching our proceedings.

Glyn Roberts of the Farmers’ Union of Wales said:

“It says it all that the prospect of a hard Brexit means a rich and highly developed state is stockpiling food and hoping to use an exemption to WTO rules on the Irish border which would more normally be applied in cases of war or famine. Yet this situation is not compulsory; this is a crisis which in fact we can easily avoid by acting in the best interests of our four nations; by withdrawing Article 50 and telling people honestly why Brexit must take place over a safe and realistic timetable.”

In July 2018, the British Government lodged proposed schedules with the World Trade Organisation setting out the most favoured nation tariffs that would apply to imports to the UK after Brexit. Subsequently, in March 2019, the British Government set out proposed temporary tariffs to apply in the event of a no-deal scenario, which would see zero tariffs applied to 87% of imports measured by value for up to a year in a temporary regime, while consultation and review on a permanent tariff regime takes place.

I am pleased that the British Government have exercised at least a degree of sensitivity in their treatment of the sheep sector, recognising the need to maintain tariff protection for lamb in the event of no deal by maintaining the full WTO tariff of 48% on lamb imports. However, what they give with one hand, they take away with the other. Tariff rate quotas will allow lower or zero tariffs to be applied up to a certain level of imports on some products. We know, for example, that New Zealand will continue to enjoy significant tariff-free access to the UK market for 110,000 tonnes of lamb annually. One of our principal competitors in the lamb sector will therefore enjoy more generous tariff-free access to our market.

George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): I was involved in some of that work and the development of that schedule as a Minister. The existing New Zealand tariff rate quota would be split in half, giving it less access to the UK market than previously. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, in any event, in recent years New Zealand has used only about 70% to 75% of its current rate quota because it cannot compete with lamb produced in the north-west and south-west of this country even before it reaches that ceiling?

Jonathan Edwards: I recognise the former Minister’s expertise in the matter. We will have to wait and see what farmers have to say about that. I invite him to attend the Royal Welsh show next week and make that point. I am sure he would receive a welcome response to his comments.

The new Brexit date of 31 October will coincide with very high numbers of finished lambs coming on to the UK market.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity to invite Ministers not just to the Royal Welsh show next week but to Balla Mart, which will be held on 31 October, when perhaps 800,000 small-body lambs will come to market at a time of considerable pressure on prices?

Jonathan Edwards: I welcome my right hon. Friend’s intervention, because it takes me to my next point. If we are locked out of European markets, there is no way in which domestic consumption could pick up the slack. Additionally, the final quarter of the year sees the sale of light lambs from Wales, which are traditionally destined for export. There is no way in which they could be redirected into domestic consumption. Economists previously assumed that the loss of the EU market would depress UK farm-gate prices by 30%.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for being so generous. The added threat of tariffs, as he suggests, is that British supermarkets will think they have farmers over a barrel because of the loss, in effect, of our export markets. Does he agree that Ministers ought to take action now and increase the powers of the Groceries Code Adjudicator to ensure that supermarkets cannot exploit the situation?

Jonathan Edwards: I am grateful for that valid intervention. Those are the remedial measures that the British Government should be looking at urgently to protect our domestic farm producers. We are all aware of the imbalance there has been in the supply chain over many years, with, as he said, producers under the barrel of the supermarkets. The situation may well be exacerbated by what comes in the following months.

To return to my point, economists believe that farm-gate prices will fall by 30%. With an additional 800,000 lambs on the domestic market at the end of October, farm-gate prices will come under additional pressure. I therefore call on the British Government to commit, on top of the measure mentioned by the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), to additional funds for Wales to be able to implement contingency plans should the worst happen and we find there is unsellable surplus on the domestic market. There would be a disproportionate impact on Welsh agriculture.

In other sectors, the British Government have elected partially or completely to dismantle tariff walls on most products. Tariff rates of 45% for beef, 0% for eggs and 22% for poultry meat will apply for imports into the UK from the EU and the rest of the world, while our exports of those products to the EU will face tariffs of 84%, 19%, and 48% respectively. In the dairy sector, only certain products—such as cheddar with a 7% tariff and butter with a 15% tariff—will be afforded some degree of protection, with the EU applying tariffs of 57% and 48% respectively on those products.

Liz Saville Roberts: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his time. Does he agree with Dairy UK’s analysis that the toxic combination of WTO tariffs on exports aggravated by zero tariffs on imports will cause a massive shock to raw milk prices? That will affect big dairy sector employers such as farmer-owned South Caernarfon Creameries.

Jonathan Edwards: That was another valid intervention. The hit will not be just to core producers, but along the supply chain to some of the producer and production capacity as well.

Commodities such as skimmed milk powder, yogurt, whey, cream and liquid milk will not be protected by any tariffs. If farmers in Northern Ireland cannot send their liquid milk into the Irish Republic for processing and export, there will also be the problem of a major oversupply of liquid milk on the domestic market.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): In my constituency we have Lakeland Dairies, which has two factories in Northern Ireland and two factories in the Republic of Ireland. Michael Hanley is the chief executive officer of that firm. He says that whether or not there is a Brexit deal, life will go on. In other words, the movement of milk across the border, either way, in liquid or powder form, will still take place. We need to be aware of what some businesses are saying. That comes straight from a firm in my constituency.

Jonathan Edwards: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's expertise; he is a farmer himself, I believe. However, if there is a no-deal Brexit, the European Union will have to protect its customs and market territory under all circumstances; otherwise, it would undermine the essence of the customs union and the single market.

Owing to our inability to discriminate between countries under WTO rules, the tariffs that we apply to the EU27 in the case of no deal will be the same as those we apply to countries with which we do not have a trade deal. At the moment, that is basically the rest of the world, apart from the Faroe Islands and a few other territories. That would mean that South American beef, which is currently subject to the EU's common external tariff of 84%, would, in the event of a no-deal Brexit, be able to enter the UK subject to a 45% tariff and out-compete our domestic producers.

Many classes of imported product will be produced to standards that are currently illegal in the UK, and that will undermine our high domestic standards. As an unintended consequence, it will also hinder our ability to trade with our biggest market, which prides itself on high standards. The fact that the UK could be on the cusp of leaving behind a trade policy based on almost half a century of EU membership and swapping it for a trade policy based on WTO tariffs and protection for a handful of products is, to say the least, deeply concerning.

All that, and I have not even begun to countenance the north of Ireland. The UK temporary import tariffs are set to apply to products exported from Ireland to the British mainland but not to goods crossing from Ireland into Northern Ireland. Although protecting the integrity of the Good Friday agreement must be a priority, that fantasy solution has been branded useless by the unions, as it flies in the face of WTO and EU rules.

On another point often used by the British state to defend its tariff schedules, although I recognise the importance of ensuring that food prices do not rise in the immediate aftermath of no deal, the second-order effects of a no-deal Brexit on the economy could well lead to the cost of living sky-rocketing, rendering that argument null and void. Surely, ruling out no deal in the first place is the best way of achieving food price

stability and food supply. If the next Prime Minister insists on keeping the myth of no deal alive, I would urge him to prioritise revisiting the proposed tariff schedules, with a view to ensuring that protections are maintained rather than eroded or removed completely.

From a wider strategic perspective, what proponents of no deal do not admit is that the strategy is essentially a negotiating tactic. I do not think that even the mad caps of the Tory European Research Group want to base the British state's trading relationship with the EU on the North Korean, Venezuelan, Cuban, Belarusian and Kazakhstani model. They believe that threatening no deal will secure favourable terms from the European Union. That has not been the case to date and is highly unlikely to change in the autumn, owing to the simple fact that the European Union holds all the cards in the negotiations.

I do not think our inability to secure such terms is down to insufficient effort by previous UK negotiators. The strategy is the international trade equivalent, as one expert put it, of placing a gun to our own head and telling our opponent that we will pull the trigger unless they concede. In that case, they are likely to say, "Go ahead." The reality is that, far from being intransigent, I am amazed by the patience of our European friends as Westminster goes through a full-scale political nervous breakdown.

The strategy, however, has developed. Some in the Conservative party now believe that the crisis of a no-deal situation, which will face the British state on 1 November, is the best way to secure favourable terms in future negotiations, as opposed to doing things in a managed, grown-up way. It is a game of risk, in other words. Those advocating no deal are prepared to throw all their chips in the air in the hope that they fall on the right roulette numbers. Personally, when dealing with people's jobs and living standards, I prefer a more strategic and nuanced approach.

Before the Minister starts blaming my side of the argument for keeping no deal alive by not voting for the Brexit deal, it is the case that the Brexit model and narrative in front of us today has shifted drastically towards a harder, more extreme Brexit. At the start of the process, directly after the EU referendum, a soft Brexit was perceived as staying within the framework of the EU single market and customs union, while a hard Brexit was widely perceived as Canada-plus. At the time, Plaid Cymru would have been content with the former. Indeed, we have voted for those options when they have been before the House. By now, the discourse of a soft Brexit looks more like Canada-plus, while a hard Brexit is widely accepted as being no deal. There is no way on earth that we could accept either of those options with a clear conscience.

The reality of the situation is clear: on day one of a no-deal Brexit the British state will have to negotiate a series of mini deals or face dire economic consequences. No deal is therefore a complete oxymoron. The European Union has said clearly that its priority before any meaningful negotiations would be settlement of the £39-billion divorce bill, citizens' rights and the British border in Ireland. Considering the British Government will have to concede on those three issues no matter what they do, I am at a complete loss as to why anyone who supports Brexit voted against the withdrawal agreement.

Over the last year, the British Government have clearly outlined the dangers of a no-deal Brexit. On top of an economic recession equivalent to the great financial crash of 2008, highlights include troops on the street to deal with civil unrest; food shortages and higher prices as import supplies are disturbed, especially for fruit and vegetables; customs checks costing UK businesses £13 billion a year; no legal protections when buying products and services from EU countries, while UK courts no longer offer redress for consumers; flights from UK airports not receiving equal treatment when traveling to and landing at airports of countries who are members of the common aviation area; the Eurostar being disrupted until new arrangements are negotiated with each country along its routes; and fishing boats losing access to EU fishing waters, and being unable to land their catch at EU ports—and that is just what the British Government have chosen to share with us over the last few months.

Pascal Lamy, who should know a thing or two about such things as director general of the World Trade Organisation between 2005 and 2013, equates leaving the European Union single market and customs union and trading on WTO terms to leaving the first division and facing a double relegation to the third division. Aware of the potential backlash to such a reality, no-deal proponents now argue that the British state could seamlessly enact article XXIV of the general agreement on tariffs and trade to keep the current tariff schedule. That argument was shot down last week by the WTO's current director general, who said:

"Article XXIV of the GATT is simply the provision of global trade law under which free trade agreements and customs unions are concluded... If there is no agreement, then Article XXIV would not apply, and the standard WTO terms would."

In other words, as we now famously know, paragraph 5(c) of article XXIV of GATT states that it applies only if there is a deal—the direct opposite of what the no-deal apostles are arguing for.

For that reason, I have little doubt that, were the British Government to adopt no deal as its official policy, they would lose a vote of no confidence in this House. I for one am certainly committed to voting to bring down the British Government in order to defend the economic interests of my constituents. Diolch yn fawr iawn.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): The debate can last until 4.30 pm. I will call the Minister at 4.20 pm. To speak for the next 90 seconds, I call James Cartlidge.

4.18 pm

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): Thank you, Mr Hollobone; I will be very brief. I congratulate the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) and thank him for allowing me to make a short point that is very important to me. I had a meeting with arable farmers in Shimpling in my constituency two Fridays ago. They are extremely worried about the prospect of no deal. Under the current proposal, we are suggesting nil tariffs on imported wheat and barley into the United Kingdom, while exports will be subject to an out-of-quota tariff of almost €100 per tonne, making their being unmarketable a serious prospect.

Obviously, there is no time to go into the potential impact of that. I am sure that the Minister, like me, does not want no deal, but were no deal to happen we must

revisit the tariff schedule from the point of view of protecting arable farming. Otherwise, it could face a serious impact. In my view, we should respond with a reciprocal tariff to ensure that the breadbasket of England, just like our farmers in Wales, is on a level playing field with the rest of the world.

4.19 pm

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr Robert Goodwill): I congratulate the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) on securing this debate on the proposed tariff schedule for agricultural products in the event of the UK leaving the EU without a deal.

I reiterate the position of the UK Government: leaving the EU with a deal remains our top priority. I hear the hon. Gentleman's justification for not voting for the deal, but the deal that I voted for three times already this year represented a compromise between people such as him, who seem to think that being in the single market and customs union is the only way to deliver Brexit—in my view, it would be Brexit in name only and would not give us the freedom to negotiate free trade deals around the world—and others, who seem to want some sort of pure Brexit. I believe the compromise deal was a good deal. Had we voted for it, we would have left on 29 March and would now be in negotiations on the trade arrangements with the rest of the European Union.

I gently remind the hon. Gentleman that 52.5% of the people of Wales voted to leave the European Union. They will be frustrated that some parties in Wales have not voted to deliver on that. He said it was a narrow margin, but the majority for the 1997 devolution referendum was 50.3%, and he seemed very happy to stick with that.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): That is something that has been raised on several occasions. Is the Minister aware that there was a further referendum on devolution in Wales in 2011, which saw the Welsh people overwhelmingly support granting further powers to the Welsh Government?

Mr Goodwill: I understand that a win is a win, which is why the results of the initial referendum and the referendum on Britain's continued membership of the European Union should be respected and delivered on by all parties in Parliament.

As a responsible Government, we have spent more than two years carrying out extensive preparations for all scenarios, including no deal. Nowhere has the preparation been more assiduous and detailed than in my own Department. As we heard, the Government announced on 13 March a temporary tariff regime that will apply for up to 12 months should the UK leave the EU without a deal. In developing the policy, we have sought to balance the five principles set by the Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Act 2018. The five principles include taking into consideration the interests of consumers, producers, external trade, productivity and competition.

We analysed a range of evidence, including information on average trade volumes, tariff data and Government modelling on tariffs in a no-deal scenario, supplemented with business stakeholder engagement. Under this policy, the majority of UK imports—87%—would be tariff free. However, tariffs will be in place for the remaining

[Mr Goodwill]

13% of overall trade, to avoid significant adjustment costs for certain agricultural products, where tariffs help to provide support for UK producers against unfair trading practices such as dumping, and to maintain our trade commitments to developing countries.

We have not had tariffs on cereals to any extent for a number of years. Indeed, I believe the protections that we are introducing through tariffs on imported poultry meat will help protect the cereal industry, because the major customers of our cereal producers will be producers of poultry and other meat products, which we are protecting.

Jim Shannon: I declare an interest in this issue as the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on eggs, pigs and poultry, which has asked me to pose the following question. Does the Minister agree that it is absolutely essential that eggs and egg products are included in the tariff scheme, given that it is the most effective way to ensure that all UK egg producers can continue to make improvements and further welfare standards without the threat of being undermined by low-quality imports from third-world countries?

Mr Goodwill: I hope I can to some extent reassure the hon. Gentleman on the issue of shell eggs, which is the major egg market. Supermarkets have made it clear that they would not seek to buy lower quality products, and that they will continue to sell only Lion mark products. I have heard representations on liquid and powdered egg, which might be a problem, and we will continue to listen to the industry.

The no-deal tariff policy has been carefully designed to mitigate price spikes should we apply the full EU most favoured nation rates to our trade with the EU, which will result in large tariffs and potentially price increases for both consumers and producers. I will give a few examples. Should we retain EU MFN tariffs, it will result in tariffs on pasta of over 20%, and 12% tariffs on basic foods such as potatoes, cabbage and lettuce.

The policy has been designed with the objective of minimising disruption in the agricultural sectors, and it aims to strike the right balance between exposing sectors to an unreasonable level of disruption and liberalising tariffs to maintain current supply chains and avoid an increase in consumer prices. A mixture of tariffs and duty-free quotas will therefore be used for beef, sheep meat, poultry, pig meat, butter and some cheeses. The aim is for their impact on production and consumption patterns to be broadly neutral. A point was made on lamb imports from New Zealand, which will be maintained at roughly the same levels. Lamb production is of course seasonal, and New Zealand production has always filled a gap in the UK market.

Tim Farron: The export tariffs for UK farmers, including Cumbrian hill farmers, into the single market worry me the most. Would the Minister consider the potential for increasing the powers of the Groceries Code Adjudicator, so that it can prevent supermarkets from taking advantage of the loss of export markets by paying our farmers a pittance after 31 October, should we have no deal?

Mr Goodwill: Well, I will now turn to the sheep meat market, which is my single biggest concern about a no-deal Brexit. Supermarkets will operate only within the market. There is an idea that supermarkets will drive prices down. Should we have an oversupply of lamb—we could well have, as lambs come on to the market in the autumn, around the time that we could leave the EU without a deal—it will put tremendous pressure on the market. We have already seen that lamb consumption is pretty inelastic in the UK, with a 4% year-on-year reduction. We will also have the big store markets, particularly in hill areas in places such as Wales and Scotland. Hill farms that cannot keep their sheep over the winter will bring lambs to market, which could be affected by the impact of a no-deal Brexit.

As I said, the largest economic risk to the sheep sector is limiting or halting the export of lamb to the EU. The sector is unique among UK agriculture in relying heavily on exports to balance supply—indeed, we are net importers of most products. UK lamb exports will face both tariff and non-tariff barriers in the event of a no-deal Brexit from the EU. UK exports were worth £365 million in 2018, with 97% destined for the EU. To export to the EU, the UK must be recognised as a third country. Even then, the imposition of EU MFN tariffs—around 50% in ad valorem terms—would reduce the competitiveness of UK lamb on EU markets and consequentially reduce our exports. Should the UK be listed as an approved third country, it will need to meet the EU's additional requirements for third-country products of animal origin, including movement through a border inspection post, pre-notification of delivery, checks on marketing standards and export health certificates.

My boss, the Secretary of State, has said that he will support vulnerable sectors, should the price of sheep meat fall considerably. In the event that an aid scheme is deemed necessary, it is likely that we would use retained EU powers; hence the scheme would be exempt from state aid rules. As I said, UK lamb exports were worth £365 million in 2018, with most going to the EU.

Jonathan Edwards: In March, the British Government said it would have to undertake a mass culling programme of lambs and sheep in the event of no deal. Is that still the policy of the British Government, should they pursue no deal in November?

Mr Goodwill: That is not the policy of the British Government. As I say, we are looking at emergency measures, and various figures have been bandied about. The president of the National Farmers Union suggested that the cost of supporting the sheep industry—probably a system involving a headage payment based on the ewes that farmers had already declared—would cost around £150 million. We understand its scale, and I am sure the Treasury will be able to consider that. As I say, we do not want a no-deal situation; we need to get a deal over the line. Whoever the Prime Minister is next week, the best way to minimise the impact on farmers—particularly sheep farmers—is to get us a better deal that is acceptable to Parliament. Every single hon. and right hon. Member of the House will need to examine their conscience and consider how they have voted this year in a way that did not deliver on Brexit.

It is important that we deliver on Brexit. Confidence is waning in our democratic systems, and the Brexit party did very well in the European elections. We have

only ourselves in the House to blame for not delivering on Brexit, and sheep farmers will pay the greatest price. We will still get our salaries as MPs, but they will pay the price of our failing to secure an agreement.

In conclusion, I re-emphasise that leaving the EU with a deal remains the Government's top priority, but the tariff policy has sought a balance between the impacts on consumers and producers in the event of no deal. We expect the impact on UK consumers as a whole to be broadly price neutral should these changes be transmitted to retail prices, and we will provide support for our most sensitive sectors.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Drug Treatment Services

4.30 pm

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered drug treatment services.

It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Hollobone. This is a very timely debate, because today we learned shocking new figures for drug-related deaths in Scotland. There were 1,187 drug-related deaths last year, which is an increase of 27% on the previous year and the highest drug death rate in the EU. We await the 2018 figures for England and Wales without much hope for better news or an improvement.

Today also sees the launch of a new report called "Towards Sustainable Drug Treatment Services" by the research-led biotech company Camurus, which has done some extremely interesting research on the state of drug treatment services, including anonymised surveys of 22 directors of public health in England. I thank Camurus for sight of that report and thank those who have sent me briefings from other organisations, including the Hepatitis C Trust, Release, the Alcohol Health Alliance UK, the Local Government Association, Humankind and the Royal College of Psychiatrists. I will not be able to refer to all those briefings in this relatively short debate, but a couple of themes emerge from most if not all of them.

First, there is worry across the sector that the whole drug treatment services system is under pressure—some would say under threat. Since around 2012, Government cuts have squeezed treatment services so much that they are under strain and struggling to cope with demand. In 2010, the coalition Government inherited one of the best drug and alcohol treatment systems in the world, with over 250,000 people treated every year. Drug-related crime was decreasing, HIV and AIDS were under control, and tens of thousands were overcoming addiction through opiate substitution or abstinence-based programmes. The Labour Government prioritised that sector in the late 1990s as part of their social exclusion agenda, and raised treatment budgets from around £200 million per year in 1998 to more than £1 billion by 2003.

When the coalition Government's austerity really began to hit public services, the hardest-hit area was local government. When local authorities became responsible for the funding and commissioning of drugs services under the Health and Social Care Act 2012, they were already struggling with the reduction of approximately 37% in central Government funding between 2010 and 2016. Between 2014 and 2019, net expenditure on adult drug and alcohol services decreased by 19% in real terms. In 2017, the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs warned that local authority funding would prioritise mandated services over non-mandated services, such as drug services,

"particularly if service users are stigmatised or seen as undeserving."

All the stakeholders who contacted me have expressed their dismay at the impact of the cuts in recent years. More than a third of the public health directors surveyed by Camurus believe they will be unable to keep up with demand for substance misuse services in the coming year.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way and for bringing this important debate to Westminster Hall. The figures for Scotland

[Jim Shannon]

are horrendous, but the figures for the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, also show a rise. Does he agree that the current system is not equipped to deal with the level of drug abuse and need for treatment, and that the waiting times for dedicated facilities leave people without support for too long, which inevitably leads them back to their coping methods and further addiction? Those facilities need to be upgraded and made more available.

Jeff Smith: I agree with the hon. Gentleman; not for nothing is the UK labelled the drug-death capital of Europe. That should worry us across the UK.

The second theme that emerged from the reports is the real worry about the future of services after 2020 if the ring-fenced public health grant for local authorities ends and funding moves to general local authority funding. A report by the Select Committee on Health and Social Care showed that public health budgets have been cut every year since 2013, with alcohol and drug treatment services facing the biggest cuts. Councils have reduced spending on adult drug misuse by an average of 27% since 2015-16, and almost one in five local authorities have cut budgets by 50% or more since then.

The highest cuts have been disproportionately concentrated in areas with high rates of drug-related deaths, according to the Camurus report. More than half of the directors of public health surveyed believe that the removal of ring-fenced public health grants will result in further cuts. Service providers are struggling to maintain their current offer, and have even less capacity to make additional outreach efforts that are needed, such as offering proactive early prevention measures or engaging under-represented groups and communities who come less into contact with available services.

I wish I had more time to talk about hepatitis C, which is a really important issue. Stuart Smith, the head of community services at the Hepatitis C Trust, said:

“I walk into many drug services around the country and it’s chaos. They’re being asked to do so much with so little resource. I’m not sure how many of them can even feasibly have it on their priority list to discuss hepatitis C with clients.”

Hepatitis C is a very harmful condition but it can be prevented and cured if we have the resources to do so.

This is another story of austerity hitting the services that are most needed by the most vulnerable in society, but—this is the third theme that emerges from the sector responses—it is also a story of false economies. Spending on the recovery and reintegration of people who struggle with drug and alcohol dependency is one of the smartest spend-to-save investments that a Government can make. Strong evidence suggests that properly funded drug treatment services help to drive reductions in drug deaths, crime, and rates of blood-borne viruses. Research that the Government themselves commissioned concluded that drug treatment can “substantially reduce” the social costs associated with drug misuse and dependence, with an estimated cost-benefit ratio of 2.5:1. Depending on the breadth of the definition of “social costs”, that ratio could be calculated far more favourably and take into account factors such as lower crime, fewer health problems, less benefit dependency,

lower social services spending and so on. Public Health England estimates that for every £1 invested in drug treatment services, there is a £4 social return.

Drug treatment and harm reduction services are cost-effective and offer good value for money, so this is a classic example of funding reductions in one part of the public services leading to spending increases in another. To quote Ron Hogg, police and crime commissioner for Durham and Darlington, who in my view is one of our most progressive PCCs:

“As PCC, I have concerns regarding the future allocation of public health funding in Durham, via the Public Health Grant, and the knock-on effect for policing. I am fearful that I will face the triple whammy of a reduction in police funding, a further reduction due to changes in the funding formula, and the consequences of a decrease in public health funding. The consequences of these changes are likely to include a significant increase in crime in County Durham and Darlington.”

We know that half of acquisitive crime in the UK is directly related to drug dependency.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): I am grateful that my hon. Friend has raised the issue of crime. Is he aware that crime prevention orders and drug and alcohol treatment orders attached to sentences have fallen? Drug treatment orders have fallen from 8,734 in 2014 to 4,889 in 2018, and alcohol treatment orders have also halved. People are not getting drug treatment orders as part of their sentence in the community, which leads to the same threats that my hon. Friend describes.

Jeff Smith: I thank my right hon. Friend for making that important point. Durham constabulary’s Checkpoint scheme, through which low and medium-level offenders with drug dependency are diverted into treatment rather than the criminal justice system, has reduced arrests by 11% and convictions by 9.7%, and has made a positive contribution in relation to participants’ drug use, physical and mental health, finances, accommodation status and relationships. There are benefits right across society when we send people into help and treatment, rather than into custody.

A number of stakeholders have identified that the lack of resources not only puts a strain on current treatments and activities, but stifles innovation in new ideas and treatments. That leads me to another key point, which is on our wider approach to drug treatment and policy. There are measures that we can take to reduce deaths and that would lead to less demand on drug treatment services, but the Government are either not encouraging or not permitting them. The most obvious is what many call drug consumption rooms, although I prefer the term overdose prevention centres, which are aimed at those with severe addictions. People will take their drugs—they have them in their possession, so they will inject them, and there is no way that we can stop them doing that—but rather than being left to inject their drugs in a bedsit or back alley, alone with an increased risk of overdose, they can go to one of the centres, where a nurse is on hand; they can use in a sterile clinical space with medical supervision, and naloxone on hand to reverse any overdose.

There are two great benefits to the centres. First, they save lives: no one dies of an overdose in such facilities. Secondly, they also have services for addicts to engage with. It might be the first time that addicts have come into contact with services, so they could be encouraged

into other treatment options. At least 100 drug consumption rooms operate in at least 66 cities around the world, in 10 countries. In a number of European countries, such as in Spain, Germany and the Netherlands, supervised drug consumption has become an integrated part of services offered within drug treatment systems.

Police and crime commissioners and health professionals have been assessing the value of piloting such facilities in various areas, but the Government position is to block the pilots. Furthermore, the Government are unwilling to revisit the legislative framework, and so are insistent that we cannot make provision for the centres. However, according to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction last year:

“There is no evidence to suggest that the availability of safer injecting facilities increases drug use or frequency of injecting”.

Equally:

“These services facilitate rather than delay treatment entry and do not result in higher rates of local drug-related crime.”

Drug consumption rooms, overdose prevention centres or whatever we want to call them simply make sense, and it is very regrettable that the Government will not allow them to become part of our treatment landscape.

On the subject of innovative models of service delivery, I mention the Checkpoint scheme in Durham.

Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is making some excellent points. Does not the thrust of his argument lead to the conclusion that, if one were to regulate and control but decriminalise more broadly, many of the social ills and medical problems might be reduced? Is it not time for a royal commission to look more broadly at the troubling social disease of drugs?

Jeff Smith: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. I absolutely agree that we need regulation and control. Personally, I am not sure about royal commissions, because they tend to kick things into the long grass a bit, but perhaps a parliamentary commission or some other way of looking at the problem, trying to come to a consensus and taking the politics out of it—stop people weaponising drugs as a political issue—is the way forward. We need to look at that, because our system is not working. This is not a debate about wider drug policy but, clearly, that policy is not working, and it is resulting in the kind of problems that we face—addicts need the kind of drug treatment services that this debate is about.

I will try to be quick, because other people want to contribute to this short debate. On innovative models of service delivery, naloxone is a life-saving medication that can be used to reverse opioid overdose. However, coverage across England remains poor and the guidance is confusing. If we cannot convince the Government to increase funding for naloxone treatment by implementing a national naloxone programme, they should at least offer national support and guidance for local authorities and prisons. Finally, on drug safety testing, the Home Office refuses explicitly to sanction drug safety testing, which is a simple measure that could save lives and result in fewer people needing treated for drug harms.

We therefore need a refocus of our spending priorities. Funding constraints are curbing the effectiveness of proven treatment and harm reduction measures at the same time as we spend fortunes on drug law enforcement.

In 2014-15, for example, an estimated £1.6 billion was spent on drug law enforcement, compared with only £541 million on drug treatment and harm reduction services over the same period. However, while we know that treatment services are cost-effective and save money, the Home Office's own evaluation of its last drug strategy could not demonstrate value for money in drug law enforcement or enforcement-related activities.

The Government, unfortunately, are preoccupied with trying to stop people from taking drugs—something no one has managed to do in centuries of human behaviour—instead of focusing on harm reduction and treatment. Problematic drug users are stigmatised by our policies and treated as criminals, leaving them less likely to access the life-saving drug treatment services that they need, for fear of arrest. Meanwhile, the services that are available—as we heard earlier—have had their funding slashed and continue to be squeezed.

I need to conclude with some proposals. First, the one consistent message from all stakeholders who have been in touch and care about the issue is that we need to reverse the cuts to our struggling drug and alcohol treatment system. We need to reinvest in those services. The Camurus report released today states:

“The evidence shows that we are fast approaching a point at which we risk doing irreparable damage to our hard-won recovery system, leaving services unable to meet the scale of need that exists.”

The Government must therefore use the upcoming spending review to increase spending on drug treatment services. They need to provide local authorities with additional funding towards those services, without which the ability of services to meet demand will continue to decline.

Among other proposals I suggest the Government should consider guaranteeing the delivery of substance misuse services by making them a statutory, mandated service to end the ambiguity about their delivery and to underline importance of protecting budgets. The Government should also look at the commissioning regime—the consensus among many stakeholders is that it is not working and is too variable—to see whether it is fit for purpose. A 2017 report by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs asked whether the constant re-procurement of addiction services creates unnecessary instability in the system, resulting in poorer recovery outcomes, which is something I have seen on a small scale in the area of south Manchester I represent. Finally, we need to remove barriers to overdose prevention centres and drug safety testing to encourage faster use of heroin-assisted treatment. Such proposals can stop deaths and reduce the numbers going into treatment. We are looking at a public health emergency, and we need to act.

The shadow Health Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth), has talked movingly about his experience of alcoholism in his family. He has promised that a future Labour Government will reverse the decline in the drug and alcohol treatment sector. I fully support him in that endeavour, but we cannot wait. We need the Government to act to safeguard our drug treatment services and, most importantly, to safeguard those who use them.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): The debate can go on until 5.30 pm. I am obliged to call the Front Benchers from no later than seven minutes past five o'clock. The

[Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair)]

guideline limits are five minutes for the SNP, five minutes for Her Majesty's Opposition and 10 minutes for the Minister, and Jeff Smith has two or three minutes at the end to sum up the debate. Five Back Benchers are seeking to contribute, so there will need to be a time limit, which is four minutes each, and then everyone will get in.

4.48 pm

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) on securing the debate. I agree with everything he said. I draw the attention of Members to my declaration of interest as a practising NHS psychiatrist and as someone who has worked in drug addiction, or drug treatment, services.

I do not intend to rehearse the discussion on the lack of, or reduction in, funding for the treatment of addiction services since the commissioning moved to local authorities, because that argument has been well established. The challenge we face is how to encourage more people to engage with addiction services and how to improve the quality of care available to those who are drug and alcohol-dependent. In my view—this is increasingly the consensus—commissioning by local authorities has probably been the single biggest failure of health legislation under our Government, and we need to revisit that if we want to improve the quality of care available to the patients we are looking after.

Between 2009-10 and 2016-17, the number of people with opiate addiction who access services has reduced by about 16%. Heroin deaths are on the rise; the number of people presenting with alcohol-related illness, pathology and morbidity is rising; and alcohol-related deaths are rising. Our current approach to addictions is not working, which appears to be that the NHS will patch you up as best it can. We are not doing a good job of preventing people from appearing in A&E or in the acute hospital because the commissioning of addiction service is not right. While I do not believe that local authorities are in the right place to commission services, the lack of funding they receive has been a contributing factor.

There are five key challenges and problems with commissioning by local authorities. The first is the quality of patient care delivered. There is poor integration of services between the NHS and the providers that often are commissioned by the local authority, be they in the private sector or the charitable sector. Historically, NHS services have had a good integrated approach between physical healthcare and addictions care. NHS providers have a joined-up approach to treating people with hepatitis, HIV and other physical health problems, or older addicts who may need support for physical health needs, such as cardiac or respiratory problems they may develop as a result of their addictions, particularly if they smoke heroin. That does not happen when there is fragmented commissioning by private-sector providers and local authorities. That needs to change for the benefit of many patients.

Secondly, all private sector providers operate under their own IT systems that have no integration with the NHS whatsoever, so an NHS doctor does not know necessarily what care those private providers are giving.

That is dangerous because there is no continuity of healthcare and it is fragmented, to the extent that one part of a supposed health system cannot see what is happening elsewhere.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order.

4.52 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) for securing this debate.

Figures released today show that in Scotland there are more than three deaths a day due to drug use. But who really cares? Who are those people who are dying? It is the homeless; the isolated; the good-for-nothing; the detritus of society. People who inject themselves with poisonous substances do it to themselves—nobody makes them do it. How often have we heard that justification? Nobody is saying it in this place, but we know some people are thinking it.

Through a lack of compassion, but primarily through a lack of understanding, society has created a sub-culture of marginalised people who are pushed to the fringes of our day-to-day consciousness. It has become far too easy to dismiss them, ignore them and exclude them from our cosy lives. Problematic drug users are not getting high for the kicks; they are self-medicating because the pain of everyday life is so great that without the drugs they could not live. The sickness is not the drug use—the pain started long before the addiction. Of the 10% of drug users who develop an addiction, the vast majority have been physically, psychologically or sexually abused. Mix that with financial and aspirational deprivation and it makes a powerful mix that it takes powerful drugs to suppress. That is why the support services must be about homelessness, mental health, security, continuity, understanding and compassion—everything that counters the chaos.

When I visited drug consumption rooms in Barcelona, I was particularly struck by one facility: a health centre where people visit their GPs for everyday ailments, which is attached to a hospital that people can be referred to. One part of the health centre is for homeless people to visit and pick up clean clothes, have a shower and shave. Over time, the staff build up a relationship with the clientele and come to understand why they are homeless and what can be done. Another unit attached to the health centre is a drug consumption room; the staff there have exactly the same attitude as the staff in the health centre, the GP surgeries and the homelessness unit. They want to know, "What is your problem, and how can I help?"

That is a million miles away from the stigmatisation that is so common in the UK. The mindset of approaching problematic drug use as a health issue pays great dividends: it is cheaper than pursuing and incarcerating people for drug possession; it frees up the police to fight crime; and, most importantly, it works across the globe. It does not work for everyone; tragically, there will always be drug-related deaths, but as we look at the figures released today let us not forget that, thanks to the naloxone available in DCRs, there has never been a death due to overdose in any DCR anywhere in the world. When will the UK Government come to terms with that?

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): On the reform of drug laws, we probably have a lot in common, but today's shocking figures show that the

number of drug deaths in Scotland is not only three times the average of the rest of the United Kingdom, even though we are all under the same laws, but the highest in Europe. If the hon. Gentleman wants a health-based solution, will he explain what, after 12 years of SNP stewardship of our health service in Scotland, can be done? What should be done through the devolved and central Governments working together?

Ronnie Cowan: The policy is a Europe-wide one; it is proven that the methods used elsewhere in Europe have helped the situation.

Glasgow stands ready to pioneer a DCR. There is cross-party support from Glasgow Council, backing from the SNP Scottish Government, and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde is fully on board. What in the name of goodness is stopping the UK Government from joining us?

4.56 pm

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) on securing this debate and on speaking so well. Happily, much of what I intended to say I now do not need to, not that I would have time to say it anyway.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter); he began to get into the systemic problems in this area, which is what I want to focus my remarks on. We have a systemic problem in the assessment of the rate of return on the investment in drug treatment services, particularly compared with the rate of return on investment in law enforcement in drug policy.

According to the Government's own statistics, we are not getting a satisfactory return at all on drug law enforcement. That is why the police's operational policy has been progressively to withdraw from doing nugatory work, leading to effective decriminalisation in many parts of the country, simply because that is not a sensible use of resources. It certainly is a sensible use of resources to try to repair the lives of drug addicts. The cuts under the necessity of austerity, and the systemic issue that my hon. Friend referred to in respect of local authorities taking responsibility, have meant that we are making a shocking value-for-money judgment in the application of public resources in this area.

It has to be down to the Minister—no one else can do it—to review how we invest public money for the public good. That is at the kernel of this debate. If we do not make changes, enforcement authorities will continue to progressively withdraw, because they simply will not waste the public money they have been given by running ineffective operations. The just-retired chief constable of Durham, Mike Barton, is a huge authority on that, and I urge the Minister to talk to her Home Office colleagues about his experience.

There is a very clear overlap between the application of the law to drug users and recovery. One then gets into the toxic situation of stigma around those users. There is also a public health budget administered by local authorities, which are under pressure to use those resources elsewhere. People who have used drugs that we have made illegal do not get automatic support in our society, yet they are just as much part of our society as anyone else.

If we do not invest resources properly, we will simply find that we carry the burden of the consequences of the damage that has been done to all those people. There is an infinitely better way to do things, and I urge the Minister to try her hand at effecting the system change that is needed to do things infinitely better.

4.59 pm

Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) on an excellent speech and on his commitment to tackle unswervingly the problems associated with drug and alcohol abuse.

I am pleased to speak as co-chair of the drugs, alcohol and justice cross-party parliamentary group that last week considered the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs' recent report, "Custody-Community Transitions". The report is helpful in providing advice on how to reduce drug-related harms that happen when people move between custody and the community. I hope the Minister will agree to implement the report's practical recommendations as soon as possible to ensure continuity of care.

Some simple changes could make a huge difference. For example, it suggests prisoners with complex needs should not be released on to the streets on Fridays. Given that last year only 12% of prisoners with drugs problems left prison with naloxone, which can reverse the effects of overdose, the report recommends that naloxone should be issued to all prisoners with drug problems on leaving custody.

We have record rates of drug-related deaths, yet drug treatment budgets have been slashed and services cut, as has already been said. I am sad to say that my region, the north-east, is the worst affected in England. Today we have heard that drug-related deaths in Scotland have gone up by a staggering 27%. We can only tackle these soaring statistics if substance misuse services are made mandatory and drug treatment budgets ring-fenced.

Instead of investing in harm reduction, we waste valuable resources on an unwinnable war on drugs, treating this as a criminal justice rather than a public health issue. We have excellent examples of a different approach being taken in the checkpoint scheme in County Durham and the Thames Valley diversion scheme. They show effective alternative solutions—not easy options, but positive ways of getting people out of trouble and into treatment. Another innovation to help drug users would be the introduction of drug-consumption rooms—effectively overdose prevention centres—which the Government stubbornly refuse to allow, despite conclusive evidence that they are of massive benefit.

In summary, I will quote Paul Townsley, chief executive of the charity Humankind:

"These challenging times provide an important opportunity to cement the evidence base of what our service users and our communities need, but to achieve this we will need stable funding and commissioning... Government has a duty to act now to ensure treatment services are accessible to all who need them. We call on Government to ensure that substance misuse treatment is a prescribed local public health activity."

I can only concur.

5.2 pm

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you for calling me to speak, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) on an excellent introduction to the debate and on the vital points he made.

Last week, one of my constituents, Chelsea Bruce, died of a drugs overdose. She was 16-years-old. She is another figure to add to the 1,187 deaths in Scotland in the last year. It is particularly poignant because this time last year I presented Chelsea with an award at her school, where I talked about the potential of the future and what young people could go off and do in the world. To think that that girl now lies dead for entirely preventable reasons sickens me. I wonder about the damage that has been caused to her family and the trauma that has been caused to her friends, who now live in a mixture of grief and fear of what drugs can do to them.

Chelsea might not have come to harm had she been able to have the pills tested, to have had a testing kit or to have sourced the pills from a supplier who had had them tested. There are now very high-strength MDMA pills in circulation. Sometimes it is not MDMA but other substances that mimic some of the effects of MDMA; that could have been a factor in Chelsea's death. That is something we need to understand in this House and respond to with great urgency.

I have been following the campaign for drug policy reform closely since my election, and ensuring that a public health approach is at the heart of how we begin to properly tackle this devastating blight on our country is critical. I am personally convinced of the merits of decriminalisation of people who use drugs and minor drug possession for personal use, based on international examples, most notably in Portugal. I am pleased that the introduction of safe drug consumption facilities is Labour party policy and we will be campaigning to ensure that we go even further in our next manifesto.

However, I am alarmed at the lack of impetus to put in place practical policies now, which could save lives in my city where drug-related deaths have reached epidemic levels. They are now 1,000% higher than the European average; that is a public health emergency by any definition. While many are big on rhetoric, our public policy is years behind where it should be in addressing this appalling crisis of death and misery.

The Home Office and the Lord Advocate have been intransigent about the piloting of safe drug consumption in Glasgow. A model that has a worldwide track record of saving lives has been discussed. While the Home Office refuses to change the obsolete Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, the Lord Advocate, Scotland's chief law officer, claims that a letter of comfort is insufficient to avoid possible prosecutions of NHS staff who might work in such a facility or those who would use it, unless the law is changed by the UK Government.

The chief executive of the Scottish Drugs Forum, David Liddell, believes that much more can be done to facilitate reform within current legislation. Last week, I suggested to the Scottish Affairs Committee that the Lord Advocate is being too risk averse and conservative in approach. I have now written to the Lord Advocate to challenge him on that point. It is certainly no good for Scottish Government Ministers and Glasgow City

Council to abrogate their responsibility for this public health crisis by conveniently blaming Westminster, as unco-operative and unhelpful as it might be on this issue, when they have cut victim services in Glasgow by over a quarter in recent years, causing the closure of rehabilitation services and needle exchanges, as well as the end of central Government funding for the national naloxone programme.

While a heroin-assisted treatment pilot will launch in Glasgow later this year, it will be highly targeted and the thresholds for access will be difficult to reach for most of Glasgow's problematic opiate and cocaine users, who are often polydrug users. That is why I have also asked for the Lord Advocate's advice on an additional innovative model that could be adopted in Glasgow, a safe prescribing clinic, where instead of illicit drugs of an unknown purity being brought into the facility for use under clinical supervision—as in a drug consumption room—pharmaceutical diamorphine and cocaine can be prescribed freely for use in a supervised clinical environment. As well as bringing all the benefits of DCR, it removes the stranglehold that criminal gangs have over the drugs supply chain and removes the financial dependency that many people with drug problems face to feed their habit, and the crime that goes with it. Combine that with supervised drug facilities like the Loop in Bristol and WEDINOS in Wales, and we could be on to something that reduces harm.

Saving one life is one life that is worth it, and we should take urgent action now.

5.7 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I am glad that the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) secured this debate, because it is very timely for Glasgow and for Scotland more widely.

Let me start by saying that every single one of the 1,187 deaths last year is a tragedy—a tragedy for the families who lost a loved one and, as the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) said, a tragedy because of the potential that was lost as a result of that person passing away. We should bear those people in mind whenever we talk about drugs policy.

Ideally, I want those people, who have an illness, to be able to get medical help as if they had any other illness. If they had cancer, we would not stigmatise the cancer drug that kept them well. That is what methadone does—it supports people and stabilises their lives.

Luke Graham *rose*—

Alison Thewliss: I will not hear a word from the hon. Gentleman against that.

Luke Graham: It is not stigmatisation; it is data led. We saw information today that more people die from the use of methadone. I am not asking the hon. Lady to cancel anything; I am asking whether she will join me in calling for a review. We need a review of all our drug laws across the board. She knows that I agree with her on many aspects of this policy. I seek a review, not to cancel out or stigmatise.

Alison Thewliss: When the hon. Gentleman talks about methadone, the result is that he stigmatises it. That may not be his intention, but that is the result. He

may have heard Kirsten Horsburgh from the Scottish Drugs Forum talking on “Good Morning Scotland” this morning about that being stigmatising for people. We need to get away from that stigma. We need to look towards treatment and harm reduction.

To that end, I and my SNP colleagues have argued for three years for a drug consumption room for Glasgow. That could go ahead as a pilot if the UK Government got out of the way and let us do it. It is three years since NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde produced its “Taking away the chaos” report, the business case for that drug consumption room, which Saket Priyadarshi and his colleagues worked away on. That has been sitting there for three years. The UK Government are standing in the way of the life-saving intervention a drug consumption room would bring.

That drug consumption room would not save everybody—at the moment, it would be just for Glasgow—but it would make a huge difference to the people I know who inject in dirty bin sheds and back lanes and on waste ground yards from my office, time and again. It is the job of the rest of society to try to pick up the pieces of that—to pick up the discarded needles that are left behind. Those people would have the dignity of a drug consumption room within a few paces, where they could go to inject drugs, receive medical help and get support now, if the UK Government approved it. It is an absolute tragedy that that is not happening, and a huge source of frustration.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) mentioned the Lord Advocate. The Lord Advocate is the Lord Advocate; we cannot intervene in the decisions that the chief legal officer takes on this. If he says that that is not within the law, that is his legal opinion. He is the chief legal officer, and that is his decision. It rests with the UK Government to make that change under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

Luke Graham: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Alison Thewliss: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman, and I am short of time.

The Misuse of Drugs Act is reserved. Where we have had powers in Scotland on alcohol, we brought in minimum unit pricing; on smoking, we brought in the end of smoking in public places. This is a medical intervention that we wish to pursue in order to save people’s lives. Glasgow, where it can, has applied for a heroin-assisted treatment programme; when that is up and running, it will be able to treat 60 people, but there are an estimated 400 to 500 people who inject publicly within Glasgow city centre alone. That medical heroin-assisted treatment programme is limited in size, scope and scale, because it is a treatment programme and people must be able to engage with that.

No doubt the programme will make a huge difference to those lives, but it almost goes without saying that if 394 people died in Glasgow last year, and it can only deal with 60 people at a time, it is not enough. It is clear that we need the entry level that drug consumption rooms will give, meaning that people can go in without any kind of barrier or stigma associated with seeking help, and are able to reach those treatment services. It needs to be an easy way for people to get in and get treatment within those services.

The Scottish Government are pursuing this. We are doing what we can. We have a new drugs taskforce, chaired by Professor Catriona Matheson from the University of Stirling, which is looking at all the things we do in the Scottish Government in the round and where improvements need to be made. Both I and the Scottish Government accept that improvements need to be made, but the UK Government also need to play their part.

I will mention organisations such as Turning Point Scotland in my constituency. They drive a van around as a needle exchange, but they know that as soon as they give that needle to somebody, that person is going around to the car park at the back, to inject in a dirty back lane. That is not good enough. Not one UK Government Minister has yet come to visit Glasgow to justify their position; I urge this Minister and any of her colleagues, whoever they may be, whenever the new Prime Minister eventually turns up, to come to Glasgow and tell me why this cannot be done.

5.12 pm

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone.

I begin by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) for bringing this debate on this very important subject. As we have already said, the debate is timely, as we hear today that 1,187 people died drug-related deaths in Scotland last year, an increase of 27%. I can say from personal experience of delivering services to drug users in a community pharmacy in my constituency that the problem is not confined to Scotland.

The problem is not new, but there is no doubt that cuts to budgets for addiction support services in recent years have made the situation worse. The cuts to public health budgets that have had an impact on this are downright irresponsible. There have been numerous calls over the years for us to take steps to address the problem, but instead, we prefer to speak about getting tougher in tackling the trade in illegal drugs. Meanwhile, police chiefs are on record as saying that there is no way that police will ever stop addicts buying from dealers, but still we continue to chase drug addicts like criminals.

While other countries move increasingly to a public health approach to drug use, the instinct in the UK is to criminalise addicts. It is worth noting that in Portugal, where drug use has been decriminalised, there has been a steep fall in the number of drug-related deaths and even in the number of drug users. It is time for an intelligent approach here in the UK, an approach that stops drug dealers preying on vulnerable addicts and that recognises that drug addicts are not alien beings, but people in our communities in need of help, not a criminal record.

Drug addicts have families and children who need and love them. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) spoke movingly of his constituent Chelsea, reminding us of the humanity in all this. In the first instance, addicts need support to stay alive, to safely manage their addiction, to overcome it and to recover their lives.

So what can the Government do? The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs has clearly said that maintaining funding of drug treatment services is essential to preventing drug-related death and drug-driven crime in communities. It has also said that if resources are

[Julie Cooper]

spread too thinly, the effectiveness of drug treatment will suffer, leading to drug-related deaths and drug-driven crime. As a first step, I hope the Minister can tell us that her Government will restore funding to addiction support services, but I also hope she will go much further and consider new ways of tackling the problem to save lives.

Both supervised consumption rooms and heroin-assisted treatments are possible ways to effect some positive changes. Supervised consumption rooms reduce the risk of disease transmission, prevent overdose and also present an opportunity to refer users to appropriate addiction services. Heroin-assisted treatment allows for the provision of pharmacological heroin to dependent individuals who have not responded to other treatments, and involves patients receiving heroin in a clinical setting from a doctor under strict controls.

That has many benefits. It reduces the use of street heroin, which can be of dubious quality and variable strength. It takes away the need for criminal drug dealers, who are preying on vulnerable people and profiting from their addictions. It gets addicts into treatment. It stops desperate addicts resorting to criminal activity to fund their addiction. It improves access to recovery services, HIV treatments and services to address adverse life circumstances. As the police remind us, it also stops drug-taking in open spaces in the community and protects the wider public from contact with used needles.

Both those services reduce pressure on other services in the NHS, police and justice systems, protect the wider public from contaminated needles and ultimately save public money. Cuts to those services are short-sighted in the extreme. Those initiatives are supported by the British Medical Association, and it is a fact that other countries are doing better than us because they have implemented those programmes.

I say to the Minister that we need urgent action. We need mandatory commissioning of drug and alcohol treatment services. We need to amend the Misuse of Drugs Act to enable an innovative, health-focused approach to tackling this problem. We need a Government with the courage and the compassion to act to save lives.

5.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Seema Kennedy): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I begin by sending my sympathies and those of the whole House to Chelsea's family and friends. It is a reminder to us all of the seriousness of the subject we are discussing today. I also thank the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) for securing this important debate.

Many of the hon. Members who have spoken are devoting their parliamentary lives to this issue, because they feel so strongly about it. They have raised questions that are a matter not only for me and my Department but for other ministerial colleagues, particularly those in the Home Office, and I will transmit the many challenges that have been set for me today to those colleagues.

We have made some progress in reducing drug dependency-related harms, but, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, this is an ancient problem. We have made progress but we are not at all complacent, and events

such as the death of a girl such as Chelsea remind us that there is much more to do. I have to work with other Government Departments, public health experts and local government to continue supporting people through recovery and to prevent them from ever taking up drugs in the first place.

We published a drugs strategy in July 2017 and it is being rolled out. We know about the serious health harms of drug use, including blood-borne viruses, overdose and death, which have been outlined in great detail by hon. Members. We know that the majority of people who need treatment for drug problems are also experiencing mental health issues. We know that drugs cost £10.7 billion a year in policing, healthcare and crime costs; it is estimated that drug-fuelled theft alone costs us £6 billion a year. There is both an economic case and a moral case for us all to act on this.

It is encouraging that drug use in England and Wales is lower now than it was a decade ago. In 2016-17, 8.5% of adults had used a drug in the past year, compared with 10.1% of adults in 2006-07. More adults are successfully leaving treatment than in 2009-10, and the average waiting time to access treatment is two days.

I will pick up on some of the points that hon. Members have made. On the drug-related death figures for Scotland, health is a devolved matter, but of course—[Interruption.] I am afraid I cannot hear what the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) is saying.

Alison Thewliss: The Misuse of Drugs Act is not devolved.

Seema Kennedy: I will come on to that. However, health is a devolved matter. Any death is a tragedy, but the figures are really worrying. I understand that the Scottish Government have appointed Professor Catriona Matheson to head up a drug deaths taskforce, to look at the main causes of death and to examine how to save lives.

My hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) raised the question where responsibility for public health should sit. Clearly, he thinks its sitting with local authorities is not right, but that is a broader question of public health commissioning that I do not know if we can get into here. However, he has a wealth of experience in this, and I will take away some of the points that he raised.

Julie Cooper: Does the Minister agree that, while we can argue about who should be responsible, as long as public health is the responsibility of local authorities, cutting their budgets is irresponsible?

Seema Kennedy: I will come on to funding.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) takes great interest in this issue. He spoke about the legislative framework for drugs, which is a matter for the Home Office. As I said, I will talk to ministerial colleagues about that. The Government are putting together a formal response to the report on custody-community transitions, with input from many Departments, including the Department for Work and Pensions, the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office. I think we have until the end of the summer to issue that response.

Local authorities will want to increase the provision of naloxone to people who are not in treatment, perhaps through outreach workers, hostels or needle and syringe programmes. Public Health England is working alongside the National Police Chiefs' Council and Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service and recently updated its advice and guidance on naloxone availability in prisons. The problem with drug testing kits is that not all of them are entirely accurate, which might give people false reassurance. More sophisticated testing has been available at some festivals in one pilot, but again this is a matter for the Home Office.

Hon. Members talked about the international evidence that drug consumption rooms can be effective at addressing public nuisance issues and health risks for users and for the wider public, but there is a risk that such facilities would be introduced at the expense of other more relevant, evidence-based drug services for local areas. There is currently no legal framework for the provision of drug consumption rooms, but we support a range of evidence-based approaches to reducing health-related harms. Again, we are committed to widening the availability of naloxone to prevent drug-related deaths. I acknowledge the strength of feeling on drug consumption rooms in the House.

Crispin Blunt: This is a narrow point, but I invite the Minister to talk about overdose prevention facilities, rather than drug consumption rooms. One can understand the difference that might make to their reception in local communities; they are about preventing death.

Seema Kennedy: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention.

Alison Thewliss: Will the Minister give way?

Seema Kennedy: Briefly, and then I must continue, because I want the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington to be able to make his concluding remarks.

Alison Thewliss: The Minister talks about there being no legal framework, but it is the job of the UK Government to provide that. If she wants any assistance, I have a 10-minute rule Bill still waiting to be heard that she could implement.

Seema Kennedy: As I say, that is a matter for the Home Office. I sense the hon. Lady's frustration, but I am not responsible for that area. I have already said twice that I am happy to take that point away. Tabling business in the Chamber really is not my responsibility. I sense and am cognisant of the frustration in the House.

Under the 2017 drug strategy, we are involved in delivering actions across four themes: reducing demand to prevent drug use and its escalation; restricting supply; building recovery; and a new strand focused on global action, which is important. We need a partnership-based approach alongside the treatment system; other partners, such as the mental health and criminal justice systems, have key roles to play in securing the drug strategy's aims.

I attend a cross-ministerial drug strategy board with Ministers from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Home Office, the Ministry

of Justice and representatives of Public Health England. Additionally, the Home Secretary has appointed Professor Dame Carol Black to lead a major review of drugs, looking at a range of issues, including the system of support and enforcement around drug misuse, to inform our thinking about tackling drug harms. Dame Carol will report later this summer.

I acknowledge the concerns about the funding of public health services, and that local authorities need to make difficult choices about how they spend their money to be able to continue providing effective drug treatment services. Local authorities will receive £3.1 billion in this financial year, ring-fenced exclusively for use on public health, including drug addiction. In addition, we are investing more than £16 billion for public health over the five years to the end of 2020. It is a condition of the public health grant that local authorities have regard to the need to improve the take-up and outcomes from drug and alcohol misuse treatment services. Public health funding is a matter for the next spending review, in which it will be looked at in the light of the best available evidence.

Mr Sweeney: Does the Minister accept that it is within the remit of the Department of Health and Social Care to consider the possibility of not only drug consumption rooms but expanding the scope, based on a heroin-assisted treatment facility, to provide safe prescribing clinics, which have far lower thresholds and which would provide greater access to safe drug use?

Seema Kennedy: I will have to respond to that in writing.

It is not possible for the treatment system to bear sole responsibility for responding to these challenges. Where necessary, the Government are prepared to act to ensure that our response enables us to reduce the harms caused by drugs. We are already acting on designating third-generation synthetic cannabinoids, such as Spice, as class B drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act. In response to the increase in drug-related deaths, PHE has been working to better understand how to best protect people from dying of overdoses.

Although we have made strong progress in tackling the human and financial harms associated with drug misuse, we know that there is more still to do, and that there are emerging challenges that we need to tackle. We will approach these issues with the full range of partners who are essential to delivering the drugs strategy, enabling us to build on such achievements—without being complacent—and drive further progress.

5.27 pm

Jeff Smith: I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have made such excellent contributions to the debate. I will mention two in particular. I was very much enjoying the speech of the hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) until he was cut off in his prime. He made some important points about commissioning. That is not something I went into in detail, but it is certainly something that the Government need to consider. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) told the story of Chelsea, which brought home the ways that

[Jeff Smith]

our drug policy is failing and the way that we need to address issues that end up in tragedies such as Chelsea's sad death.

I also thank the two Opposition Front Benchers for their powerful speeches, which had a welcome focus on support, rather than the criminalisation of addicts. That is absolutely the way that Government policy needs to go. I thank the Minister for her response. We have a Health and Social Care Minister here, which is exactly right; on a general principle, when talking about drug policy, we should have a Health and Social Care Minister. Responsibility for the policy should be situated in that Department, but as the Minister rightly pointed out, much of the responsibility is currently in the Home Office.

The focus on the legal framework was interesting, as was the frustration about how the legal framework fails us and how the focus on criminalisation fails us and distracts us from focusing money and resources into the drug treatment services that we so badly need. I hope the Minister will go back to colleagues in the Home Office and talk about this. I was expecting the debate to be a lot more about cuts to drug treatment services,

rather than the legal framework. However, I think that brings home the frustration that many of us feel: that a progressive drugs policy is being blocked by the fact that responsibility is situated in the Home Office, rather than in Health and Social Care.

The Minister mentioned a couple of points that I question. Without a national framework or programme, we will end up with a postcode lottery for naloxone, which is a real concern. She talked about the legal framework for drug consumption rooms, but that is for the Government to change, as the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) said. Drug testing is very sophisticated these days. A charity based in my constituency operates excellent drug testing in festivals and city centres around the country. We have nothing to fear from the drug testing that those sorts of organisations carry out.

I finish by urging the Minister to do two things. First, the spending review is coming up. I hope she will be going in to bat for her Department, and particularly for investment in drug treatment services.

5.30 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).

Written Statements

Tuesday 16 July 2019

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Taylor Review: Implementation

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): The good work plan sets out the Government's vision for the future of the UK labour market and how we will implement the Taylor review recommendations. It forms an integral part of the modern industrial strategy and this Government's long-term plan to boost the productivity and earning power of people throughout the UK and to develop better jobs for all.

Today we are delivering the next phase of the good work plan. The good work plan recognised the vital role effective enforcement plays in ensuring confidence to challenge when the law is broken and in creating a level playing field between businesses. Establishing the director of labour market enforcement has been an excellent innovation, in terms of improving co-ordination across agencies, but we think we can go further. Today, we are publishing a consultation on new proposals for a single labour market enforcement body and will be seeking views on how the enforcement landscape could be simplified.

We will also be publishing the most recent director of labour market enforcement's strategy, setting out recommendations for the Government which we will be carefully considering. The Home Secretary and I are very grateful to Sir David Metcalf for producing this report prior to his retirement and for all his hard work in this role. We are also delighted to announce that we have appointed a new interim director of labour market enforcement. Matthew Taylor, chief executive of the RSA, will be taking up this role from 1 August for 12 months.

The reforms we have announced today are the next important step in delivering on the good work plan and ensuring we have a labour market that is fit for purpose. We recognise that the world of work is changing and are delivering the necessary reforms to ensure the UK labour market can adapt effectively, and support the needs of both workers and employers.

Copies of the referenced consultation and the director of labour market enforcement's strategy will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS1726]

TREASURY ECOFIN: 9 July 2019

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond): A meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) was held in Brussels on 9 July 2019. The UK was represented by Mark Bowman (Director General, International Finance, HM Treasury). The Council discussed the following:

Early morning session

The Eurogroup President briefed the Council on the outcomes of the 8 July meeting of the Eurogroup, and the European Commission provided an update on the current economic situation in the EU. Ministers then discussed potential new sources of revenue for the upcoming multiannual financial framework the EU's long-term budget.

Own resources

The Finnish presidency gave an update to the Council on the potential new sources of revenue for the upcoming multiannual financial framework, following a discussion during the early morning session.

Presidency work programme

The Finnish presidency presented its work programme on economic and financial matters for July to December 2019.

Appointment of the President of the European Central Bank

The Council adopted a Council recommendation on the appointment of Christine Lagarde as the next President of the European Central Bank.

European semester

The Council adopted the 2019 country-specific recommendations as part of the European semester process.

Any Other Business

The Dutch Finance Minister briefed ministers on the topic of aviation taxation and carbon pricing.

[HCWS1727]

EDUCATION

Teacher Training

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): In the "Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy" published in January, the Government committed to help great people to become teachers and ensure high quality teacher training.

In support of this, I am introducing a new approach for assessing the numeracy and literacy of prospective teachers, which will replace the existing skills tests.

From October, teacher training providers will become responsible for ensuring that prospective teachers meet the high standards of literacy and numeracy required to be a teacher. Under this new system, trainees will be benchmarked against a defined set of skills they will be expected to have by the end of their initial teacher training.

This new system of provider-led assurance will be introduced at the end of the current recruitment cycle.

[HCWS1728]

Ministerial Correction

Tuesday 16 July 2019

TRANSPORT

High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill

The following is an extract from the Report stage of the High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill on 15 July 2019.

Ms Ghani: 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.

[Official Report, 15 July 2019, Vol. 663, c. 648.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani):

An error has been identified in my response to a point made by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith).

The correct information should have been:

Ms Ghani: 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 British and 70% are small and medium-sized enterprises.**

ORAL ANSWERS

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MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

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