

**Tuesday
23 July 2019**

**Volume 663
No. 335**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**
(HANSARD)

Tuesday 23 July 2019

House of Commons

Tuesday 23 July 2019

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Leaving the EU: Access to Drugs

1. **John Mc Nally** (Falkirk) (SNP): What steps he is taking to ensure access to drugs after the UK leaves the EU. [912109]

6. **Douglas Chapman** (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): What steps he is taking to ensure access to drugs after the UK leaves the EU. [912116]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): Our highest priority is for patients to continue to have access to medicines and medical products in all Brexit scenarios. As a responsible Government, we will minimise any disruption in our exit, deal or no deal.

On 26 June, we set out our approach to ensuring continuity of supply. I discussed this last week with the head of the NHS, and Professor Keith Willett wrote to all NHS trusts yesterday to advise on no-deal planning.

John Mc Nally: Concerned breast cancer charities have asked me and others to ask the Secretary of State if he will confirm to us, and to them, whether he is leasing enough ferry capacity to ship in medicines in the very likely event of shortages in the UK when we leave the EU.

Matt Hancock: Yes, we secured the requirements ahead of a potential exit on 29 March, and we are doing the necessary work to ensure that capacity is available, whatever the Brexit scenario, on 31 October.

Douglas Chapman: My constituent Jonathan Fisher, known as the Bold Joff, has complex health needs due to a rare genetic condition called Lowe syndrome. He requires six regular medications, three of which come from the EU. They are all vital to his health, but one in particular, Epilim, is critical to his epilepsy care. What reassurances can the Secretary of State give to Jonathan and his mother, Fiona, that when we leave the EU there will be no disruption to his supply of this vital medication?

Matt Hancock: The assurance I can give is that, ahead of 29 March, we put in place the measures that are necessary to ensure that the hon. Gentleman's constituent and others get the medicines they need, and we have taken forward those proposals and that work ahead of an exit from the European Union on 31 October.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): The Secretary of State will be aware of the expert evidence, including from the BioIndustry Association, warning that, although we may be able to stockpile the bog-standard drugs, it will be very difficult to do so for specialist treatments. What guarantees can he give that we will have access to those specialist medicines?

Matt Hancock: Ahead of 29 March, we managed to put in place a full programme to ensure access to drugs. Of course, the approach is not just about ensuring stockpiles—there are adequate stockpiles for so many medicines all the time—but is about ensuring the flow of materials and finished drugs across the channel via ferries and, where necessary, aircraft.

Rural Areas: Health Service Funding

2. **Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): What steps he is taking to increase the level of funding for health services in rural areas. [912111]

The Minister for Health (Stephen Hammond): NHS England is responsible for funding allocations to clinical commissioning groups, which already take into account the relative health needs of local areas. NHS England is now introducing a new community services formula, which will better recognise the needs of rural, coastal and remote areas.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: Will the Minister update the House in more detail on how the Department plans to support CCGs such as Northumberland, where managing the extra costs associated with the extreme rurality of communities like the Coquet valley, the most rural in England, means it simply is not possible for community nurses and general practitioners to reach as many patients in a day?

Stephen Hammond: Adjustments are already being made in the funding formula for differences in costs related to rurality or location. Northumberland CCG will receive an extra £1.1 million in funding this year to provide emergency ambulance services in sparsely populated areas. By 2023-24, Northumberland CCG will receive £98.5 million more funding.

My hon. Friend has already spoken to me about Rothbury Community Hospital in her constituency, and I would be delighted to speak to her about it again.

Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Ind): People in rural areas need more investment in social care services. I do not always agree with the *Daily Mail*, but is it not right when it says that we now need a national dementia fund and an all-party approach to defining the nature and funding of the social care system in this country? Successive Governments have failed in that respect, and older people, disabled people and their families are being let down as a consequence. When will we see some action?

Stephen Hammond: The hon. Gentleman is right, which is why the Green Paper will have long-term plans on mental health and, indeed, dementia. I think he will be pleased to see that when the Green Paper is released shortly.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): What can the Minister do to expedite the provision of primary care services in those rural areas where the population is growing fast as a consequence of new housing?

Stephen Hammond: My right hon. Friend is right to raise that point, which has been raised with me several times. The new funding formula that the independent advisory committee is setting up will take into account the growth in population. It will look at the growth in the electoral register every year, rather than over a five-year period, as it does now, so it will be able to respond more quickly than is currently the case.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Will the Minister bear in mind the fact that dementia comes in many different forms? My mother had one form and she lasted a number of years, but it finally took hold. My sister, on the other hand, went within a short period of time, because she would not eat at all. My best friend at the time in the National Union of Mineworkers, Peter Heathfield, finished his life being violent, struggling with three people who tried to get him to the toilet. Bear that in mind carefully, Minister. Dementia is not a static illness; it is very different for different people.

Stephen Hammond: I do not always agree with the hon. Gentleman, but he is right to make that point. I know from very personal experience that dementia affects people in different ways, which is why I am proud to be part of a Government who are committed to delivering in full on the challenge on dementia 2020, to make England the best country in the world for dementia care.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): The huge rural area covered by the Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust has and needs three hospitals, but it is funded as if it had only one. As a result, the trust has been fined more than £4 million in debt interest over the past three years. That money could have been spent on nurses, paramedics or doctors. Will the Minister intervene to stop this at once?

Stephen Hammond: I met the hon. Gentleman recently to talk about ambulance provision in his constituency and the Morecambe bay area, and I hope he is now satisfied with the progress we are making on that. I will look into the individual case he mentions and respond to him.

Rural Areas: Access to Health Care

3. **Anne Marie Morris** (Newton Abbot) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to ensure the accessibility of health services for rural populations. [912112]

The Minister for Health (Stephen Hammond): The long-term plan that the Department published in January commits to delivering fully integrated community-based healthcare in primary and community hubs. It confirms

that the standard model of delivery will be developed for use in smaller acute hospitals that serve rural populations.

Anne Marie Morris: I thank the Minister for his answer, but some rural villages, including some in Devon, have no ambulance service at all—a fact masked by high-level statistical reporting. Will the Government work with me and the National Centre for Rural Health and Care to expose the real rural healthcare deficit, which is so masked, and work with us to rectify the situation and provide the appropriate care and medical support necessary by putting in place a robust and accountable rural health and care strategy and plan?

Stephen Hammond: I know that my hon. Friend has worked with the National Centre for Rural Health and Care and chairs the all-party group on rural health and social care. She is right to mention the fact that there are particular challenges in the delivery of the best-quality healthcare that we want to see in rural areas. I would be delighted to work with her and the all-party group on the matter.

Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab): It has now been almost 18 months since health commissioners proposed that the two options for acute medical care in east Kent be put forward for public consultation. My constituents, particularly those in rural areas, are simply fed up with waiting for a new hospital. Will the Minister please confirm for me today just when a full public consultation on the future provision of acute services in east Kent will finally take place?

Stephen Hammond: The hon. Lady asks a good question on behalf of her constituents. I cannot confirm today when that will happen, but I will look into the matter and write to her to make sure that she gets the answer.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): One in 10 women have endometriosis. The average wait for diagnosis is seven and a half years and can be even longer in rural areas, and there is currently no test for it. Researchers at the University of Hull previously developed biomarkers for cancer testing and have recently developed a project to test for biomarkers in urine to help to identify endometriosis. They need £10,000 in seed funding to get the project off the ground; will the Minister please meet me to discuss how we can secure the funding?

Stephen Hammond: The hon. Lady has invited me to meet her to discuss that funding. She will be pleased to hear that I will be delighted to do so.

Cystic Fibrosis Treatment

4. **Ian Austin** (Dudley North) (Ind): What steps he is taking to ensure that people with cystic fibrosis receive the latest treatment for that condition. [912114]

18. **James Frith** (Bury North) (Lab): Whether he plans to hold a further meeting with Vertex Pharmaceuticals to ensure that new drugs to treat cystic fibrosis can be approved. [912133]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Seema Kennedy): We want patients living with cystic fibrosis to get the best care possible. Progress in specialised treatment for patients with CF means that people are living healthier and longer lives, but I recognise that it is frustrating for everyone, in particular patients and their families, that a deal on Orkambi has not been reached. It is for Vertex and NHS England to enter negotiations. I urge Vertex to consider the latest offer from NHSE.

Ian Austin: I have heard from people in Dudley and across the country about the difference that those new treatments make, but patients have been waiting for three and a half years now. Some families are having to take extreme measures to secure access to the drugs. Will the Minister and the Secretary of State meet me, people with cystic fibrosis or their parents, and the Cystic Fibrosis Trust so that we can get the whole thing sorted out and the wait for the drugs is not drawn out any longer with another summer or year of impasse?

Seema Kennedy: I recognise and share the frustration of patients and their families. The situation has been going on for far too long. I again urge Vertex to accept the offer. The hon. Gentleman has been in touch about a meeting, and I understand that we have responded to say that we will give him a firm date shortly.

James Frith: Sufferers of CF, as we have heard, are well used to the new hope of changes in the Government, but it soon becomes yet another false dawn: they are left drowning in their disease without access to Orkambi. The Minister has to lean in on the business end of the job that she has to do. Will the Government use their leverage, support the buyers' club—the drastic action that CF sufferers are having to take—and supplement access to the equivalent of Orkambi? That might finally get Vertex to the table to do a deal on this important issue.

Seema Kennedy: As I said to the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members in the Westminster Hall debate on the drug, a deal is the preferred option. However, the attitude taken by Vertex, which has been called an outlier in this situation, means that my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary has instructed NHS England to look at other options.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): Over the past three years, all of us in this House have heard the numerous calls for Orkambi to be made available to cystic fibrosis patients. The Minister could go down in history if she takes the all-important step this week, while still in her job—I hope she will still be in the job tomorrow—of announcing an alternative route to access cystic fibrosis drugs, such as a Crown use licence or clinical trials. Today, before we break for recess, will she commit to that so that families can have Orkambi now?

Seema Kennedy: The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence process is important, because it is an independent expert review and the way in which we allocate resources sensibly. The Crown use licence is not a quick or easy solution, and it is open to legal challenge, which might delay things even more. Vertex has been

offered the biggest settlement in NHS history, and I urge the company to accept it. However—I have said this on numerous occasions from this Dispatch Box and in Westminster Hall—the Secretary of State has urged and asked NHS England to look at other options, such as the ones to which the shadow Minister has referred.

Healthcare Staffing Levels

5. Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): What assessment he has made of trends in staffing levels of registered (a) doctors and (b) nurses since 2010. [912115]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): Across the UK, the number of registered nurses and doctors has increased over the past nine years. In England, there were over 112,000 doctors in NHS trusts in March 2019, 17,000 more than in March 2010, and over 8,000 more nurses than in 2010. There is more to do, and the NHS people plan will ensure a sustainable workforce for the long-term future of the NHS.

Kirstene Hair: As the Secretary of State may be aware, earlier this month—conveniently in the Holyrood recess—we learnt that medical students who come from the rest of the United Kingdom and want to apply for an undergraduate course at Scottish universities will find their chances greatly diminished. Most Scots are appalled by this policy. In fact, the British Medical Association, the Royal College of General Practitioners and medical schools are all expressing concern. Does the Secretary of State agree that the Scottish Government need to be attracting the brightest and the best—no matter where they come from across the United Kingdom—to address the GP crisis?

Matt Hancock: Yes, I do. I was surprised by the recent news that I read about medical schools in Scotland being told to discriminate against medical students from elsewhere in the UK. I understand that the Scottish National party itself accepts that this is discriminatory. I doubt that the policy will last and I look forward to an SNP U-turn.

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): Mitie recently signed a £150 million contract at St George's Hospital, but staff are already facing job cuts. My union, the GMB, balloted its members; 99.6% of them voted to take industrial action. Will the Secretary of State commit to visiting staff on the frontline and show them solidarity during this very difficult time?

Matt Hancock: I am always very happy to visit hospitals around the country, including St George's. Of course, the individual management of staff is a matter for the hospital itself. I look forward to discussing with the hon. Lady what more we can do.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): The Secretary of State has quite rightly outlined the global progress that has been made on the medical and nursing workforces, but he will be aware that the picture is very different in mental health services, with the loss of 4,000 mental health nurses over the last decade. Indeed, the fill-rate for doctors entering higher training in child and adolescent mental health services

this August is only 63% and only half the higher trainee posts in general adult mental health have been filled. What is the Secretary of State going to do to turn the very good rhetoric on mental health into a reality on the ground for patients?

Matt Hancock: The increase in funding for mental health services, which is the largest increase as part of the overall £33.9 billion increase, goes to mental health services. Of course, the vast majority of that will go towards employing more people. As my hon. Friend says, we need to encourage more people into training in mental health services and psychiatry, as well as mental health nursing, which is also under pressure. The expansion of these services ultimately means that we need to have more people doing the work: supporting people to improve their mental health and supporting people with mental ill health. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this issue, which is right at the top of the priorities for the NHS people plan.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): Sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhoea are on the rise. Will the Secretary of State target more resources at staffing and investment to ensure that we tackle this rise?

Matt Hancock: We have recently announced that the way in which we are going to proceed with regard to sexual health services is co-commissioning between local authorities and the local NHS. This is the best way to ensure that we get the services on the ground. I would just slightly caution the hon. Gentleman; although he mentioned that some sexually transmitted diseases have been on the rise, others have been falling quite sharply. We have to ensure that we get the details of what we try to implement right, but I support the direction of travel that he proposes.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): What can we do to make the workload terms and conditions more attractive for salaried GPs and GP partners compared with locums? GPs in my constituency tell me that a great number want to be locums, but that not so many want to be salaried or GP partners because of the workload. What can we do about that?

Matt Hancock: My hon. Friend is dead right. This is an important part of the work that Baroness Dido Harding is leading in the NHS people plan to ensure that we can make careers in the NHS—whether as doctors, other clinicians or more broadly—the most attractive that they possibly can be. This week we announced a pay rise for doctors and earlier this month we announced a long-term agreement with junior doctors, which I am delighted they accepted in a referendum with over 80% support. But there is more work to do.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): The rules around annual and lifetime allowances are having an impact on the NHS workforce in Scotland, and the options contained in the recent consultation on doctors' pensions do not provide the level of flexibility necessary to resolve this situation. We know that the solution lies with the Treasury, so what pressure can the current Secretary of State put on the Chancellor to ensure that urgent reform takes place to stop this terrible impact on our NHS workforce?

Matt Hancock: I have been working hard with the Chancellor of the Exchequer to ensure that we can resolve this important issue. The hon. Gentleman will have seen the consultation document that we put out yesterday to resolve the problem. The consultation is open and asks open questions about the best way to fix it. I am absolutely determined that we will fix it to remove some of the unintended consequences of changes in pension tax law. It is a pity, though, that the SNP spokesman did not stand up to accept that the proposal mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair), which would discriminate against people from outside of Scotland, is wrong and should be withdrawn.

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): The Secretary of State is in denial. There is a crisis in GP retention. In fact, there are now 1,200 fewer fully qualified permanent GPs than there were in 2010. Because of this, patients are waiting longer than ever to get a GP appointment. He has promised, as he did again today, to address this, but it is a fact that the situation is getting worse, with a pension system that is effectively charging GPs to work extra hours. Does he really believe that this is the best way to retain GPs in the NHS? Does he have a detailed plan, and can he explain how he is going to sort out this mess?

Matt Hancock: I think it is worth starting with a few facts. One fact is that I published a detailed plan yesterday, on which we are consulting, to tackle the pension issue. The other two facts that are worth noting, and that the House will want to know about, are the following. First, there is a record number of GPs in training—3,473. Secondly, the overall number of GPs is rising, with, as of March 2019, 300 more doctors working in general practice than a year earlier. I want to see that number continue to rise.

Social Care Services: Accessibility

7. **Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab):** What recent estimate he has made of the number of people unable to access social care services. [912118]

11. **Eleanor Smith (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab):** What recent estimate he has made of the number of people unable to access social care services. [912125]

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenage): All councils have a statutory duty to look after people's care and support needs in their areas. In total, between 2016 and 2017, and in 2019-20, the Government have given councils access to £10 billion more social care funding.

Afzal Khan: Given that the Government have promised a spending increase for the NHS in the regions, is the Minister aware that at the current funding levels, Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership will be operating on a predicted deficit of £2 billion by 2021? Will she advise on what work has been done in partnership with the GMHSCP to avoid this huge deficit?

Caroline Dinenage: There is no doubt that the system is under pressure, but that is why the Government have been putting an enormous amount of money in and giving councils access to additional funding to be able to address the growing need—up to £10 billion over the past three years. We know that people are living longer

and living with much more complex conditions. This situation is only going to get worse, so we do need to find a more sustainable way to deal with it in the long term. The hon. Gentleman will be interested to know that Manchester will receive an additional £42.9 million for adult social care funding in 2019-20.

Eleanor Smith: Figures from the Care and Support Alliance and Age UK show that at least 1.4 million older people in England are not receiving the care and support they need. We know that this figure will be much, much higher owing to the number of working-age disabled people who are being denied the care and support they need to lead better lives. Speaking as co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on adult social care, how much longer do we need to wait until the Government publish the long-awaited Green Paper on social care and finally start to show some much needed leadership in this vitally important area of public policy?

Caroline Dinenage: First, I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for her work in the APPG on adult social care. It is really important that we have an APPG that represents this really important issue. As I said, the fact that we have an ageing population is a growing issue that we have to face as a nation, and, in fact, as a world. Her area of Wolverhampton will receive an additional £22.1 million for adult social care in 2019, but we know that that is not a long-term solution and we will be publishing a Green Paper at the earliest opportunity.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): The Government's utter chaos over Brexit has already impacted on recruitment in the social care sector. Scottish Care told the Scottish Affairs Committee that providers have lost 67% of their intake from the European economic area. The fact is that this Government's actions are putting the health of the sick and elderly at risk. Will the Government make an assessment of how the staffing crisis in social care is impacting on the rate of hospital admissions?

Caroline Dinenage: The hon. Gentleman is right: we do have a number of vacancies—a large number of vacancies—in adult social care. That is why, earlier in the year, the Government announced a recruitment campaign, “Every day is different”. It ran for a few months, with enormous success. There have been 14% more apply clicks on the relevant Government jobs site as a result, so we have just announced that we are going to expand and extend that recruitment campaign, with an additional £4 million of funding.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): Among those most affected by lack of access to social care are the 2,300 autistic people and people with learning disabilities stuck in inappropriate in-patient units because of a lack of funding for community placements. Labour, my party, has pledged to spend £350 million per year to support moving as many of those people as possible into community placements. I note that the Health and Social Care Secretary actually pledged extra funding for social care if he became Prime Minister, so will the Care Minister tell us if he now promises to match Labour's pledge and ensure that autistic people and people with learning disabilities can live in homes, not hospitals?

Caroline Dinenage: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. One of the biggest issues we have had with people with learning disabilities and autism ending up in in-patient settings is a lack of community provision. That is why the NHS long-term plan commits to an extra £4.5 billion a year for primary and community health services, and local areas will be expected to use this investment to develop the sort of specialist services and community crisis care that will help divert people away from in-patient care settings.

Mental Health: Young People

8. **John Howell** (Henley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to help prevent mental health illness among young people. [912120]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): We are committed to improving early intervention and prevention to ensure that young people with mental health problems do get the best start and the earliest possible treatment. To that end, we are introducing new school-based mental health support teams. The first 59 of these will start being operational by the end of December this year. The next wave of 124 more teams was announced on 12 July.

John Howell: With half of all lifetime cases of mental ill health beginning at the age of 14, will the Minister say how well the training promised to constituencies such as mine will help to stop these problems worsening as people get older?

Jackie Doyle-Price: My hon. Friend is right: people with mental health conditions do tend to develop them as children. Clearly, the earlier we can give them support to help them manage those conditions, the better for their long-term wellbeing. Equally, however, we need to make sure we have sufficient community services when they leave school and get older, so that having invested in their wellbeing, it can be continued through later life.

Dr Paul Williams (Stockton South) (Lab): Is the Minister confident that the mental health of the 5,000 children with special educational needs who spent time in school isolation booths last year was not harmed, and if not, what representations has she made to the Secretary of State for Education about this practice?

Jackie Doyle-Price: The hon. Gentleman, as usual, raises a very important issue indeed. Of course, people with special educational needs will be at risk of mental ill health more than any other cohort of children. I am having regular meetings with the Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), who has responsibility for children and families, about this very vulnerable group. Having targeted mental health provision across mainstream schooling generally and put in such investment, we now really need to home in on the groups at highest risk.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the Minister outline what discussions have taken place with the devolved Administrations to ensure that best practice and best results are implemented UK-wide, especially

considering that Northern Ireland has the highest level of mental health issues pro rata in the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland?

Jackie Doyle-Price: As usual, the hon. Gentleman raises an extremely important point. Of course, health is a devolved matter, but that is not to say that all four nations cannot learn more from best practice in each place. I am pleased to say that we are now increasing our contact with representatives of the devolved Governments, and we will very much be sharing such best practice.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Referrals to child mental health units from primary schools for pupils aged 11 and under have risen by nearly 50% in three years. BBC research last week also found that primary school children are self-harming at school, and in four cases children under 11 had attempted suicide while at school. This is deeply shocking, so what is the Minister doing to ensure that primary school children will have support from trained mental health professionals when they return in September?

Jackie Doyle-Price: The hon. Lady is quite right to raise that, and it is incredibly troubling to see those figures. The investment we are making in mental health support teams will be of assistance. For primary schools that are well led and gripping this issue, there is some very imaginative and innovative practice to bring emotional wellbeing into the classroom from the moment pupils arrive. We need to make sure that those mental health teams start acting as soon as possible. This is something that we need to address collectively with schools and as a society to make sure that we get treatment to people at the earliest possible time.

NHS Facilities

9. **Jack Brereton** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve NHS facilities. [912122]

The Minister for Health (Stephen Hammond): Modern, fit-for-purpose facilities are better for patients, the NHS staff who work in them and the taxpayer, so the Government have already provided £3.9 billion of new capital investment to deliver new, upgraded facilities across the country.

Jack Brereton: I thank the Minister for visiting the site of the proposed new Longton health centre in my constituency recently. Does he agree that we must deliver new primary care facilities such as this to make sure that improvements in health in my local community continue?

Stephen Hammond: I very much enjoyed the visit. The new £5 million Longton medical centre will provide general practice service for more than 12,000 patients, and it will be a fantastic community health scheme. My hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that yesterday I wrote to him outlining the capital options that might be available. He is right, and that is why this Government believe in transforming the primary care estate. It is a key enabler for delivering the long-term plan, and it provides better care for patients.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): A year on, NHS Property Services is now having to remarket the site of Bootham Park Hospital. In the light of this complete failure and the failure to listen to health professionals locally, will the Minister ensure that the One Public Estate bid is seriously considered as the sale moves forward?

Stephen Hammond: I met the hon. Lady about this disposal last December, and I have followed the matter carefully. The local health system has not wanted to continue using the site, but I am happy to assure her that I will look at bids from all comers. It is not my decision; it is a decision for local healthcare bodies and NHS Property Services.

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): The Minister will be aware that our general district hospital was closed to new admissions in recent weeks, and the reason given was delayed transfers of care. Ever since I was elected, many others have joined me in looking at how we can provide a step-down, step-up facility—a community healthcare hub—with beds in the St Ives constituency. I wonder what funding is available to achieve that aim.

Stephen Hammond: My hon. Friend is right. He will have heard me say in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) that we are already making available £3.9 billion extra to provide these facilities. We should not be complacent, however, and it is important to recognise that we want world-class facilities for world-class care. One of the benefits of the long-term plan is that we can create a stable environment for capital investment, and we can make the case for more capital investment at the spending review.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): Government cuts have already resulted in significant downgrading and loss of vital services at South Tyneside District Hospital. Since the Department refused to fund the next phase of downgrading, the trust has approached the local authority to borrow £35 million from the treasury to see it through. Does the Minister agree with me and my incensed constituents that it is wrong that we are now being asked to pay for further cuts to our hospital?

Stephen Hammond: The hon. Lady will know that the Government are putting more cash and more money into the NHS than at any other time in its history. There will be £33.9 billion extra going in by 2023-24.

NHS Workforce Vacancies

10. **Karen Lee** (Lincoln) (Lab): What recent estimate he has made of the number of NHS workforce vacancies. [912124]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): Question 10 is about workforce vacancies, and I can tell the House that one workforce vacancy has just been filled, because Boris Johnson has just been elected as the leader of the Conservative party.

The NHS employs more staff now than at any time in its 70-year history, with significant growth in newly qualified staff from 2012. Our full people plan will help to tackle these issues for the long term.

Karen Lee: Words are all well and good, but it is actions that actually count, and the Government are not creating a health service that supports its workforce. The striking health visitors in Lincolnshire have each lost more than £2,000 a year since they were transferred from the NHS to the Conservative-controlled county council and many have had their professional status downgraded. Does the Secretary of State agree that rather than shifting the responsibility for cuts to health services on to local government, the NHS should deliver fully resourced healthcare services and pay its staff properly?

Matt Hancock: The NHS is delivering healthcare services and it is paying its staff properly. It is working with local authorities to deliver the best possible health services right across the country. We absolutely need to recruit more people to the NHS and we are recruiting more people to the NHS.

Vulnerable Older People

12. **Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he is taking to ensure that (a) adequate resources and (b) highly trained personnel are allocated to health services for vulnerable older people. [912126]

The Minister for Health (Stephen Hammond): The NHS is responsible for ensuring adequate resources and a high-quality workforce that can deliver a comprehensive health service for all people, including vulnerable older people. That is clearly happening. We are supporting that through investing an extra £33.9 billion in the NHS.

Mr Sheerman: I have also just heard the news that we have a new Prime Minister. I am thinking of the man who stands outside with a sign saying that the end of the world is nigh.

The fact of the matter is that the end of life for many of my constituents is tough, because the people in the care sector who support them are poorly paid, poorly resourced and poorly trained. Surely we should go for well-managed, highly trained, highly skilled people in the NHS for every age?

Stephen Hammond: The hon. Gentleman is right, which is why we have ensured that we are putting more money into the NHS and more money into primary care, with £4.5 billion in real terms on primary medical care and community health services. It is why we commissioned Baroness Dido Harding to produce the "Interim NHS People Plan", which she has done, and why we are working on ensuring that we have the health service workers to provide excellent care for all people in the community.

Health Inequalities

13. **Mr Virendra Sharma** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect of public health services on reducing health inequalities. [912127]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): The Government recognise the importance of reducing inequalities and have included a commitment to that in the NHS long-term plan. We know that public health services, such as immunisation, screening programmes, smoking cessation services and many other initiatives, can significantly improve health outcomes to combat some of the inequalities faced by ethnic minorities and those living in less affluent areas.

Mr Sharma: I thank the Minister for her response. After nine years of Tory austerity, advances in life expectancy, which steadily increased for 100 years, have now ground to a halt and have even gone backwards in some of the poorest areas. How does the Minister plan to reverse that damning trend?

Jackie Doyle-Price: Life expectancy has been increasing year on year, but it is also true that it is an international phenomenon that that rate of increase is coming to a halt. None the less, life expectancy in England is the highest it has ever been: 79.5 years for men and 83.1 years for women. We will continue to invest in our public health programmes and look at the wider issues facing society that can also contribute to good health outcomes, such as housing, work and so on. There is a lot that can be done; it is not just about NHS spending.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): One of the best ways of getting early public health help across the doorstep is by investing in health visitors to give that much needed early support, especially to new parents to help to ensure that every child gets the best start in life. One of the best achievements of the Cameron Government was the creation of 4,200 additional health visitors. Does the Minister share my concern that since 2015, with the responsibility now having gone to local government, there has been a 26% reduction in the number of health visitors? That is something of a false economy.

Jackie Doyle-Price: I do share my hon. Friend's belief that health visitors are probably the most important army in the war against health inequalities. They provide an intervention that is very family-based and not intimidating. It is based on good relationships and means we can provide intervention at the earliest possible time. He is right to highlight the massive investment we made during the Cameron Government. There has been a decline since, which we really must address if we are to get the earliest possible intervention and the best health outcomes for children.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Ind): We finally got to see the prevention Green Paper yesterday evening, and it rightly highlights the appalling inequality in healthy life expectancy and the fact that being overweight or obese is now the leading risk factor for disability and years lived with disability. Will the Secretary of State please reassure the House that he will act on the evidence? The prevention Green Paper makes it very clear:

"The Soft Drinks Industry Levy...has been hugely successful in removing the equivalent of over 45,000 tonnes of sugar from our shelves."

The House really needs to hear reassurance that we will not roll back on those kinds of issues.

Jackie Doyle-Price: I reassure the hon. Lady that the Government are committed to following the evidence; that is very much a theme in the prevention Green Paper. The evidence will speak for itself. Clearly, she is absolutely right to highlight obesity as the biggest risk factor in impeding healthy life expectancy. That is why, across Government, we should be vigilant about tackling it.

King George Hospital A&E Department

14. **Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (IGC): Whether his Department's decision of October 2011 to close the A&E department at King George Hospital, Ilford, has been rescinded; and if he will make a statement on future services at that hospital. [912128]

The Minister for Health (Stephen Hammond): The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to hear that I can confirm that there will continue to be an A&E at King George Hospital, Ilford. The NHS has concluded that there is need for such provision now and in future.

Mike Gapes: I thank the Minister for that reply. I hope that it will stop some of the more lurid scaremongering and campaigning, which is unfortunately diverting people in my constituency from looking at the most important issue: how we use the King George Hospital site in future. Will he confirm that steps are being taken to integrate North East London NHS Foundation Trust and King George Hospital services to deal with social care and other matters?

Stephen Hammond: I am happy to confirm that.

Autism and Learning Disabilities

15. **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): What additional funding he plans to allocate to the NHS to reduce the number of people with autism and learning disabilities held in in-patient settings. [912129]

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinanage): The NHS long-term plan commits to an extra £4.5 billion a year for primary and community health services by 2023-24. Local areas will be expected to use part of this investment to develop specialist services and community crisis care to reduce avoidable admissions and lengths of stay for autistic people and those with learning disabilities.

Kerry McCarthy: I do not know whether the Minister has seen the report from the Children's Commissioner, but it says that the number of children with autism or learning difficulties in mental health hospitals has doubled in recent years. Many are very far from home. Their parents are not consulted properly on their care, and they are in for much longer than they need to be. What proportion of the money that she mentions will go towards trying to ensure that children can have support in their home, so that they are not in this situation?

Caroline Dinanage: The hon. Lady has hit on a really important point. The truth is that a lot of children who end up in an in-patient setting are not diagnosed with autism or a learning disability until they are there; they normally come in on a mental health diagnosis. There are a few points to make here. One is on making sure

that early intervention is there as early as when a child is in school. That is why the Government have made a commitment to having mental health support available from a very early age, in schools. This is also about making sure that families do not get to crisis point, and that the investment is there in the community, so that children get the support that they need at every possible step.

Missed GP Appointments

16. **Gordon Henderson** (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con): What steps he is taking to reduce the number of missed GP appointments. [912131]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Seema Kennedy): Missed appointments are a waste of NHS resources, and we believe that encouraging patients to use the NHS sensibly and responsibly is the right approach. We are encouraging a range of local schemes to help to reduce missed appointments, with clinical commissioning groups and practices embracing technology and adopting a variety of approaches, such as text reminders, patient-recorded bookings and the increased use of online systems that make it quick and easy for patients to change and cancel appointments.

Gordon Henderson: A GP surgery in my constituency has reported that in one month this year, 78 people failed to keep their appointment and failed to cancel it. Those failures led to the surgery losing 11 hours' working time. The surgery has announced that it will consider removing patients from its register if they miss three consecutive appointments. Does my hon. Friend support that proposal, and does she think that the policy should be rolled out across other surgeries?

Seema Kennedy: Local NHS organisations know their populations best, and that is why the Government support locally led initiatives to reduce missed appointments. The evidence shows us that people are less likely to miss an appointment if they have a convenient option. Swale CCG has a "Did Not Attend" campaign, which will run across the region this summer and support his constituents in making sure that they use their appointments responsibly.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Is the Minister aware of any research that has been done, not just on missed appointments, but on repeat offenders who periodically miss their appointments, and the effect that has? What can be done to ensure that that is not repeated beyond today?

Seema Kennedy: There is no overall estimate of the number of people who miss their appointments. We want to encourage people to be responsible, but we also want to make booking appointments as easy as possible by having things such as online and text booking. NHS England will shortly conduct an access review, which will look at ways of developing a coherent offer to patients in terms of how they access their practice appointments. We will therefore make things easier, and hopefully bring down the number of people who miss an appointment.

Strategy and Action Plan: Improving Lives

17. **Sarah Newton** (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): What progress has been made on implementing his Department's strategy and action plan, "Improving lives: the future of work, health and disability", published in November 2017. [912132]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): I am pleased to say that we have made strong progress against the commitments in the Command Paper my hon. Friend refers to, and I thank her for her role in delivering those advances. I can advise the House that the number of disabled people in employment is now 400,000 higher than it was in 2017. There is, however, much more to do, and on 15 July we launched a consultation on measures to reduce ill health-related job loss. We are seeking views on how employers can best support people with disabilities and people with long-term health conditions to stay and thrive in work.

Sarah Newton: I thank the Minister for her really helpful response, and I congratulate her on the fantastic work she has done in her position. Last week, the next Prime Minister announced his intention to look again at the tax treatment of at-work referral health services as a benefit in kind to employees, given how crucial fast access to health and support is to so many people. Will the Secretary of State and the Minister work with the new Prime Minister in bringing forward an urgent review, as the current tax regime goes against our focus on prevention and reducing demand on the NHS?

Jackie Doyle-Price: Absolutely. We will continue with the emphasis on work being good for people's health. We need to look at what we can do to make it easier for employers to help their employees, which is good for everybody—it means that everyone can still make an economic contribution, and that we retain the existing workforce, and it is good for people's wellbeing. We absolutely will look at what we can do to incentivise best practice.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): It is difficult to see how lives will be improved and people supported to stay in work by NHS England's decision, supported by Ministers, to encourage CCGs to phase out their walk-in centres—I am thinking, in particular, of the three walk-in centres that serve my constituents. I urge Ministers, even at this late stage, to set aside new funding streams so that Alexandra Avenue, the Pinn and Belmont Health Centre can continue to provide a 365-day, 8 am to 8 pm walk-in service to my constituents.

Jackie Doyle-Price: I do not share the hon. Gentleman's view on this. Clearly, it is important for CCGs to have the freedom to determine their best primary care arrangements. Walk-in centres are convenient for people who are in work and who perhaps work away from home, but ultimately, we keep people with disabilities in work by having bespoke support for them, and that is better organised by having good primary care services near the home.

Topical Questions

T1. [912134] **Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): This week, the Department has released a consultation on the future of clinicians' pensions, a new five-year deal to support our approach to community pharmacy, the Government's prevention Green Paper and a £20 million collaboration with the Prince's Trust on the NHS widening participation initiative, which will allow and support more apprentices into the NHS. There has been a lot done just this week, and there is a lot more still to do.

Mr Sweeney: Another item for the Secretary of State's list might be to engage with his counterpart in Scotland on the issue of the NHS taper on the pensions programme. When I raised the issue with a Treasury Minister, she seemed unaware that there was more than one NHS in the UK. If there is some co-ordination and joint representation to the Treasury, that might assist matters. Would the Secretary of State agree?

Matt Hancock: Of course, in solving this problem, many of the changes can take place within the NHS, and we are working on that with the Treasury. I am happy to ensure that discussions take place with devolved colleagues, but of course, the NHS is devolved in Scotland.

T2. [912136] **Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): Provision of in vitro fertilisation in Redditch has been reduced from two cycles to one. I warmly welcome the work that the Minister has done to increase equity across the country, but what more can she do to address the postcode lottery in this and other areas, such as hip and knee surgery?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): My hon. Friend is right: the postcode lottery is not acceptable, and patients manage to get around it; my local clinical commissioning group, having funded three courses of IVF, has had to reduce that to two, because demand has doubled owing to the lack of provision in neighbouring CCGs. I have made it very clear that it is unacceptable for any CCG to offer no IVF cycles at all; I have given them that guidance.

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): My I pursue the question asked by the Chair of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston)? We know that obesity is a major cause of cancer and other diseases, and we know that we have severe rates of childhood obesity, so why does the prevention Green Paper say only that the sugar tax "may" be extended to milkshakes? The evidence is clear. Is the Secretary of State not kicking this into the long grass?

Matt Hancock: I have asked the chief medical officer to review the evidence to ensure that our policy for tackling obesity is evidence-driven. Follow the evidence: that is what we do on this side of the House.

Jonathan Ashworth: A year ago the Secretary of State said, to great fanfare, that prevention was one of his priorities. Now the prevention Green Paper has been sneaked out in the night on the Cabinet Office website. Health inequalities are getting wider and wider, and life expectancy is stalling, but the Secretary of State still cannot give us any clarification on the future of the public health ring-fenced grant. Is it not the truth that he has buckled under pressure from the sugar industry, is not taking on the alcohol industry, and is not taking on the tobacco industry? That is more about trying to get in with the new Prime Minister than putting the health needs of the nation first.

Matt Hancock: I thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome the prevention Green Paper, which was published yesterday. We have been working very hard to publish a huge amount of policy, including the Green Paper, which contains about 80 different policies to ensure that we prevent people from becoming ill in the first place. However, it is also part of a broader drive, which Conservative Members support, to ensure that we are the healthiest of nations, and that people can take personal responsibility for their health, as well as relying on the NHS, so that it is always there when people need it.

T7. [912143] **Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Has the Secretary of State given further consideration to providing extra funds to meet the challenges of running unavoidably small hospitals, such as Scarborough and the Friarage in Northallerton?

The Minister for Health (Stephen Hammond): My hon. Friend has campaigned on this matter for a while, and I was pleased to meet him to discuss it earlier in the year. We absolutely recognise the challenge that small acute providers face, and over the past two years the Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation has been considering how we might meet that challenge. The committee has endorsed a new community services formula to reflect the pressure in remote areas, which may help the two hospitals mentioned by my hon. Friend.

T3. [912138] **Tracy Brabin** (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): My constituent Catherine is undergoing post-operative breast cancer treatment. A new drug, Pertuzumab, which has been approved by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, has been shown to improve a woman's life chances. The drug was prescribed for Catherine by her oncologist at the Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust, but that was overruled by NHS England, although in the neighbouring trust patients are allowed it. Can the Minister guarantee that women who could extend their lives by taking this drug have access to it, no matter where they live?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Seema Kennedy): When drugs have been approved by NICE, there is an obligation to prescribe them. If the hon. Lady will write to me, I shall be able to look into this matter more closely.

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): I welcome the consultation on NHS pensions that was announced this week, and while I do not think that 50:50 is the

ultimate solution, I welcome the invitation to present other proposals. However, given that this is causing an issue now, how quickly does the Department think that it will be able to turn the outcome of the consultation into action?

Matt Hancock: We are working very hard to turn it into action as soon as possible, and I can give my hon. Friend an absolute commitment that the new rules will be in place in time for the new financial year.

T4. [912140] **Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I am not going to shout at the Secretary of State this morning, but I will say to him that Huddersfield is a typical town, and a lovely place in which to live and work. Given that it is so attractive, why is it so difficult for us to find doctors and dentists who can give a good service to my constituents under this modern NHS?

Stephen Hammond: The hon. Gentleman will know that the Government have produced an interim people plan setting out the course and the trajectory that will mean more doctors and nurses being trained. He will also know that we have opened new medical schools this year, and that more doctors are now being trained.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): I should declare that I am chair of the all-party group on eating disorders. Despite eating disorders affecting 1.25 million people across the UK and being the most deadly of mental health issues, the average time dedicated to training about eating disorders in a five-year medical degree was found to be only three or four hours; in some cases, there was none at all. Will the Minister agree to look into this and perhaps report back to the all-party group?

Jackie Doyle-Price: I certainly will. This recommendation was also made by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee following its report into the death of Averil Hart, and we are in discussions with the royal colleges to see what more can be done, in terms of training medical staff and doctors in mental health, because we want to make sure that intervention happens at the earliest possible stage, which means that all our medical professionals need to understand it better.

T5. [912141] **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): Constituents of mine recovering from mental health problems have told me that when they have shared their desire to return to work with jobcentre staff, jobcentre staff have used that as a trigger to move them from employment support allowance to jobseeker's allowance, with, obviously, the financial loss involved in that. Do Ministers agree that whoever is still in their job by the end of the week could usefully talk to the Department for Work and Pensions team about how people with mental health problems can be supported back into work without being penalised?

Jackie Doyle-Price: Yes is the short answer, and the hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that I have regular discussions with colleagues in the DWP to see what we can do to humanise all our processes for benefits claimants, because it is important that when people suffering from mental ill health interact with

organisations of the state, we are not causing them harm. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that that is very high on the list of things in my in-tray.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): I greatly welcome the publication of the prevention Green Paper. How will that strategy enable people to keep well by living in warm homes?

Matt Hancock: Clearly, the need for join-up across Departments of Government is a vital part of this agenda, as my hon. Friend knows from her work across different Departments; the specific point she raises is one example of that, and we must drive it forward.

T6. [912142] **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): In the north-east, we die on average two years younger than those in the south. The Northern Health Science Alliance estimates that that costs our economy £13 billion a year, on top of the emotional and personal costs. The Secretary of State talks a lot about technology in health, but what is he doing about equality in health—or should I ask Alexa?

Matt Hancock: Technology and the data that show these inequalities are an important part of the answer, but of course it is much broader than that, and tackling health inequalities is an underpinning part of the long-term plan for the NHS; it is absolutely critical in order to address the sorts of inequalities that the hon. Lady rightly raises.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): Life skills courses can be key to helping people out of depression, loneliness and isolation, and into work and training, yet the course in Glossop in my local area has been cut by the county council, in spite of it having a £2.8 million underspend this year. Do Ministers agree that local authorities should be looking to spend the public health money that they have, and to use it effectively?

Matt Hancock: Yes, emphatically we do, and there is a drive across the country for more of the sort of social prescribing that the hon. Lady talks about. The clinical solution to many people's health issues, and in particular mental health challenges, is often about changes in behaviour and activity, and the support people are given, rather than just drugs. On the face of it, the project the hon. Lady mentions sounds very good; of course I do not know the details, but I would be very happy to look into it. However, we wholeheartedly and emphatically support the broad direction of travel of helping people to tackle mental illness both through drugs where they are needed and through activity and social prescribing.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I recently met three care workers who work for Sanctuary Care. Between them, they have 60 years of experience of, and dedication to, caring for vulnerable people, but Sanctuary Care has decided to cut their pay and conditions because they were TUPE-ed over from the Borough of Greenwich. Is this the way to treat dedicated care staff? Will the Minister meet me and those care staff to discuss what is going on at Sanctuary Care, whose chief executive gets a handout of almost a quarter of a million pounds a year, while it cuts low-paid staff's wages?

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenage): I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that, because one of the things that I have learned in this role is that working in care should never be described as unskilled. It is probably one of the most skilled professions, and it requires people with exactly the right principles and values to deliver it. We are clear that people should be paid a fair and decent wage, and I am more than happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss it further.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The Minister with responsibility for mental health is a very sympathetic person. Unfortunately, that does not seem to translate into action. Our clinical commissioning group has stopped funding the voluntary sector to provide counselling, and now it is taking counselling services out of GP surgeries as well. Will she look into that?

Jackie Doyle-Price: Yes. What the hon. Lady has just outlined to me flies in the face of the advice that I and the clinical directors of NHS England are giving CCGs. We are clear that voluntary sector provision of additional services is crucial in the support of people with mental ill health. Unfortunately, some commissioners seem to want to medicalise everything, but that is not the key to good treatments, and I will look into it.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The prevention Green Paper talks about the risk of an opioid epidemic. In Scotland, we feel that that is already here, with 1,187 deaths in Scotland last year, 394 of them in Glasgow. Will the Secretary of State work with the Scottish Government and Glasgow health and social care partnership and support the opening of a medically supervised drug consumption room in Glasgow?

Matt Hancock: Yes, the risk of an opioid epidemic across the UK is a serious one. We have seen that risk materialise in the United States. I was as shocked as anyone to see the recent figures for the growth in opioid addiction in Scotland. While public health and the NHS are devolved to the Scottish Government, and they must lead on tackling this issue, for the UK elements of my responsibilities, we in England will do absolutely everything we can and put aside all party politics to tackle this serious problem.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Two hon. Members who are standing have not been heard this morning.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): In January the Health Secretary declared air pollution a health emergency, yet today, tomorrow and Thursday we will see ozone layers in the south and south-east of England that will be a health hazard to the old, the young and the sick. Unlike in equivalent situations in other countries, the Government have released no warnings to people or advised how they should take appropriate action. How bad does air pollution have to get before the Government use their not inconsiderable communications budget to warn people to take appropriate action?

Matt Hancock: We have. Through Public Health England, which is the responsible agency, we have absolutely put out communications, which I heard this morning.

The communications that the hon. Lady asks for are out there. Of course air pollution is a significant risk to public health. I am delighted that it is falling to its lowest levels since the industrial revolution, but there is clearly much more that we need to do.

Thelma Walker (Colne Valley) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State confirm that the Care Quality Commission has recently inspected Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS

Foundation Trust, and that patient safety was raised as an issue during that inspection? If that is the case, what action is he taking?

Caroline Dinenage: Clearly, patient safety is a massive priority for the Government. I do not know the exact details of the site that the hon. Lady is talking about, but if she would like to drop me a line, I will definitely find out and get back to her.

Personal Independence Payments: Supreme Court Ruling

12.39 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if she will make a statement on last week's Supreme Court ruling on personal independence payments for those with mental health issues.

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson): The Supreme Court has ruled on the case of Secretary of State for Work and Pensions v. MM, which is known as MM. The case was about the definition of "social support" when engaging with other people face to face in the PIP assessment, and how far in advance that support can be provided.

We took the case to the Supreme Court because we wanted clarity on the issue and the judgment gives us that clarity. We welcome the Court's judgment. We are pleased it accepted that there is a difference between "prompting" and "social support", and that there must be a need for social support to be provided by someone who is trained or experienced in providing such support.

PIP is already a better benefit for people with mental health conditions than the legacy disability living allowance. The proportion of them who get the higher rate of PIP is five times higher than under DLA, with PIP at 33% and DLA at 6%.

It is clear that there is an increasing understanding in society about mental health and how important it is to make sure that individuals with poor mental health get the right help. It is not an exact science, but the desire for an increased understanding of mental health issues is one of the few areas that have cross-party support.

Getting this clarity ensures that even more people who need help to engage face to face may now be eligible to benefit under PIP. I want to be clear that supporting disabled people and those with mental health conditions continues to be a priority for this Government. That is why we will now carefully consider the full judgment and, working with disabled people and engaging with Mind and other stakeholders, implement it fully and fairly so that claimants get the PIP support they are entitled to.

Chris Stephens: I thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting the urgent question and the Minister for his response.

The individual concerned in the case is a Glasgow South West constituent. As the Minister said, the Department appealed the decision by the Scottish courts.

Will the Minister confirm that the judgment means that ongoing encouragement from a family member to help someone leave their house and engage socially will result in additional points in the PIP process? Does he accept that it is now clear that PIP assessments need to be overhauled and that, once again, we have found that the process discriminates against those with psychological conditions?

The Minister appears to accept the judgment, so will he tell us whether any estimate has been made of the number of people who will be affected by the decision and how long it will take to initiate any back payments? Will he confirm that that will be new money and that it will not come out of existing budgets?

Justin Tomlinson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his questions. I pay tribute to him, because through his constituency work and as a valued member of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions, he has been a real champion in this area.

I repeat that the Government are committed to supporting people with mental health conditions. I push back on the suggestion that PIP needs fundamental reform, because only 6% of claimants with a mental health condition were able to access the highest rate of support on legacy benefits, compared with 33% under PIP.

We recognise that there is more to do. That is why we will engage with stakeholders and disabled people. We have already met Mind since the judgment was passed down. We want to get this right and to ensure that people are treated fairly and are fully supported. I cannot give an exact timeline but, as with all legal judgments, we will update the House once we have had time to consider it. We do, however, take this very, very seriously.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend for the excellent job he is doing and for his statement. He is right that more people with mental health conditions are receiving more support than ever before, but clearly there is more to do. Will he kindly update the House on the progress that is being made on training Department for Work and Pensions staff—not just the PIP assessors, but the people in the jobcentres and the people who pick up the phones—to make sure that everybody has a positive experience and is treated with respect and dignity?

Justin Tomlinson: I thank my hon. Friend, who did so much in this role before me and is widely respected across the House. She is right to highlight how much more is done in terms of training. I am grateful for the support of the stakeholders who helped to shape that training. One of the biggest improvements is that we now have a mental health champion in each PIP assessment centre who can support claimants who may be more anxious when they arrive to make sure that their experience is as positive as can be.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): This landmark judgment by the Supreme Court should act as a serious wake-up call for the Government.

According to Mind, more than 425,000 people with conditions classed as psychiatric disorders have been turned down for PIP. What percentage of those people would have been successful in the light of this judgment? Will the Minister be clear that the Government will look again at those cases where people have been turned down?

The assessment framework for PIP is not fit for purpose and has created a hostile environment for disabled people. After the ruling, Mind commented:

"Far too many are struggling to claim benefits they need because of draconian assessments, which often fail to take fully into account the impact a mental health problem can have."

Does the Minister agree? Many people with mental health problems can feel socially isolated, so surely the Government should be providing a system that supports people in need.

[Margaret Greenwood]

It was revealed recently that more than 60,000 appeals against the tests for PIP ruled against the Government in 2018. That is 72% of all tribunals. Clearly this is wholly unjust. The fact that such a high proportion of PIP assessments are overturned on appeal speaks volumes about the failings of the Government's record when it comes to providing support to disabled people. Ill and disabled people should not have to fight through the courts to receive the support that they are entitled to. Ministers at the Ministry of Justice recently revealed that the Government spent £26.5 million in 2018 on PIP hearings that ruled against the Department. The Minister must surely also be aware that the introduction of PIP has ended up costing the taxpayer more than the system it replaced, so will he commit today to scrapping the cruel and discredited PIP assessment framework and replacing it with one that treats disabled people with the respect they deserve and provides them with the support they need?

Justin Tomlinson: To repeat: we do welcome the judgment. It was the Government who referred this matter to the Supreme Court to get clarity. Across society, there is a deeper understanding of mental health, and that is welcome. This is not an exact science, but it is one of the few areas where there is cross-party support as, together, we get a better understanding of how to identify and support people with mental health conditions. This will be a complex exercise, and we will need to work carefully through the detail of the judgment before we start the exercise of checking claims. We are committed to doing that as soon as we can, working with disabled people and stakeholders, so that we can pay people as quickly as possible. I remind the hon. Lady that we are committed to supporting those with disabilities and long-term health conditions. We are now spending £10 billion more than when we came into office in 2010 on supporting people with long-term health conditions and disabilities. This represents a record high of 6% of Government spending, and we are committed to seeing that rise in every single year for the rest of this Parliament.

On the specific point of appeals, we know that the vast majority of successful appeals are because of additional written and oral evidence, but we recognise that the independent appeal process is too long and that it adds anxiety for claimants who are in too many cases having those decisions changed over. We are therefore determined to improve the mandatory reconsideration stage so that we can proactively contact claimants to get that additional written and oral evidence at that point. We have already piloted this in all the PIP mandatory reconsideration assessment centres, and that has been so encouragingly positive that we will do the same with the work capability assessment mandatory reconsiderations. This is a really important area of work, and we are determined to get it right for all claimants as quickly as possible.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): Many people will be unaware of the way in which PIP supports people who have mental health conditions far better than the predecessor benefit, disability living allowance, but mental health conditions can fluctuate and people can find it very difficult to get the right support and advice. How is my hon. Friend ensuring that PIP best

supports those people, particularly in finding their way through what can be a very complicated and difficult application system?

Justin Tomlinson: My right hon. Friend raises the really powerful point that we collectively need to do more to support claimants with mental health conditions. This is why we now have mental health champions in all the PIP assessments, and we are putting videos online so that people can see what to expect. We encourage claimants to bring a trusted third party—family, friends or a support worker—with them during the process, and we are working with the Department of Health and Social Care to identify ways to get hold of the crucial medical evidence that can improve the decision making at the first time of asking.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): Will the Minister please answer the question that the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) asked him at the beginning: how many more claimants will now be eligible for PIP who previously were not? Also, will he again clarify a commitment that he will look at all those claimants who have had their PIP application turned down, to see whether they are now eligible under the new rules?

Justin Tomlinson: We must consider the detail of the judgment and how it needs to be implemented before we can estimate how many people will be affected, but we will look back at cases. We are committed to engaging with stakeholders and disabled people, utilising their expertise, to ensure that the people who should receive support get it fully, fairly and as quickly as possible.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): The Liberal Democrats welcome the Supreme Court judgment, and I welcome much of what the Minister has said today about making things easier and more appropriate. However, does he accept that, as has already been mentioned, mental health assessments bring with them a particularly difficult set of circumstances? People's conditions may fluctuate, and assessments affect individuals in different ways, so will he consider, yet again, bringing assessments back in-house and having specialists who deal specifically with mental health cases to ensure that individuals get not only a mental health champion, but an appropriate champion with knowledge of their particular condition?

Justin Tomlinson: I understand the thrust of the hon. Lady's point, and I know that she works hard in this area. As I have said, our collective understanding is getting better, and we are working with stakeholders—people with real frontline experience—to help shape our training. All the assessors—trained health professionals—have people behind them who are experts in all conditions, not just mental health. Remember, many claimants have a menu of health conditions to be navigated. Where an assessor feels that they need additional support, they will get it from those experts before the assessment and while writing the report afterwards.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): To be dragged to the courts yet again in relation to PIP and the totally inadequate support that it provides to disabled people is a shame on this Government. According to Mind, two thirds of people on DLA for

mental health conditions have had their PIP refused or reduced, which is just not good enough. On top of that, 60 disabled people a month—a month—die after being refused PIP. To say that PIP is an okay support system for the most vulnerable people in this country is an absolute disgrace, so will the Minister write to me and answer the questions that I put to him in my letter of over two months ago?

Justin Tomlinson: I remind the hon. Lady that the Government took this case to the Supreme Court because we wanted to get clarity on this important issue. I also remind her that, under DLA, only 6% of claimants with a mental health condition got access to the highest rate of support. Under PIP, 33% of claimants are getting that support—more than five times higher than under DLA. We are doing everything we can to support people, and we are continuing to work with stakeholders and disabled people to ensure that the process continues to improve. I am proud that this Government are spending a record amount of money on supporting the most vulnerable people in society, something that Opposition Members continue to vote against at each Budget.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Ind): The judgment is welcome, of course, because it will provide more support to people with mental health conditions, but it does prompt a question, regardless of who brought the case, about whether the PIP and ESA assessment processes still contain significant flaws. I was under the impression that the Government were looking at the processes, potentially bringing them back in-house, and I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) that there should be more specific assessments for people with certain types of health conditions. Why are the contracts with Atos and Capita being extended for another two years when they are not meeting their targets?

Justin Tomlinson: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. The key thing is that we will continue to engage with stakeholders and disabled people and be held to account by the Select Committee on Work and Pensions, of which the hon. Lady is an active member. We will continue to make improvements, which is why increasing amounts of money are rightly being spent on vulnerable people in society. The Secretary of State is personally committed to improving the process, and we will do all that we can to do so.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The change from DLA to PIP has meant that my constituents have lost £2 million collectively—[*Interruption.*] That is a matter of fact, so I do not know why the Secretary of State is shaking his head. There is clearly a lot of despair behind that figure, and the recent judgment clearly proves that the situation is unsound. What is the Secretary of State going to do to fix it?

Justin Tomlinson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for elevating me to Secretary of State. I am just a Minister of State, but he is very kind. To be clear, 33% of people with a mental health condition will now access the highest rate of support under PIP, compared with just 6% under the legacy benefit. That is significant progress,

but we are committed to work with stakeholders and disabled people to continue the improvements that we are proud to be making.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Just last week, I had a constituent in my surgery who had not been awarded points in their PIP assessment for which I could clearly see that they were eligible. After the ruling, and considering that people have hidden and fluctuating conditions, what can my constituent now expect?

Justin Tomlinson: As I have set out, we will be looking carefully at the judgment, but the hon. Gentleman highlights something. As constituency MPs, we all have cases in which it is clear that, with additional written and oral evidence, a different decision could come about. That is why it is right—it is a departmental priority—to improve the mandatory reconsideration stage, so that more people can get the correct decision much quicker, without the long independent appeal process.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): There is a letter in the post to the Minister about this case, but I do not know whether he will be there to receive it, so I thought that I would ask about it here. My constituent has a long-standing diagnosis of Asperger's, but her PIP assessor ignored the detailed medical evidence that she had provided and performed a five-minute mental state test involving taking 25p away from £1 and spelling the word "world" backwards. Her decision letter stated that she had

"no cognitive sensory impairment diagnosed"

and

"no evidence of a cognitive impairment".

Surely constituents should not have to come to their MP to get such evident mistakes overturned. The Minister should be getting things right first time, rather than going for mandatory reconsiderations.

Justin Tomlinson: I have gone from being the Secretary of State to potentially not having a job in the next couple of days in the space of one question, but I will look at that letter carefully. I actually agree with the hon. Lady's point that we want the right decision the first time. We want claimants to be able to access the crucial medical evidence that can assist with assessments. Assessments are right more often than not, and only a small percentage of claims ultimately need to be appealed, but we need to learn lessons wherever there are mistakes, and I will take that case seriously.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): I also welcome the ruling, but it is important not just that we get rulings, but that people on PIP get the support that they deserve. I was concerned by the release of figures a couple of weeks ago showing that the Department's own equality impact assessment expected 14% of the 1.6 million people on PIP who were reviewed after previous court rulings to get an additional award, but just 0.8% of people reviewed have actually received an increase in their entitlement. Will the Minister commit to an urgent audit of what is going on in those reviews to ensure that people affected by this case do not see their awards quashed yet again?

Justin Tomlinson: The hon. Lady refers to the mental health estimates, which were done before the final guidance was implemented. We have consulted with Mind and

[Justin Tomlinson]

other key stakeholders on the revised guidance, and we will continue to ensure that those who are entitled to additional support get it as quickly as possible. We are on track to complete that work by next year, as initially set out.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): We all have casework in our surgeries involving people suffering from mental health issues who have been denied PIP or have had it taken away from them, but the situation goes beyond that. I have a profoundly deaf constituent who was transferred from DLA to PIP, but they were then denied PIP. Other people with chronic illnesses have failed to score enough points through the question and answer system. Will the Minister take on board the fact that other people in the system will be suffering similarly? We need a fundamental review to ensure that those people do not suffer in the way that they are currently.

Justin Tomlinson: We have made a real commitment, and we work closely with stakeholders representing a huge variety of disability and health conditions, empowering them to challenge, to make suggestions, and to work with our teams to help shape the training guidance. That is why an increasing amount of money is being spent each year on supporting people with disabilities and long-term health conditions. As I said, at £55 billion a year, spending is up £10 billion since we came to office. That is a record high, and it will continue to increase as we work, listen and engage with the people who have frontline experience, which the Government have committed to do.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I have a constituent who is rebuilding his life after spending some time in jail. His mental health condition means that he has communication issues and that crowds are a problem for him, which makes travel on public transport more problematic. All of that makes it difficult for him to maintain family contact and access the necessary support groups. He was denied PIP despite my office sending supporting letters and trying to help him hit the PIP descriptors. What changes will the Government make to the system so that my constituent will get the support that he deserves, as in the Supreme Court ruling, and be able to go forward and fully integrate into society?

Justin Tomlinson: I would be happy to look at that specific case. On the broader point of supporting people transitioning from prison back into society, I pay tribute to the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince), who has responsibility for family support. He has been working with the Minister of State, Ministry of Justice, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Robert Buckland), the prisons Minister, to make sure it is joined up. We have had successful trials to make sure that work coaches go into prison in advance of a person's leaving, as it is key that those who need the support can access it as quickly and as smoothly as possible. The case raised by the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) highlights why that is so important.

Decriminalisation of Abortion

1 pm

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Home Secretary to make a statement on the repeal of sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 in England and Wales, in consequence of the decriminalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): I have been asked to answer this question. As with other matters of conscience, abortion is an issue on which the Government adopt a neutral stance and allow Members to vote according to their moral, ethical or religious beliefs. As the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has responsibility for abortion policy, I am an instrument of the House in that regard and I will discharge the instructions of the House in the best interests of patient safety.

The Government have a duty to see that the provisions of the Abortion Act 1967 are properly applied until, and unless, Parliament chooses further to amend that law. The hon. Lady will be aware that the Abortion Act—the legislation affecting England and Wales—is an amendment to the Offences Against the Person Act 1861. Notwithstanding the issues in Northern Ireland, the Government currently have no plans to amend sections 58 and 59 of the 1861 Act in England and Wales.

Abortion is an extremely sensitive issue, and there are very strongly held views on all sides of the debate. Given this, any significant changes to the law require careful consideration and full consultation with the medical profession and others. Moreover, it is right that MPs and peers—or the devolved legislatures, as the case may be—have adequate opportunity to scrutinise any legislation fully. The Joint Committee on the draft Domestic Abuse Bill has also made it clear that abortion is not a matter for the Domestic Abuse Bill, which the House will consider shortly.

The question of potential reform to Northern Ireland's abortion laws, through the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill, if no restored Government are in place, should not be cause to reform the system in England and Wales. Abortion in England and Wales is already accessible and serves the needs of women seeking to access such services. The law also provides protection for the medical profession in carrying out its functions and duty of care to women.

As abortion is a devolved matter in Northern Ireland, the Government's preference remains that a restored Executive and a functioning Assembly take forward any reforms to the law and policy on this issue. It is our hope that devolved government will be restored at the earliest opportunity through the current talks process.

We do, however, recognise the strength of feeling expressed by the House in the amendments to the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill, which place a duty on the Government to make regulations to reform Northern Ireland's abortion laws if there is no restored Executive by 21 October 2019. The Government will work expeditiously to take forward this work, should that duty come into effect in the absence of devolved government.

The Government will also work with service providers to ensure that, in the meantime, the scheme provided in England for women from Northern Ireland continues to be fully accessible and that appropriate information is provided to those seeking to access those services. It remains my priority to provide safe access to abortion services under the law, as set by Parliament.

I appreciate this is an emotive issue, on which there are strongly held views, and I am sure it is something we will continue to debate in Parliament over the coming months, but I end by reminding the House that, over the past 50 years, the Abortion Act has ensured that women have access to legal safe abortion, which has contributed to a significant reduction in maternal mortality and has helped to empower women to make informed choices at what can be a very sensitive and difficult time in their lives.

Diana Johnson: I thank the Minister for her response, although it is a very disappointing response that does not address the subject of my question: England and Wales. I am also disappointed that we do not have a Minister from the Home Office, because this is a matter of criminal law.

The Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill, which repeals sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 in Northern Ireland, completed its parliamentary passage yesterday, but those sections still apply in England and Wales, meaning that any woman who ends a pregnancy without the permission of two doctors faces up to life imprisonment. That includes women who obtain pills online, and they might be women in abusive, coercive or controlling relationships, women living in rural areas and women who have childcare responsibilities who cannot access services in clinics.

Despite legal access to abortion in Great Britain, two women a day seek online help on abortion from Women on Web. The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, the medicines watchdog, has over three years seized almost 10,000 sets of abortion pills headed to British addresses.

The House will be pleased to know that there are no arguments about jurisdiction on repealing these provisions for England and Wales, and we are the competent body to do so. We have voted to decriminalise abortion on two recent occasions, 13 March 2017 and 23 October 2018, which alongside last week's vote on the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill clearly shows the will of this House that abortion should no longer be part of our criminal law but should be a regulated health decision between a woman and her doctor. I must stress again that decriminalisation does not mean deregulation, and a whole range of legal and professional regulation would still apply, just as it does to other healthcare procedures.

The situation in which we now find ourselves is unjust, irrational and confusing. The British Pregnancy Advisory Service released polling this morning showing that only 14% of people are aware of the current law and that 65% of British adults and 70% of women do not support the current criminal sanction.

Decriminalisation is supported by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of General Practitioners, the Royal College of Midwives,

the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Nursing, so I ask the Minister again. When will the Government act to repeal sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act, and will there be a moratorium on any prosecutions under these sections in the meantime?

Jackie Doyle-Price: I know I will disappoint the hon. Lady, and I know she has been a passionate campaigner on these issues for many years, with the welfare of women at her heart. I answer this question with great respect for her desire, but it remains the case that the Government are not minded to repeal the provisions of the 1861 Act in England and Wales, recognising that we have an Abortion Act that provides for access to abortion services.

From the perspective of the safety of women accessing abortion services, the issues raised by the hon. Lady do concern me. It is not good for the welfare of women that pills are being accessed online. I also observe that the Abortion Act is more than 50 years old and was the product of a very different time. Abortions were then entirely surgical, and the medical abortions to which we now have access are clearly far safer.

This is very much a personal view, and I am not speaking for the Government in advancing this view, but I think that making provision for early abortion and for recognising medical abortion in law will get us much further. We need to make sure we have a safe regime that enables women to access abortion services as safely as possible.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I supported decriminalisation, I supported the regularising of the abortion law in Northern Ireland last week, and on Friday I shall visit my local BPAS clinic. But changing the law is only part of it. Last year, I was out with an ambulance crew and we were called out to a woman who had been at an abortion clinic and taken the pills. She was bleeding heavily and had been taken very ill, and there was no out-of-hours service—this was on a Friday evening. Does the Minister agree, particularly in respect of the availability of do-it-yourself pills on the internet, that it is absolutely essential that, at a very difficult time for a woman who has taken that decision, the ongoing support is there 24 hours a day, seven days a week?

Jackie Doyle-Price: My hon. Friend reminds us that this is not always an easy process for women to go through. As with any medical procedure, full consent must be given, based on full information. As long as pills can be accessed via the internet rather than via medical professionals, it is clearly more likely that women will not be informed of the risks of taking the pills. Any medication can have risks and consequences, and women need to be fully advised so that they can manage what they are going through.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for and congratulate her on securing this urgent question, and thank her for her tireless campaigning on this issue. I share her disappointment that no Home Office Minister

[Mrs Sharon Hodgson]

was available to respond to this urgent question; waiting for a call is obviously more important. I thank the British Pregnancy Advisory Service for its excellent work on this issue, and for its new campaign, launched today, called #PunishedForPills.

Following the passage yesterday of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill, we find ourselves with a discrepancy across the UK when it comes to abortion. As we have heard, sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 no longer apply in Northern Ireland, but still apply in England and Wales, which means that if a woman does not seek the permission of two doctors before having an abortion, she could face up to life imprisonment in Britain, but not in Northern Ireland. The same goes for women who access abortion pills online. There are a whole host of reasons why women may do that, including not being able to get an appointment at a clinic, which now happens more and more often; not having childcare; living in a rural area; or being in an abusive relationship. Although women in Northern Ireland will no longer be persecuted for accessing abortion pills, the same cannot be said for women in Britain. I know this issue does not fall under the Minister's brief, but will she ensure that abortion will be decriminalised, but not deregulated, throughout the UK? That would increase access to and the safety of abortions for women throughout the UK.

No one takes abortion lightly—this is a very sensitive issue—but I am sure that we in the House can all agree that women deserve access to safe and legal health procedures, and that includes abortion. A woman's right to choose is a human rights matter. We need to seize on the momentum of the great result in the Republic of Ireland and deliver equality of rights for women throughout the UK and equality of resources across the whole NHS. The Government need to make this a landmark year in which women's reproductive rights are fully respected and realised. That is why I call on the Government to repeal sections 58 and 59 today, to make abortion rights equal throughout the UK.

Jackie Doyle-Price: I thank the hon. Lady for the characteristically constructive spirit in which she has engaged with this issue. The nub of the point she makes is that decriminalisation must not be met with deregulation. Whatever we do, we must make sure that in repealing those sections of the 1861 Act—if that is what Parliament chooses to do—the regime that replaces it must not only guarantee the rights of women to take decisions for themselves but protect them and keep them safe. That is my priority in addressing this issue.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): My hon. Friend is aware—isn't she?—that any proposal for repeal will be resisted as passionately in the country and on the Government Back Benches as it has just been advocated by those on the Opposition Benches?

Jackie Doyle-Price: I am very aware that this issue rouses passions on both sides of the argument, which is why I reassure the House that, from my perspective, I just want to make sure that I deliver Parliament's instructions in a way that is safe. I should add that perhaps the way in which both sides of the argument

have been debated in the House has not led to good lawmaking, because it has meant that the law has not been revisited in 50 years and has not kept pace with medical advancement.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister herself just made exactly the case that my good and hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) made so powerfully about the need to make sure that the law works for the 21st century. The votes we had in this place in the past two weeks were to recognise that human rights are not a devolved matter and should be available to every UK citizen. Although I enjoy the irony that potentially we could end up with the most progressive abortion laws in Northern Ireland, my constituents in Walthamstow and, indeed, all our constituents in England and Wales deserve to be treated equally as an adult, able to make their own choices.

In reading out what I believe someone had given to her as the Government's stated position on this legislation, which puts having an abortion on the same level as child stealing and using gunpowder to blow up a building, the Minister said that there would need to be a consultation with medical bodies "and others". Will she tell us who the others are and why, when it comes to something medical, it is only women who seem to have non-medical professionals getting involved in deciding what their rights to access treatment might be?

Jackie Doyle-Price: As with any consultation, "others" would include all members of the public, and everyone here is a representative of members of the public. There are a number of ways that we can get to the outcome of legislation fit for the 21st century. It is the Government's position that the simple repeal of those two aspects of the 1861 Act is not sufficient to guarantee safe legislation for women in this country. We have an Abortion Act that empowers women to take decisions themselves. Again, I come back to the fact that this is an issue of conscience. As Minister, I will implement the law as decided by Parliament.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I have great respect for the Minister, but I do not think there is any case at all for inviting amateurs to comment on what should be medical, clinical assessments. The criminal law always bears down most harshly on the most vulnerable and marginalised women: very young women, those with literacy or learning difficulties, those with poor language skills and those who may be in an abusive relationship. Will the Minister therefore consider again her stance—the Government's stance—on the impact of encompassing this offence in our criminal law, and look at steps that can be taken urgently to repeal it?

Jackie Doyle-Price: The specific offences to which the hon. Lady refers are a matter for the Home Office. The Government's position is that they should not be repealed for England and Wales at this point. I absolutely understand the issue she raises with regard to the most vulnerable, and she and I have had discussions on that basis, but that is also a reason why simple repeal is not necessarily the best tool. To have a safe regime in place is also to protect exactly the people she identified. As I have said, from a personal perspective I do not think

that the current law is in any way satisfactory, and I hope that in future we can have sensible discussions about how we might modernise it.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): In my role as a member of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, the committee on which I serve, which is chaired by the noble Lord Dubs, has for the past two years been looking at abortion policy across the whole of Ireland and Britain. Our report should have been available already, but there was some disagreement as to its final content. We will be updating it, hopefully for publishing in October. It would be helpful to discuss that report with the Government. As well as online medication, we have found other particularly concerning issues: we need to remember that there are no borders for healthcare for women across these islands, and there are no borders for how women across these islands will continue to support each other. We want to see more equality. Of real concern are the often very traumatic cases of late terminations. The workforce across our islands are not skilled—there are not enough of them and there are not enough good-quality skills. Does the Minister agree that the Government should at least look into those points regarding workforce?

Jackie Doyle-Price: Yes, absolutely. I would be delighted to meet the hon. Lady about her report. That there is difficulty in getting agreement comes as no surprise to me but, given the intentions of the people behind it, having that discussion would be useful. Yes, I have heard concerns expressed about skills levels, in particular to perform late-stage terminations, which are incredibly dangerous, as she is aware. I will endeavour to take that forward with the relevant bodies.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Ind): I sense that the Minister is genuinely trying to help. There is some irony in that we have been trying for so long to amend legislation in Northern Ireland to reflect what we have here, but now it has gone the other way—in the absence of any Executive, with the repeal of sections 58 and 59, Northern Ireland will in fact have more modernised legislation than we have. May I ask her explicitly what she thinks—personally, I suspect—would be the most effective tool to modernise abortion law right across the UK, which the majority of Members want?

Jackie Doyle-Price: That is a difficult question to answer given that the matter is now completely devolved. In respect of England and Wales, I think that the most effective method would be to revisit the Abortion Act, which is itself an amendment to the Offences Against the Person Act providing an exemption for women making that choice in those circumstances. My personal view—the Government do not have a view on such matters of conscience—is that, after 50 years, the Abortion Act does not reflect medical practice today, and therefore restricts the choices of women and their ability to exercise those choices in the safest way.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Other jurisdictions in Canada and Australia have already removed abortion from the criminal law without any increase in the rate of abortion or in late terminations. The Minister

cloaks the issue in words such as “emotive” and “sensitive”, but this is actually a legal issue, and women in England and Wales deserve the same protection now afforded to women in Northern Ireland. Given that this is a legal issue, when will we get an answer from the Home Office, rather than the buck being passed to the Health Minister?

Jackie Doyle-Price: At the risk of being flippant, obviously I can only relay the policy given to me by the Home Office. I can give the hon. Lady my views on how we best keep patients safe, but clearly, when it comes down to it, how Parliament decides to manage such issues is a matter for Parliament; the Government and I as a Minister will do as instructed.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): Will the Minister give us an example of any other medical procedure or treatment that is a human right that is criminalised by the law in England and Wales?

Jackie Doyle-Price: We need to look at exactly what the Offences Against the Person Act says, which is not in the context of a medical procedure. That is why we have the Abortion Act, which provides for a specific exemption by treating abortion as a medical procedure. The Offences Against the Person Act is in effect about foeticide; the Abortion Act amends that to decriminalise women seeking an abortion. That is the difference. If we make it about the Offences Against the Person Act, we are missing the point about England and Wales.

BILLS PRESENTED

LOW CARBON DOMESTIC HEATING BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir David Amess, supported by Ian Austin, Mr Adrian Bailey, Sir Graham Brady, Tom Brake, Maria Caulfield, Mr Roger Godsiff, Zac Goldsmith, John Grogan, Tim Loughton, Sarah Newton and Alex Sobel, presented a Bill to make provision about low carbon domestic heating systems.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 427).

ASYLUM SEEKERS (ACCOMMODATION EVICTION PROCEDURES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Chris Stephens presented a Bill to make provision for asylum seekers to challenge the proportionality of a proposed eviction from accommodation before an independent court or tribunal; to establish asylum seeker accommodation eviction procedures for public authorities; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 428).

Mr Speaker: Suggestive of a busy “tomorrow”—we shall await the development of events. Meanwhile, we have an item of considerable parliamentary excitement, namely the ten-minute rule motion, which the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) has been patiently waiting to move.

Tibet (Reciprocal Access)

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

1.24 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con):
I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the Secretary of State to report annually on restrictions on access by UK nationals to Tibet in comparison with other regions of China; to make provision to deny persons involved in imposing such restrictions permission to enter the UK; and for connected purposes.

In May, in my role as chair of the all-party group for Tibet, I attended the seventh world parliamentary convention on Tibet in Riga, Latvia, together with the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law), who I am delighted is in the Chamber today. We joined parliamentarians from around the world, representatives of the Tibetan Parliament in exile based in Dharamshala, and His Excellency Lobsang Sangay, the Sikyong or President of the Central Tibetan Administration since 2012. We were pleased to receive the Sikyong in this place, and that he met you, Mr Speaker, just a few weeks ago.

At the convention, we discussed continued human rights abuses of Tibetans at the hands of Chinese security forces; the routine intimidation of Tibetans, their supporters and the Dalai Lama himself around the world; the assaults on the Tibetan language, and the culture, religious practices and way of life of Tibetans generally; and the continued population transfer of Chinese into Tibet to dilute and smother further the Tibetan identity. We also debated at length the environmental degradation being waged on the Tibetan plateau, which has led to an unprecedented number of natural disasters, caused by the impact of excessive and unsustainable mineral extraction and dam construction in an area whose rivers service some 40% of the world's population; as well as the accumulation of waste and the dumping of toxic waste on the plateau and in Tibet's waters. We discussed, too, the tragic self-immolation of more than 150 Tibetans in protest against Chinese persecution in Tibet, and the continued human rights abuses generally.

We all signed up to the Riga declaration, which requests China

“give unimpeded access to Tibet to foreign journalists, scholars and researchers, diplomats and other foreign citizens, including those of Tibetan origin.

To cease its policies and practices that harm the natural environment of the Tibetan Plateau.

And to resume the dialogue with envoys of His Holiness the Dalai Lama without preconditions”,

because the Tibetan struggle has always been a peaceful one.

A few days before the convention, I received a phone call from a senior official at the Chinese embassy in London, strongly suggesting that I should not be going to Riga, that I should not be consorting with such people and that I should rethink my plans, because everything is fine in Tibet, and that is plain for all to see. Basically, I was told, “You don't want to go Riga, Mr Loughton, do you?” I responded politely that his entreaties had made me even more determined to attend

the convention and I asked why, rather than intimidating parliamentarians, the Chinese Government do not sit down to talk to us.

I again invited the Chinese ambassador to attend a meeting of the all-party group for Tibet and indicated that a group of us would be delighted to be hosted in Tibet so that the Chinese Government can show us at first hand how everything in Tibet is just fine. Subsequently, I wrote twice to His Excellency Liu Xiaoming, the Chinese ambassador in London, but I await a reply, even though the ambassador has found time to attend numerous other all-party group meetings in this place and various other events in recent months.

We should not be surprised, however, by that behaviour by the Chinese. Their record on human rights, cultural tolerance and the environment is deplorable, which is why they do not want people from outside finding out what goes on in the inside. Foreigners including British and EU citizens, and Americans require a number of special authorisations and permits in addition to a Chinese visa to enter the Tibet autonomous region, which spans about half of Tibet. For those who do get in, a Government-appointed guide must accompany them, and during politically sensitive periods the region is completely closed to foreigners. Such closures have occurred regularly since a wave of mostly peaceful protest swept across the Tibetan plateau ahead of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Foreign diplomats, parliamentarians, journalists and even UN officials are almost always denied visits to the region, other than on rare official tours carefully orchestrated by the Chinese authorities. At the same time, Tibetans are regularly prevented from travelling outside China, and those passing information abroad are punished severely. A prominent example is Tashi Wangchuk, a young language rights advocate who last year was sentenced to five years in prison, just for giving an interview to *The New York Times* about his efforts to protect Tibetans' mother tongue. The UK ambassador in Beijing has not been able to visit the Tibet autonomous region since 2017, and is still waiting for permission to travel. Trips by officials and tourists are always closely managed, and travel permits are often withdrawn at short notice.

Sadly, such restrictions are even harsher for European citizens of Tibetan heritage, many of whom are refugees who escaped from Tibet and are specifically targeted by and discriminated against by Chinese embassies and consulates when they apply for a travel permit. That cruelly prevents many of them being able to see their families, from whom in many cases they have been separated for a long time.

Recently we have seen the latest attempts at repression by the Chinese authorities in Hong Kong, and the brave resistance of millions of Hong Kong citizens. Less graphically we have been given limited access to the appalling abuses in the Xinjiang region of China, where more than 1 million Uighurs, Kazakhs and other primarily Muslim minorities are detained in concentration camps that are cynically dressed up as re-education schools. Families are being split up and thousands of children are being taken into state care. But we must not be distracted from the long-term protracted suffering of the Tibetan people; in the 60 years since the occupation and invasion, more than 1 million Tibetans have lost and continue to lose their lives.

We can no longer sit idly by. All attempts to shed light on human rights abuses through the universal periodic review of the UN Human Rights Council have been snubbed, and they continue unabated and largely in secret. The Foreign Press Association has reported that it is easier for Beijing-based journalists to visit North Korea than to visit Tibet.

Chinese authorities take advantage of our freedoms in the west to travel freely and spread their propaganda, but routinely refuse to reciprocate. That must stop. Recognising this, in December 2018 the United States adopted the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act, which promotes access to Tibetan areas for American diplomats, journalists and ordinary citizens—just as their Chinese counterparts enjoy in the US. Despite Chinese denunciation of this law, the legislation already appears to have made an impact, as Chinese state media are now reporting that Beijing has decided to adopt a faster process for foreign tourists to receive permits to enter Tibet. This landmark Act had cross-party support and was unanimously approved by the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in December. It was sponsored by Republican Senator Rubio and Democrat Senator Bob Menendez, and even President Trump welcomed it.

My Bill mirrors the US Act. I will shortly be publishing the draft Bill, replacing references to “US” with “UK” and “State Department” with “Foreign Office”, and making other appropriate adjustments. It will also include a recommendation for the UK Government formally to request that the UN Special Committee on Decolonization considers Tibet. Given that China is part of that committee, it would therefore need to recuse itself. I hope that request will be taken seriously.

My Bill requires the Foreign Office to report to Parliament annually regarding the level of access that Chinese authorities grant to UK diplomats, journalists and tourists to Tibetan areas in China. Such assessment shall include: a comparison with the level of access granted to other areas of China; a comparison between the levels of access granted to Tibetan and non-Tibetan areas in relevant provinces; a comparison of the level of access in the reporting year and the previous year; and a description of the measures that impede the freedom to travel in Tibetan areas.

Under this legislation, no individual who is substantially involved in the formulation or execution of policies related to access for foreigners to Tibetan areas may enter the United Kingdom if: the requirement that foreigners must receive official permission to enter the Tibet autonomous region remains in effect or has been replaced by a similar regulation that also requires foreigners to gain a level of permission to enter the Tibet autonomous region that is not required for other provinces; and travel restrictions on United Kingdom diplomats, officials, journalists and citizens to Tibet autonomous areas in Sichuan, Qinghai, Yunnan and Gansu provinces—I apologise to *Hansard*—are greater than travel restrictions to other areas.

The Bill will also require the Foreign Office to report to Parliament annually, identifying individuals who were blocked from United Kingdom entry during the preceding year and a list of Chinese officials who are substantially involved in the formulation or execution of policies to restrict the access of UK diplomats, journalists and citizens to Tibetan areas.

The Bill mirrors the legislation that has already been passed unanimously by the US Congress. It is time for us, in Europe and the United Kingdom, to take a similar stand to show categorically to China that its continued abuses in Tibet do not go unnoticed or unappreciated, and that we will tolerate them no more.

I am pleased to report that the Bill is co-sponsored by Members representing all the main political parties who have more than one Member in this House—demonstrating the widespread sense of outrage at what China continues to get away with in its continued persecution of Tibet and Tibetans the world over. I commend this Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Tim Loughton, Chris Law, Sir Peter Bottomley, Jim Shannon, Kerry McCarthy, Christine Jardine, Jonathan Edwards, Mike Gapes, Maria Caulfield, Catherine West, Fiona Bruce and Marion Fellows present the Bill.

Tim Loughton accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 429).

Exiting the European Union (Transport)

1.35 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Michael Ellis): I beg to move,

That the draft Cableway Installations (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 2 July, be approved.

These regulations will be needed in the event that the UK leaves the EU without an agreement. They are being made under powers conferred by the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, and will give clarity and certainty to industry by fixing deficiencies that will arise in two pieces of legislation when the UK leaves the EU: namely, EU regulation 2016/424, which is a directly applicable EU regulation; and the Cableway Installations Regulations 2018, which implemented the EU regulation.

It may be helpful if I provide some background. Cableways are a mixture of funicular railways and aerial transport systems such as ski lifts for the transport of passengers. They are important for tourism and communities, and we support their continued success. The majority are in snow sports resorts in Scotland, but they also include the Emirates line in London. Those that entered into service before 1 January 1986 are classed as historical, cultural or heritage installations—for example, the Great Orme Tramway and the Babbacombe Cliff Railway—and are excluded from the scope of the 2018 regulations and the EU regulation.

The EU regulation is in part directly applicable in the UK, so it forms part of domestic law. The 2018 regulations supplement the EU regulation where further detail is required—for example, on the authorisation process for the construction or modification of and entry into service of cableway installations, and in providing for the enforcement of the regulatory framework. The EU regulation and the 2018 regulations ensure conformity of standards of cableway components across the EU; require the Secretary of State to notify the EU Commission of the notified body responsible for carrying out conformity assessments to ensure that cableway systems, subsystems and their components meet EU standards; and require the Secretary of State to set rules on the design, construction and entry into service of new cableway installations.

The 2018 regulations and the EU regulation contain a number of elements that will be inappropriate after the UK leaves the European Union. If left unamended, these would render the 2018 regulations and the EU regulation deficient in certain respects post-exit. This instrument will ensure that the legislation on cableway installations will continue to function correctly in the future—as I am sure the House would approve—providing clarity and certainty to providers.

Before I turn to what the instrument does, let me highlight the fact that it has been developed in close co-operation with the industry and the Health and Safety Executive. We have also consulted the Scottish Government; Ski Scotland, which represents the snow sports industry; and Transport for London, given its particular interest in this area. No major concerns were raised by any of those organisations regarding the approach being adopted in this instrument.

The current legislative framework gives cableway operators reassurance that the components used in new cableways, or for maintaining or repairing existing cableways,

are safe and that they comply with EU standards. Given the reassurance provided by the current standards, we have no current plans to diverge from them. However, if the UK ever wanted to diverge from EU harmonised standards, the instrument contains a power for the Secretary of State to designate standards in future. The instrument enables the Secretary of State to designate standards by means of a technical specification for cableways installations, their systems or subsystems, and publish that standard in a manner which he considers appropriate.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am listening intently to the Minister's remarks about this extremely interesting and important SI that we are about to pass. Has he considered the impact of climate change on the use of cableways in, particularly, Scottish ski resorts, which are probably the biggest users of such technology? These regulations may be completely redundant in a few years' time if we have no snow and no ski resorts because of climate change.

Michael Ellis: I am so grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. Of course, everything that I do in the Department for Transport considers these important issues of climate change, and my officials are very alive to this issue.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Very frequently in the measure, the words “notified body” are replaced with “approved body”. Why is that so common a feature?

Michael Ellis: I am going to come to that right now.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Elaborating on the point made by the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), one can actually have artificial snow ski resorts.

Michael Ellis: Yes, indeed, but even then, one would still need a cableway in order to reach the required area.

The use of this power would be subject to full consultation with the industry and the appropriate technical and safety bodies, such as the Health and Safety Executive.

As the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) mentioned, this instrument replaces the definition of “notified body” with “approved body”. This will allow the Secretary of State to approve bodies to carry out cableways conformity assessments. It should be noted that currently there are no such approved bodies in the UK, so until such time as a body is approved, we will continue to recognise EU notified bodies. I hope that is clear.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): When my hon. Friend was considering rolling over these standards, did he look at American and other world standards compared with European ones? Were they higher or lower, and might we lose out if we adopt only European standards in terms of imports?

Michael Ellis: Of course we keep under advisement all the safety standards. The officials in my Department are constantly looking at issues of safety. Historical and heritage cableway apparatus, for example, is subject to different regulations under the Health and Safety at

Work etc. Act 1974. General safety is of paramount importance, and we always look at international comparisons.

All the other changes being made by the instrument are minor and technical in nature—for example, removing references to member states and changing the terminology where applicable.

In summary, cableways are important to communities across the UK and are part of the economy in many areas. These draft regulations will give industry the clarity and certainty it needs that the current standards will continue to apply if the UK leaves the EU without an agreement.

1.43 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I rise in support of the Cableway Installations (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019. These regulations would come into force if the UK were to leave the EU without a deal, which would clearly be catastrophic for the economy and our future.

However, why are we debating these regulations only now, nearly four months after the UK was due to leave the EU? If we had left with no deal at that time, what would have happened to the cableway sector and its regulation? It seems extraordinary that the Government are only now discovering regulations that need to be debated. How many more are at the back of the cupboard in the Minister's Department and are yet to come to the Floor of the House? That is especially important as safety is paramount in these regulations. So much for no-deal preparations; even legislation protecting vital things like safety has been forgotten.

We have demonstratively seen how poor preparations for no deal are in the Minister's Department—let us not forget the Operation Stack demonstration, for example. Clearly, his Department is not ready for no deal. Perhaps he can assure the House today, as I have asked his colleagues to do previously, that this is the very last regulation to come on to the Floor of this House to ensure that EU law is enshrined in UK law in the adverse event of the UK leaving the European Union. If it is not, how many more regulations can the House expect?

These regulations deal with the components necessary for the installation of cableways such as ski lifts, the Emirates line and funicular railways, and seek to establish parallel processes to those in the EU, with the Health and Safety Executive and the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland taking over the role of the enforcement body. The United Kingdom Accreditation Service will then ensure that an assessment is made by an approved body—not by the Secretary of State—so that the components for installation meet the required standard. The setting of standards will sit with the Secretary of State, as a new extended power, but he will, in reality, work with industry to set the standards, which will sit under the British Standards Institute.

The CE—Conformité Européenne—certification marker will transfer to the UK, to be replaced by a UK marker. This transfer of functions is a practical solution should we end up with no deal. If we do, it is expected that there will be no divergence from EU standards for the industry—well, at least not to start with. However, it is not clear whether parity with EU standards will be maintained if EU standards advance. Can the Minister confirm this, and set out in what instances he believes

there could be divergence, and how his Government will respond to that? Will he ensure that in that scenario, UK legislation will keep pace with EU legislation? Clearly, for the industry in this specialist field, and the resultant supply chain, it is in the interests of manufacturing and safety standards that there be no divergence, although we can always have better safety regulations, and that we are not forced into a no-deal scenario under the new Prime Minister.

Concern has been raised about fee setting for this process, not least by the Scottish snow sports sector and Transport for London. I note that the Department highlights that that does not come within the scope of the regulations, but will the Minister tell the House how this will operate in a no-deal Brexit scenario, since a transfer of authoritative bodies, inspection bodies and the enforcement body could impact on fees?

Labour will support these regulations this afternoon, but I hope to have some clarity from the Minister on the issues that I have raised.

1.48 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Here we go again: the Government have thought it fit to bring this very minor statutory instrument to the main Chamber for debate. Why has a straightforward cut-and-paste job, which simply substitutes references to the EU with references to the UK, merited an allocation of 90 minutes in the main Chamber—or is the Minister trying to big it up? He said that the instrument is about fixing deficiencies and providing clarity and certainty for business, and that the Government developed it in close association with industry and the Health and Safety Executive, but that is not the case; it is a cut-and-paste and substitute job.

There is one slight difference: paragraph 2.8 of the explanatory notes details a “significant change”, in that there is a power for the Secretary of State to designate standards after Brexit day. So there we have it—there is a Brexit dividend: more powers for the Transport Secretary! However, he does not intend to wield these powers, fortunately; there is enough chaos and uncertainty due to Brexit without him intervening and creating further chaos, in line with his legacy.

As the shadow Minister said, we have to ask why, if the Government claimed they were ready for a no-deal Brexit in March, this measure has come forward four months after the original exit day. How on earth can the Government claim that they will pull off a no-deal Brexit deal in October when there is some really heavy legislation that we need to pass through this House in order to achieve that?

Paragraph 2.8 of the explanatory notes also advises that there are no approved bodies in the UK that can carry out conformity assessment, so the EU notified bodies will continue to be recognised. This is actually sensible, but again it shows the absurdity of exiting the EU. Will the Minister advise whether there are any plans to set up a new body?

As has been said, this SI covers 100 cableway installations in operation in the UK, the majority of which are for the ski industry in Scotland. Paragraph 10.3 of the explanatory notes details that, following the consultation, the

“Scottish Snow Sports Sector expressed concern about the fee structure for the inspection of small cableways such as chair lifts.”

[Alan Brown]

Yet a change in fees is not proposed, so can the Minister advise what assessment has been made of the fairness and level of fees, and is there any scope for reductions? Surely if we are to have any Brexit dividend, and the reduction in red tape that we keep hearing about, there must be scope for a reduction in the fees charged to the industry.

It is clear that this SI does absolutely nothing but allow some form of continuity by recognising the EU bodies involved, and changing some references. I will therefore certainly not oppose it, especially as it is particularly relevant to Scotland. I end by repeating my request for the Minister to engage with the ski sector, to see what movement can be made on the inspection fees charged to the industry.

1.51 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): It's a strange old world, isn't it? This must be the strangest Parliament in many years. We are debating Bills that are no more than clauses, in effect, and we now have on the Floor of the House a measure that would normally have been taken in a Committee Room upstairs. It is actually a measure that the Government—or certainly today's Government—hope they will never have to implement, because they are hopeful that some kind of deal will be done, so that we are not in the no-deal scenario in which this would be necessary.

There is a fundamental complexity in what the Government are arguing. In the explanatory notes, the Government say that the SI's whole aim is to mirror precisely what the EU is doing. One therefore presumes, as my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) said, that if there are amendments to EU regulations in this area in the future, the UK Government will immediately implement them in the UK. That hardly feels like seizing back control; if anything, it feels more like ceding control to a body on which we will no longer be sitting. If there are to be European-wide measures on ski lifts—because, I guess, lots of people from across the European Union who travel from one country to another will want to know, when they get on a ski lift, that it is safe—one would have thought the UK would want to take part in establishing those rules and regulations.

The regulation has been admirably and beautifully expounded on by the Minister, who has had more than a wry smile, I would say, on his puckered lips.

Michael Ellis: I always look like this.

Chris Bryant: No, the Minister does not always look quite like that. This proves yet again what many of us have felt for a long time: that Brexit is proving far more complicated than anybody ever thought it would be, and is using an awful lot of our time and energy. Whether it will produce anything more than wind is difficult to know.

1.53 pm

Michael Ellis: The hon. Members for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) said the SI was allegedly unimportant, but that did not stop them talking to the Chamber about it at some length.

May I say to the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) that my Department is actually extremely advanced in the matter of statutory instruments? It has been focusing very strongly on this, and is in a very good place on it. Safety is of paramount importance; these are not minor matters. They are matters of considerable significance, not just for ski lifts but for funicular railways and the other areas we have discussed, including the Emirates line.

We at the Department for Transport have prioritised our SI programme. We have consulted the industry and the devolved Assemblies. We are confident that there will be no impact on safety of not having these regulations in place for exit day, but it is right that we bring them forward now and give the industry clarity, because that is common sense. Standards will not change. Provision will be made for the Secretary of State to set designated standards in future. As ever, that will be subject to full consultation with all the devolved Assemblies.

When it comes to the requirements and duties placed on cableway operators transporting passengers, maintaining the status quo after exit day is perfectly proper and necessary to ensure continuity of operations and safety. The objective of Her Majesty's Government is to maintain the status quo in order to avoid uncertainty for cableway operators following exit day. I hope Members agree that that is a sensible approach that will benefit communities and the users of these services. I commend this statutory instrument to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Electoral Commission

[Relevant document: The First Report of the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, Re-appointment of an Electoral Commissioner, HC 2513.]

1.55 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mel Stride): I beg to move,

That an humble address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that Her Majesty will re-appoint Rob Vincent CBE as an Electoral Commissioner with effect from 1 January 2020 for the period ending 31 December 2023.

The motion proposes that a Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty praying that Her Majesty will reappoint Rob Vincent CBE as an electoral commissioner for a period of four years from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2023. Mr Vincent has served as an electoral commissioner since 1 January 2016, and his current term expires on 31 December 2019.

It may help if I set out some of the background to this appointment. Electoral commissioners are appointed under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, as amended by the Political Parties and Elections Act 2009. Under the Act, the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission has a responsibility to oversee the selection of candidates for appointment to the Electoral Commission, including the reappointment of commissioners. The Speaker's committee has produced a report, its first report of 2019, in relation to this motion.

The Electoral Commission includes up to six ordinary commissioners, who are subject to restrictions as to political activity. They are recruited by open competition, under a procedure put in place and overseen by the Speaker's committee. The Electoral Commission also has four nominated commissioners, who are persons put forward by the registered leader of a qualifying party for consideration for appointment. Mr Vincent is an ordinary commissioner and was recruited through an open and fair competition conducted in 2015.

The Speaker's committee is required by section 3 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, as amended, to oversee the procedure for selecting candidates for appointment to the Electoral Commission. Under section 3(5A) of the Act, this duty encompasses the recommendation of candidates for reappointment to the Electoral Commission. There is no presumption in the statute either for or against reappointment.

At its meeting in March 2019, the Speaker's committee considered a request from Sir John Holmes, the chair of the Electoral Commission, seeking Mr Vincent's reappointment for a second term. In considering the question, the committee had regard to the report on Mr Vincent's effectiveness in the role, as submitted by Sir John. In particular, the committee was informed that Mr Vincent's previous experience as a returning officer in a local authority, and the practical understanding of this work he was able to bring to the work of the commission, had been extremely valuable.

Having carefully considered Sir John's report, the Speaker's committee concluded that it was content to recommend Mr Vincent for reappointment. Once the Speaker's committee has reached a decision, statute requires that the Speaker consult the registered leader of each registered party, provided that that party commands at

least two Members of this House. The Speaker therefore accordingly wrote to the leaders of the qualifying parties in April, consulting them on Mr Vincent's reappointment. No objections or concerns were received by the Speaker in response to this consultation. The Speaker's committee therefore commends the reappointment of Mr Vincent to the House. If the appointment is made, Rob Vincent will continue to serve on the Electoral Commission until 31 December 2023. I am sure that, should this motion pass today, his expertise will continue to be appreciated by the commission.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Given the importance of this reappointment to the Electoral Commission's work, will the Government start working on the Electoral Commission's recommendations, including the recommendation that electoral fines are too small and seen as normal, day-to-day business by the major UK parties; and the recommendation about revealing donations in Northern Ireland further back than the cut-off date set by the Government?

Mel Stride: I will say two things in response to the hon. Gentleman's question. The first is that it is slightly out of the scope of this debate on a motion concerning the reappointment of an electoral commissioner. I will, however, indulge the hon. Gentleman with my second observation, which is that the wider issues that he has raised would be best taken up with the Minister with responsibility for the constitution, my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster).

2 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for moving the motion. I thank the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission for overseeing the procedure for selecting candidates for appointment to the Electoral Commission, and for producing its report, "Re-appointment of an Electoral Commissioner", which was published on 8 July 2019. I thank Mr Speaker for chairing the committee and I thank the other members: the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr Lidington); the hon. Members for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin), for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak), for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) and for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns); and my hon. Friends the Members for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero), for Newport East (Jessica Morden) and for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson).

Rob Vincent CBE has served as an electoral commissioner since 1 January 2016, and his current term of office expires on 31 December 2019. At its meeting on 18 March 2019, the Speaker's committee considered a letter from the chair of the Electoral Commission, Sir John Holmes, seeking Mr Vincent's reappointment for a second term. Sir John told the committee that Mr Vincent had consistently achieved the objectives agreed with him since his appointment, and that he had offered valuable contributions to the board's debates on strategy and resources.

Sir John also noted Mr Vincent's past experience, which the Leader of the House has outlined, as a returning officer in a local authority, and the practical understanding of that work that he had been able to bring to board meetings. Mr Vincent was chief executive of Kirklees Council between 2004 and 2010, and of Doncaster Council between 2010 and 2011.

[Valerie Vaz]

After considering Sir John's letter, the committee recommended that Mr Vincent be reappointed with effect from 1 January 2020 for the period ending 31 December 2023. Mr Speaker wrote to the leaders of the qualifying parties on 4 April 2019 on the committee's recommendation. No objections or concerns were received from Her Majesty's Official Opposition—the Labour party—or, as I understand it, from other parties, so the Opposition support the motion.

2.2 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): I want briefly, and for the record, to associate myself with the observations made by the Leader of the House and the shadow Leader of the House concerning the suitability of Mr Vincent for his current and future position. The third party has no objection to the motion, and we look forward to Mr Vincent continuing in his role in the Electoral Commission.

Question put and agreed to.

Nationality

[Relevant documents: *The Fifth Report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, Proposal for a draft British Nationality Act 1981 (Remedial) Order 2018, HC 926, and the Twentieth Report of the Joint Committee of Human Rights, Good Character Requirements: Draft British Nationality Act 1981 (Remedial) Order 2019—Second Report, HC 1943.*]

2.3 pm

The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes): I beg to move,

That the draft British Nationality Act 1981 (Remedial) Order 2019, which was laid before this House on 2 May, be approved.

In this day and age, I think we can all agree that the law should not discriminate against people simply because their parents were not married when they were born, and that we should not discriminate against people just because it was their mother who was British, not their father. The draft British Nationality Act 1981 (Remedial) Order 2019 is designed to remove discriminatory provisions in the British Nationality Act 1981 for those applying for British citizenship under specific routes introduced to address historical discrimination against those whose parents were not married, or against those whose mother was British, as opposed to their father. The draft order was first laid in Parliament in March 2018.

Once the law has been changed, those who seek to register as British citizens and who were born to an unmarried British father before July 2006, or to a British mother before 1983, will no longer need to demonstrate that they are of good character where it would be discriminatory to require them to do so. In two separate cases, the courts declared the good character requirement to be unlawful and made a declaration of incompatibility with the European convention on human rights. This legislation will correct incompatibilities identified by the domestic courts by removing the good character requirement for those applying for British citizenship via certain routes on the basis of historical discrimination. I am grateful to the Joint Committee on Human Rights for its scrutiny of the order and its careful consideration of this hugely complex and sensitive issue.

The remedial order process to correct incompatibilities in primary legislation with the European convention on human rights is rarely used. It is therefore right that each order is scrutinised carefully to ensure compliance with the procedure laid down in the Human Rights Act 1998, and to ensure that the incompatibilities found by the courts are addressed.

The Government welcome the Committee's recommendation that Parliament approve the order. It remains our position that some of the issues raised by the Committee go beyond the incompatibility rulings and are therefore outwith the scope of the order. I commend this order to the House.

2.5 pm

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): The good character requirement has wrongly blocked children from registering for their right to British citizenship. We support the statutory instrument because it corrects a discriminatory and wrongful requirement. This requirement in relation to citizenship is highly controversial and, simply put, it is outdated in the present climate. British nationality law granted automatic citizenship by descent only to children born in wedlock to British fathers.

Although previous changes have allowed children born to British mothers or fathers to become British citizens by descent whether their parents were married or not, discrimination remained because they were required to prove good character.

Concerns raised by the Joint Committee on Human Rights, the courts, numerous organisations and young people themselves all indicate that it is inappropriate to apply the good character test to children who have a right to be British. The statutory changes proposed today would address those concerns by removing the requirement to prove good character. It is disappointing that the Home Office had to be taken to court to be forced to make this change. I hope the Home Office will not wait for another court ruling to address the other glaring problems with UK nationality law, especially in relation to children.

We believe that the good character requirement has led to serious discrimination. Children from BME backgrounds, as well as children in care, are much more likely to be denied citizenship because of unequal treatment in the criminal justice system. The root of the problem came about when the Government began blurring the distinction between registration and naturalisation. The original good character requirement was not defined, and it related to adult migrants applying to naturalise as British citizens. Since then, the requirement has been applied to children who were born and grew up in the country of which they wish to register citizenship, thereby wrongly denying them their rights to register British citizenship.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I strongly agree with my hon. Friend, who has raised an important point about discrimination. Lots of children came to this country, possibly as refugees, and are in care. When they reach a certain age, they have difficulty getting British citizenship. Surely, that has to be put right.

Afzal Khan: I agree with my hon. Friend. Denying someone their right to citizenship of the only country they have ever known is a heinous overreaction to a policy caution, especially for children as young as 10.

Concerns remain about citizenship, most prominently in relation to cost and access to legal aid. The JCHR recommended that the Home Office should not charge an application fee to those who have previously been discriminated against. Can the Minister confirm that that is the Government's intention? When we can expect that to be made clear in legislation? The Government are making a profit on fees charged to children who are registering their right to British citizenship, and those who cannot afford the fee will effectively be denied their right to citizenship. We believe that that is wrong. Will the Minister set the fee for citizenship at cost price, and will she make sure that full fee waivers are available to any child who cannot afford the fee?

As we approach the deadline for EU settled status, there will be a number of children in local authority care who will need to be registered. That brings into sharp relief how little we know about the immigration status of children in care of the state. Many children will be entitled to citizenship, but not aware of it. What steps is the Minister taking to work with local authorities to identify those children with insecure immigration status, and ensure they receive proper legal advice?

2.10 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): First, I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to the Minister and colleagues for my late arrival in the Chamber. I have learnt a lesson on not overestimating how long previous debates will take. My apologies to everybody.

The order is not controversial. I am grateful to the Joint Committee on Human Rights for all its work on the draft order proposed today. It recommended that the order be passed, and I fully agree. It seeks to put right discriminations that still exist in nationality law and that is something we all support. I will make a couple of brief points on that. The Joint Committee report, in chapter 4, points out that as it stands the order will not fix the apparent discriminations highlighted in the Committee's first report, and leaves the Home Office open to potential legal challenge. Specifically, it raises that issue in relation to children who were discriminated against solely because their parents were not married and adults who were discriminated against when they were children. The Home Office will have to look at that again.

The Committee flagged up, in chapter 6 of the report, that the very same discriminations are still being faced by British overseas territories citizens. If they face the same discriminations, why are they not being provided with the same remedies? It is time for the Home Office to look at that issue again, too.

The Joint Committee also raised two more general points. First, there is a serious question about whether it is even remotely appropriate to ever apply good character tests in many of these situations at all, especially in relation to children. Personally, I find the whole notion of testing good character in children troubling and pretty awful. Attempting to wash our hands of "problem kids" via nationality law is disturbing. It seems to me that the Home Office has lost its grasp of, and become confused by, the different types of nationality applications. I think few Members would argue that having such a test apply in naturalisation applications, for example, is perfectly reasonable. Nobody would quibble with that, but since changes were introduced in 2006 and 2009 successive Governments have presided over the application of a good character test way beyond its appropriate use. In particular, it has even been applied to kids over 10 who otherwise have an entitlement to British citizenship.

Finally, I agree wholeheartedly with what the shadow Minister said about fees. In 1981, when there was a radical reform of British nationality law, this place was extremely protective of the rights of kids who, although not born here, had an entitlement to become British citizens afterwards. They have been denied that entitlement because of exorbitant fees for applications. We need radical reform on that by the Home Office.

2.13 pm

Caroline Nokes: I am grateful for the considered debate today and the interest that Opposition Members have shown in this remedial order.

As I said earlier, the scope of the remedial order is to make changes to nationality legislation and it is therefore narrow. It is limited to addressing the specific incompatibilities that have been identified by the courts.

[Caroline Nokes]

The Government will monitor any remaining potentially unlawful discriminatory aspects of nationality legislation, a point picked up on by the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan), and will consult as appropriate if it becomes apparent that further changes are necessary.

The Government are committed to ensuring that those individuals affected by the order do not face further discrimination. In its first report on the remedial order, the Joint Committee on Human Rights recommended that those who had citizenship applications previously refused, because of the discriminatory provisions in the British Nationality Act 1981, which this order seeks to remedy, should not have to pay the application fee for a repeat application. I am pleased to say that I have written to the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), the Chair of the Committee, confirming that I plan to amend the fees regulation at the next opportunity to waive the application fee for this particular cohort.

Turning to the points raised by the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald), he commented on children having to meet the good character test. This is a requirement for British citizenship as set out in the 1981 Act. It applies to those seeking to register as British who are aged 10 years and over at the time of application. That is because 10 is the age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales. Children as young as 10 can and do commit very serious acts of criminality, sad though that is and undoubtedly tragic for their victims. It cannot be right that such offences are disregarded when assessing a child's suitability for citizenship.

Stuart C. McDonald: I do not agree with the Minister on that point of principle, but even putting that to one side 50% of kids over 10 who are denied citizenship on

those grounds have had that done on the basis of nothing more than a police caution, as I understand it. Surely it cannot be right to deny someone the right to citizenship on such a flimsy basis.

Caroline Nokes: I was just moving on to that particular point. The Government do not believe that the good character requirement for children is at odds with it the statutory obligation in section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009, but I want to make it very clear that having a criminal conviction does not necessarily mean an application for citizenship is automatically refused, particularly in the case of minor offences attracting an out-of-court disposal, for example, as the hon. Gentleman mentioned, a youth caution. Each case is considered on its individual merits and guidance for caseworkers makes it clear where discretion can be exercised.

On British overseas territories, we are very proud of our heritage in Britain and this pride extends to many people around the world who identify as British. The JCHR expressed concerns that the discriminatory provisions that this remedial order seeks to remedy will still apply to British overseas territories citizens. Regrettably, this is true. When changes to nationality legislation were made, they were introduced at a very late stage in the parliamentary process and there was no time to consult fully with the territories about introducing similar provisions for British overseas territories citizens' status. It would not have been right to introduce legislation that would affect the territories, and potentially the status of those living there, without consultation. We recognise the difficulties that the British Nationality Act still presents for some British overseas territories citizens, who may wish to pass on their citizenship to their children and are considering how best to address those concerns, taking into account the opportunities for doing so. I commend the order to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Body Image and Mental Health

2.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): I beg to move,

That this House has considered body image and mental health.

I am delighted to open this debate on this very important matter about which a number of parliamentary colleagues are showing increasing concern. How we think and feel about our bodies can affect any one of us at any point in our lives. I am sure I am not alone in not liking my body shape and in wanting to lose more weight. Frankly, we know there is no magic route to that. We just need to eat less and drink more—[*Laughter.*] I should say: eat less, drink less and exercise more. Too often, however, people are seduced into seeking body shapes that are less than attainable. While for most of us that is an aspiration, for some people it becomes uncomfortable and an obsession that does them no good.

This is a particular issue today, because the pressure on people, especially young people, to achieve an idealised image is everywhere. Often, the images that people are being subjected to are unattainable because those images have been airbrushed and touched up. Those shapes are really not what any normal person could begin to achieve.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): The Minister is quite right. Some of the television reality shows today put pressure on young people, particularly young girls, to imitate shapes, weight and size, and all that goes with that. This is a timely debate and we need to have a good look at this issue. At the end of the day, young people get very disappointed and that can have an effect on their mental health. That is the important point we should not lose track of.

Jackie Doyle-Price: The hon. Gentleman raises an issue close to my heart. When we talk about so-called reality TV programmes, it is as if the people participating in them are normal people. The reality, however, is that they are not normal people. They are semi-professional celebrities who have often undergone enhancements to become attractive to be chosen to go on these television programmes. The whole thing starts to develop insidiously in a culture, making people think that they should aspire to look like that and that it is normal. Everyone is chasing a lifestyle that is frankly not attainable.

We have all enjoyed watching such programmes. I often say that we have become a nation of voyeurs, but perhaps we all need to remind society that there is no quick route to fame, fortune and success—that comes as a result of hard work—and that spending a bit of money on a nip and tuck and a lip filler will not be the route to earning a lot of money. We all need to start to address that, because we have allowed magazines and our media to develop this image. We have been complicit in it happening, because we have enjoyed that entertainment, but we are reaching a position where our society is extremely unhealthy.

The problem has been made particularly acute by the growth of social and digital media, which have increased exposure to unrealistic and unattainable images of beauty. As we all know, when we are browsing on our iPad we

can look at one thing and straight away be bombarded with sites that squirrel us down a route where we are exposed to more and more such content. People who are looking at unrealistic body images will see ever more images that they aspire to. There is another insidious thing: a friend of mine was speaking to me only last night and said that she was looking at cosmetic procedures when, all of a sudden, an advert popped on to her screen encouraging her to spend a few thousand pounds so that she could learn to administer lip fillers herself. She thought how horrendous it is that our social media does that.

Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab): Is the Minister aware of the Be Real campaign's latest report, "The Curate Escape", which looks at young people and their images on social media? Two thirds of young people edit pictures of themselves before they put them on social media, and the report makes a lot of really good recommendations. The Be Real campaign has been fantastic in recent years, focusing on health and wellbeing, rather than weight and people watching their weight. If she is not aware of the report, would she like a copy?

Jackie Doyle-Price: I thank the hon. Lady for raising that point—I have heard of that campaign. It is disturbing that so many people alter their images. None of us is perfect—God help us if we all were—but for people to think that they need to alter their appearance because they are unhappy with it, and for that to become normalised, is quite a sinister development in society. At the risk of being trite, perhaps we should be telling everyone to learn to love themselves.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Is the Minister aware of the Good Childhood report, which states that girls who share pictures or videos of themselves are less happy with their appearance than those who do not? Is she aware that the Children's Society is campaigning for a greater understanding of what makes children unhappy, and does she agree that we need to focus on that?

Jackie Doyle-Price: Yes. The Children's Society is doing some excellent work in this space and it always has a lot of expertise to share. We have to address this issue collectively as a society, because if we do not start equipping children with the tools to look after themselves and the right attitudes, that damage is set up for life. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise that point and I encourage the Children's Society to engage with us more on what we can do to support it.

The Government recognise that poor body image is a common problem. Approximately 70% of adolescent girls and 45% of adolescent boys want to change their body weight or shape. We also recognise the impact that idealised body image can have on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people particularly, on ethnic minorities, and on those with disabilities or serious illnesses.

The Mental Health Foundation recently published a very informative report on body image. Some of its findings are shocking: 20% of adults feel shame, 19% feel disgusted, and 37% of teenagers feel shame in relation to their body image. This should make us all stop and think. When it comes to teenagers, we all recognise that going through adolescence is a difficult time, when we

[Jackie Doyle-Price]

are at our most vulnerable, including to the outside influences that tell us that our body shape is not as it should be and that we are not as perfect as we could be. I welcome the recommendations made in the foundation's report, which is aimed at public and commercial organisations and gives us things that we can do to help ourselves.

Having a negative body image affects the way that we feel about ourselves and it can affect people's aspirations and confidence. In the most extreme cases, it can lead to eating disorders, depression and even feeling suicidal. I know that the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) is as concerned as I am about this issue, and I commend the work that she has been doing specifically on eating disorders. The increases that we are seeing in suicide and self-harm among young people are incredibly worrying. Much of this is being driven by young women and girls, but we must not forget the boys either. It is important that we work to raise awareness of the problems of body image that many people face and hopefully prevent them from developing issues in future.

Clearly, social and digital media companies are key players in this debate, because they contribute to the volume of material that encourages people to think negatively about themselves. Young people are put under such pressure to have the perfect image, the perfect body, the perfect relationship and the perfect clothes—the perfect everything—and that places unrealistic expectations on them. As hon. Members will know, we are in close dialogue with social media companies to encourage them to act more responsibly over the content on their platforms. We have held three summits so far; the most recent was only last week. We have said that, ultimately, we will consider legislation if they do not clean up their act. That said, Governments can always be three steps behind the development of technology, so I would much rather that we worked collaboratively and co-operatively to address this content.

So far, I have been encouraged that the companies have committed to increasing their efforts to protect users from harmful suicide and self-harm content online by coming together to establish and fund a strategic partnership with the Samaritans. That work is commencing. They will look not only at self-harm and suicide, but at pro-eating disorder content. We will continue our meetings with social media companies.

I was particularly concerned to see that a number of sites and materials are available that contain harmful content such as pro-anorexia messages. It is completely unacceptable that this sort of content is easily accessible to vulnerable young people. We are having talks with Amazon about removing books from its retail sites, but we need to ensure that social media companies are vigilant about taking down content published on their sites as well.

In the face of these modern challenges, central to tackling the problems in future is empowering our young people to improve their emotional resilience and wellbeing, so that they feel confident in themselves and in seeking support if they feel they need it. We are investing in massive improvements in mental health provision in schools. We have a new workforce that we are rolling out. We also need to make sure that children can access mental health support and we are investing

in more provision in child and adolescent mental health services. As part of making health education compulsory in schools from September next year, it will be absolutely essential that we teach children how to protect their mental wellbeing. That will cover unrealistic expectations about body image. I hope that that will allow young people to recognise what is normal—what is normal, and is there any such thing as normal?—and what is an issue for them and others, as well as to know how to seek the right support when issues arise and to know that it is accessible to them.

Another issue I would like to talk about is gender identity, which has been the subject of quite a number of negative reports in our newspapers in recent months and, indeed, on Radio 4 this week. This is about people's sense of self and physical appearance and about them wanting to change their gender identity. We have been aware of the issue of gender dysphoria, but there has been quite a lot of comment, and the House and the public need reassurance that the treatments available on the NHS, particularly for children, are appropriate.

To put the issue in context, gender dysphoria is where a person experiences discomfort or distress because there is a mismatch between their biological sex and their gender identity. That is incredibly difficult for anyone to deal with, but young people, in particular, will find it difficult. Many Members will have had representations from constituents about access to services to cope with gender dysphoria—I know that because I have signed many letters on the issue. It is essential that someone suffering with gender dysphoria receives the right support—support that really considers their holistic needs—because gender dysphoria often exists alongside other morbidities, and we must make sure we treat the whole person. Where appropriate, people should receive specialist treatment.

The Gender Identity Development Service for children and young people is provided by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. There has been lots of concern in the press about that trust, but having discussed the service with NHS England and visited it, I would like to try to give Members some reassurance and to address some of the points that have been made about the service.

The first thing I think the service would like to get across is that gender should be seen as a spectrum. The whole treatment pathway is based on allowing children to explore their feelings in a safe environment. Not all children referred to the service will go on to transition. That is an important point to recognise, because if children have the time and space to work through their feelings, that will perhaps lead to a different treatment pathway.

I know there has been lots of concern that too many children are being referred to the service, but I would like to reassure the House that the service takes children through treatment in a very exploratory way around gender, and more than half of the children referred do not go on to transition. The service will treat each case as individual and complex and will address some of the co-morbidities that come along with gender dysphoria—lots of concern has been raised about the fact that some of these children are also on the autism spectrum.

It is important to recognise that, compared with services internationally, the service is very much at the conservative end of provision, which has led to it being

criticised as far too conservative by some aspects of the lobby in favour of more services. However, where we are dealing with children who have not reached the age of majority, and where some of the treatments they may go through may be irreversible, the whole issue of consent is clearly important.

It is important to note that this aspect of service has grown quickly, and it has done so in an absence of public scrutiny. I can understand why there will be some public concern about it, so I would like to reassure the House that I am working with NHS England to do a proper review of the research around this service and the ethics of it to establish a proper framework for consent, recognising that we are looking at treatments that may have long-term consequences.

I can assure the House that the service works hard to ensure that consent is robust and that young people who might receive hormone therapy receive adequate information about the nature and consequences of that treatment. Such consent is not a one-off decision; it requires ongoing dialogue with the service. It will also require some assessment of the capacity and competence of the individuals consenting.

It is important to assure the House that this issue is very much under review. My starting point is that nothing should be undertaken in this space that would be irreversible for anyone under the age of 18. With that in mind, NHS England is putting in place a new policy and a new service specification for children's services, and will thoroughly consider the issues that have come up in the press recently. Clearly, those issues will be a matter for debate, and many Members will have an interest in them. It is important for public confidence, as well as to enable access to services, that we have a proper, ethical debate around consent and the clinical evidence behind prescribing long-term hormone treatments.

Finally, I want to say a little about cosmetic procedures and regulation. I am pleased to see the right hon. Member for North Durham in his place—he is my conscience on these issues. It is fair to say that they are becoming increasingly common, and as they do so, they are becoming increasingly risky. Increasingly, it is becoming normalised for young women, in particular, but not just young women, to seek cosmetic procedures to alter their appearance.

I was pleased to launch an awareness campaign around cosmetic procedures earlier this year, which I have driven forward to make sure not only that we encourage people to properly consider the risks of any procedure they might undertake, but that they do not just wander down to the hairdressers and book a Botox appointment or a filler but really take steps to make sure they are going to a reputable provider. It is important that people fully understand the risks and where to look for a safe procedure. We have made sure that there is good material on the NHS website, and we are encouraging people to access that information when they are considering having any kind of procedure.

However, there is a really important message that we must give, which is that anyone considering having anything done to their appearance should not seek an operation overseas. There are some very disreputable operators advertising—for example, there are holidays in Turkey with a procedure. That is hugely dangerous,

and I am afraid that the NHS is picking up the costs of those procedures. That is obviously something we need to address properly.

We will look at stronger regulation of the sector. Again, I would say that no one under the age of 18 should seek a cosmetic procedure. We have come to think that having some kind of lip filler is just like going to have a haircut, but when it goes wrong the results are much worse than having to let our hair grow back. Therefore, no one under the age of 18 should be seeking such procedures, and we need to do a lot more to make people realise exactly what the risks are.

Bambos Charalambous: Obviously, the harm is done with young people early on, and they are very impressionable—we have mentioned reality TV, and the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee is looking at its impact. Does the Minister not think that we should try to teach positive body image at school and provide support at school for people who have concerns about their body image? That would be a wise investment of Government funds and would actually help young people to address their concerns and anxieties at every stage.

Jackie Doyle-Price: I agree with that. Through the new personal education that will be rolled out next year, we will have the ability to address that issue. I would just say that we need to be careful about this and to give some scrutiny to what the content of that might be. We have to really make sure that people respect the fact that we are all different and we all come in odd shapes and sizes, but everyone is beautiful. That is a really important message to convey. It will be incredibly challenging to get that content right, and we do need to bring some scrutiny to that.

Body image is clearly a strong contributory factor in many cases of mental ill health. I am pleased that we are starting to tackle some of these issues, but there is a long way to go. We have reached a stage at which the herd has gone so far down the road that the idealised view that everyone is a size zero model, whose perfectly coiffed, long, naturally blonde or brunette hair has no shades of grey and no curls, has taken hold. It will take a long time to turn that juggernaut around, but in the interests of a healthy society we all need to get a grip.

2.40 pm

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Let me start by welcoming the Minister to the Front Bench. I am glad that she is still in her post, and I sincerely hope that this is not her last appearance at the Dispatch Box in her current role. She has been collegial, engaging and very co-operative, and I thank her for her kind words about eating disorders. I agree with most of what she has said this afternoon.

“Body image” is the term that is used to describe the way we think and feel about our bodies, which can have an impact on us throughout our lives and cause poor mental health and a lack of wellbeing. While the association between body image concerns and poor mental health is definitely not new—we have been discussing it for decades, and I am sure that we will still be discussing it for decades to come—I think it is fair to say that the problem is worse now than it was just 10 years ago. There is a far greater exposure to the media and to

[Paula Sherriff]

social media, and there is also our need to have everything, right here and right now, in the impatient and judgmental world in which we live. As the Minister said a few moments ago, we still have a long way to go in tackling this issue. Would it not be great if we recognised that, literally, one size does not fit all?

Body image concerns are extremely common, and vary in severity. Not all body image issues will affect mental health. However, it is important to be aware of the risk factor, especially among young people, as the risk of developing an eating disorder is closely associated with poor body image. The Mental Health Foundation has undertaken a great deal of research in this area, and recently conducted a survey of 4,505 UK adults aged 18 and above and 1,118 UK teenagers aged between 13 and 19. The results showed that one in five adults felt shame about their body image, 34% felt down or low, and 19% said that they had felt disgusted because of their body image in the last year, with 13% saying, very worryingly, that they had experienced suicidal thoughts and feelings. The survey of teenagers revealed that 37% felt upset and 31% felt ashamed in relation to their body image.

Perhaps more worrying are the results from Be Real's Somebody Like Me campaign. The researchers spoke to more than 2,000 secondary school pupils aged 11 to 16 from across the UK, and found that 52% regularly worried about how they looked, 30% isolated themselves because of body image anxiety, and 36% said that they would do "whatever it takes" to look good, including considering cosmetic surgery. Similarly, 10% of boys surveyed by the Mental Health Foundation said that they would consider taking steroids to achieve their goals.

As the Minister said earlier, we must recognise that body image challenges affect boys as well as girls, and men as well as women. Unfortunately, my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) is not present, but he has previously spoken powerfully about the body image challenges that he faced as a younger man, and I think that he is a great ambassador for this issue.

It is a shame that more Members on both sides of the House are not present for such an important debate. I understand the significance of today and the fact that other things are obviously going on, but for the benefit of those who are watching in the Public Gallery and others who may be watching at home, I want to reiterate my support, and that of the Minister and other Members in relation to this issue.

The shocking statistics that I have cited highlight the need for more support and help. Perhaps most worrying is the finding that a desire for the option of cosmetic surgery appears to be more and more widespread. I welcome what the Minister said about the need for stronger regulation, because cosmetic surgery has almost become normalised. Many of my friends have lip fillers and Botox treatments. I have not succumbed to either as yet, but people are now moving away from breast augmentation and talking of "bum lifts" and "Brazilian bums".

A young and beautiful lady from a constituency not a million miles from mine, in Leeds, went to Turkey—last year, I believe—to undergo one of those procedures, which involves the injection of fat into the bum. I am

not sure whether that is parliamentary language, Madam Deputy Speaker. She was a mum of three beautiful boys, and she never came home. She died during the procedure. I understand that inquiries may well be pending in that case, but it is very worrying that people are going overseas to seek cheaper treatments when there may be issues relating to, for instance, regulation.

Given mainstream television programmes such as "Love Island", which shows girls as young as 21 who have already undergone plastic and cosmetic surgery, it is hardly surprising that those who watch such programmes aspire to the same treatments. The same applies to tanning salons. In those reality programmes, everyone is bronzed and slim, and the people watching think, "I want to go to one of those." It is very worrying, partly because some of the less scrupulous tanning salons do not necessarily follow the regulations that are so important to avoiding skin cancer.

It has been widely accepted in many different body image studies that those who are most at risk of developing mental health problems associated with poor body image are women and members of the LGBT community, but, as has already been pointed out today, that does not mean that we should dismiss the incidence of such problems among other groups, although they are not as prevalent. There is no group of people who have not been identified as having certain risk factors or anxieties associated with how they view their body image.

Airbrushed photos have appeared for decades in the media, from the early glossy magazines such as "Just 17" in the 1980s to the internet today. Throughout the internet, images are portrayed that invade people's lives daily. Indeed, when undertaking research on this subject, I found that the search results on the internet were not giving information about the history of airbrushing, but were offering tips and trying to sell software enabling people to airbrush their own photographs. It should come as no surprise that the increased number of airbrushed images across the internet that are accessible to millions of young people has played a part in the huge increase in the number of people suffering from body-image anxieties in recent years.

During the Minister's speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) and I were looking at an internet picture of Serena Williams, the famous and phenomenal tennis player. She recently appeared on the front page of "Harper's Bazaar", and had specified that she did not want the images to be airbrushed. I should add that those images were themselves phenomenal. It was a great lesson, and I hope that other celebrities will consider doing the same. Some have had their pictures taken make-up free, which is also a great thing to do.

We have also seen an increase in the number of television programmes that heavily promote the idea of a "perfect body type". As I said earlier, "Love Island" is probably the most topical and talked-about programme of the moment. It focuses primarily on young men and women, all of whom can only be described as nothing less than beautiful. Even the show's host allegedly admitted in 2017 that it portrayed unrealistic body image standards, and, at the start of the current season, Twitter was alight with comments from viewers about how inadequate the contestants were making them feel. I understand that a "plus size" person has featured in the programme this year. I have to say that I have never watched it—my

research evidence comes from the internet, and from friends and, dare I say, staff members who do watch it—but I understand that the producers' concept of "plus size" may not be the same as ours.

I love to read glossy magazines—many of us do when we get the time—and sometimes looking at the models I do think, as somebody who would love to lose a bit of weight, "Crikey, could they even put in someone who is average-sized?" The average UK female dress size is 16, and some of these models, frankly, look unhealthy.

I want to share a story. I went to a big department store in London just before Christmas last year, and I asked for a dress that was out on the rail in a concession in the store. The size I wanted was not available and the lady working there said to me, "Oh, I'll have a look in the back for you, as that doesn't mean we haven't got it; we just only display sizes eight, 10 and 12." There is so much that we can do working with the corporate world as well to change these attitudes, and it is very important. We cannot overestimate the impact of little things like not displaying bigger sizes because the designers do not want that look.

"Love Island" is far from the only culprit in the world of television. In recent years there have been many programmes, including "The Only Way is Essex", "Geordie Shore" and "Made in Chelsea", that seem to focus on what for many is an unattainable body type. It is almost an oxymoron to call them reality shows when in actual fact they do not portray the reality of the way the average person looks.

The TV programme "Loose Women" has to be applauded for its body confidence campaign last year. It is easy to think that people in later life do not suffer from body image anxieties, but a Mental Health Foundation study found the contrary: approximately 20% of adults aged 55 or over admitted to feeling anxious or depressed specifically because of their body image. Campaigns such as this are incredibly important in helping to show people that their anxieties are shared by many. Indeed, a friend of mine will often say that everyone is too busy worrying about how they look themselves to ever notice how someone else looks, and I do wonder how much truth there is in that.

Sadly, however, that does not appear to be true of how people in the public eye are judged. Body-shaming and trolling of celebrities are prevalent in the media and are on the increase. When Gemma Collins took to our screens last year as a contestant in "Dancing on Ice" she received the most appalling treatment from not only the public but also, disappointingly, one of the judges, most of it based solely on how she looked.

Sadly, it almost appears to be acceptable in today's times for those we unaffectionately term "keyboard warriors" to hound and troll people who are well known. As politicians, we all, sadly, suffer abuse on social media too, and I am certainly not immune from that. Reference is often made to the fact that I am overweight, by saying, for instance, "You fat cow." That is absolutely unacceptable, as it also would be if the trolls were referring to somebody as too thin. It saddens me greatly to see that.

All too often the social media companies are turning a blind eye and refusing to take action over comments that are ruining lives. I am sure we will all at some point have received a message after reporting a post on social

media saying, "It does not contravene our rules and regulations." Indeed, I reported something to Facebook a couple of weeks ago and the reply was, "It does not contravene our community standards," which raises the question of what on earth its community standards are. The term "standards" here is an oxymoron, perhaps. I have often wondered how far someone would have to go before these companies took any action. A Mental Health Foundation study found that 22% of adults and 40% of teenagers said that images on social media cause them to worry about their body image. Personally, I would like to see much more regulation around social media and much more robust complaint mechanisms that make reporting easier, with more complaints upheld and firm action taken.

It is no coincidence that an increase in social media use is accompanied by an increase in body image issues, which in turn is accompanied by low self-esteem and poor mental health. While I appreciate that social media also has many positive aspects, we must ensure that these are not outweighed by the negatives. As parliamentarians, we all have a duty to do whatever we can to hold social media companies, TV producers, advertisers, magazines and individuals to account where they are seen to be promoting negative or unachievable body images. We also have a duty to ensure that the correct help is available so that everyone, specifically our young people, are able to use vital services and support to help combat the growing link between body image and poor mental health.

2.54 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is a privilege to speak in this debate. Indeed, it is always a privilege to speak in debates about mental health, and, having worked as a psychologist prior to coming into Parliament, I always think my timing has been good, because 10 or 15 years ago we would not have been speaking about mental health, and the doors to any conversation about it would have been firmly closed.

I am always grateful that these issues are prioritised by Government. The Minister has been doing a fantastic job in this regard, working cross-party, and she has all our support. I thank her for the work that she has done and I too hope she continues in her position; if I could send in a recommendation or something, I would be very happy to do so.

Andrew Griffiths (Burton) (Con): I am not sure a recommendation from the Opposition Benches will help.

Dr Cameron: Indeed.

Body image is a very important issue, and it is an interesting one as well, because it is coming more to the fore through social media and through society in current times, when there is this striving for perfection. As we heard, in the past that might have been about looking through glossy magazines, but now it is all about how glamorous we can look on Facebook or Twitter, how many friends we have, and how many people want to befriend us because of the way we look—because they think that equates with our being some kind of fantastic person, when of course it often does not. And sometimes the most glamorous of people can also be the most shallow, I have to say.

[Dr Cameron]

Society is encouraging stereotypes that place great stresses on our young people today, and that has an adverse impact on their mental health. Social media companies must look at this in much more detail in terms of regulation, as we have heard. I have been very pleased to contribute to the work done through the Department, which is looking at issues of social media abuse and the impact of social media on young people's development and mental health and how they relate to the world. It is almost as if we have become an artificial world rather than engaging with each other in our day-to-day lives just as we are, with all our diverse shapes and sizes being the norm.

Andrew Griffiths: The hon. Lady is raising some very important points, and I think we all recognise that young people are under more stress and pressure than ever before, particularly through social media. Does she agree that schools have a key role to play in trying to provide support for young people? I am sure that, like me, she welcomes the new Trailblazer programme that the Government have offered, but does she agree that if we can ensure that young people feel able to ask for support and help in the classroom—in the school environment—we will have a better opportunity to tackle these issues at the very start and help those young people before the problem gets worse?

Dr Cameron: Yes, those points are well made. We must do much more in the classroom to help young people grapple with social media issues and pressures, and to develop positive mental health and coping strategies so they can do that. We also have to help parents, like me and others here today, to understand social media; often children are far ahead of us and it can be very difficult for us to regulate what is happening online and make sure it is safe and secure.

I also commend the work of the all-party group on mentoring and the Diana Award. I recently went to a number of their events, one up in Scotland at Holyrood and one at Westminster just a few weeks ago. They are doing fantastic work to help young people who are being bullied in school and to provide peer mentors, because often, as we know, young people listen to other young people rather than parents or teachers. The work they are doing is going a long way in giving young people skills to understand how to challenge bullying, and to promote good mental health and to understand that it is very important that we support each other in society, rather than doing each other down. I commend them for their work.

I am chair of the all-party parliamentary group for textiles and fashion, which is undertaking an inquiry into inclusion in the industry. We have started our inquiry sessions, which have been extremely interesting. We have heard that although the industry is trying to become more diverse and to promote more diversity among its models and in the work that it prints, there are still many challenges and barriers for young disabled people and plus-size people in becoming models or getting into the industry at any level. We hope that the inquiry will highlight and raise awareness of the issues and ensure that the industry lives up to our expectations that it should be inclusive and diverse, just as the United Kingdom is.

The all-party parliamentary group on psychology recently conducted a research study that showed that although the number of abusive posts to politicians was almost equal across the genders, the content was quite different. Whereas male politicians were criticised for their position on a policy, female politicians were much more often criticised for the way they looked, held to account for not wearing the right things in Parliament—according to whoever thought they were the fashion guru—or trying to do them down based on their personality or personal appearance. That shows the stereotypes that must be overcome and the challenges in feeling confident in politics. We must support everyone to make sure we have a diverse Parliament moving forward.

When I highlighted this debate online today, my constituents asked me not to forget to mention how men are affected in terms of body image. That is such a good point. We often speak about the impact on women, and I have been doing that in much of my speech. They said, “Please don’t fail to mention how men are impacted because this is increasingly an issue in society, and the same stereotypes apply: having to be really buff, no matter what your day entails or if you are running about trying to juggle lots of different things. Always having time to go to the gym and to look fabulous and have all the best clothes etc.—these things also put pressure on young men.” I attended a very sad but poignant tribute at the weekend to my constituent Ryan Coleman, who sadly took his own life. We really must not underestimate the pressures on young men’s mental health nowadays in society. It is incumbent on Governments across the United Kingdom to ensure that young men as well as young women feel able to come forward, be referred and take up services; there is often much more stigma for young men in accessing services and acknowledging some of these issues.

We have spoken about cosmetic procedures. I do not have too much detail to speak about on that, but I am aware that there is not much regulation of such procedures and it is important that we get on top of that. As the Minister and the shadow Minister mentioned, when things go wrong, it is not just like having to go back to the hairdressers and getting a different colour put on. Cosmetic procedures can have a permanent impact on people, or affect them for a very long time, so regulation in this market is important. Other markets may be diminishing, but this market is growing exponentially so we definitely need to have regulation in place.

When I worked with people who have eating disorders, we knew from the research that body image was a core part of the issue that people struggled with. It is not just about weight; it is about cognition. It is about how people think about themselves. I worked with young people who were growing thinner by the day and had anorexia nervosa but felt that they were fat. When they looked at themselves in the mirror, they saw themselves as overweight and strove to lose more and more weight. When an eating disorder develops over time, we know that cognition becomes affected. That is why it is very important that people can be referred to local services. I know how difficult that can be.

When I was doing some work in mental health primary care, the problems in referring someone to tertiary care and eating disorder services were almost insurmountable. People had to go through the community mental health

team. Weight comes into it again. They might not be quite at the threshold, but everyone in the family and the clinicians knows that the person is developing an eating disorder. We must have services that accept people, and a clear clinical pathway. Otherwise, by the time people arrive at the service that they need, their condition has deteriorated so much that they may need to be admitted to hospital.

We also need to ensure that we can treat people with eating disorders as close to home as possible. They often need cognitive behaviour therapy or family therapy, and families really need to be involved in that care. If the care is taking place 20 or 30 miles away from where the person lives, it is so difficult for families who are grappling with all the other demands on their time to be as involved as they really want to be.

Ahead of Mental Health Awareness Week this year, the Scottish Government announced a new advisory group on body image and young people's mental health. It is important to have that group up and working; to be thinking about the issues that test young people today. We need to be ahead of the curve. The Scottish Government also recently announced a package of funds for social media advice for young people. We are very aware of the impact of social media. When we are looking through magazines, we can put them down and go off and do something else, but social media is constant. I see this with young people, including my own children: as soon as their phone rings—ding ding—they have to look. Social media is almost like an addiction. I am sure that the companies love that because people are becoming so reliant on it. We need to make sure that our young people have varied lifestyles; that they get out and about in the fresh air, as my mum used to say. I am repeating my mother now. I hope she is listening. I never thought that I would get to that stage, but there you are, I am. It is important for health.

I am extremely pleased to have spoken in this debate. I am pleased that it has been given time in the main Chamber, where it should be, that we are prioritising mental health and that we are discussing the important issue of body image.

3.7 pm

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I begin by agreeing totally with the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron): the debate is important. Last week we had a debate on mental health; we have two this week, one here today and one in Westminster Hall on Thursday afternoon on the Mental Health Act 1983. That is good because the more we talk about mental health issues, the more we normalise them. The hon. Lady is right. I have been a Member of the House for more than 18 years, and it has changed. The more we talk, the better. She makes a very good point.

Ministers are going into the twilight zone at the moment; seeing whether they are going to come out of the reshuffle. I add my thanks to the Minister to those of my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff). The Minister has been a passionate advocate for mental health and she deeply cares about it. We know when a Minister gets it, and she does. I hope that she survives whatever happens over the next few days. The other thing that is unusual and does not get a great

deal of publicity is the fact that she is prepared to work across party and across the House, and to listen to alternative viewpoints. I wish to put that on the record.

I pay tribute to the Mental Health Foundation for its excellent report. I know that the Minister was at the launch. I think it was the first time that body image and mental health had been brought together. The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow talked about eating disorders, and the stark facts that come out of the report should concern us all.

It is important to say that it is not just young people who are affected. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury said, 20% of the adult population in the UK feel ashamed of their body image and 34% feel down about it. In some cases, that will not lead to mental health problems, but in a lot of them it will. If people have anxiety about their body image, it leads to related conditions.

According to the report, 34% of young people feel upset about their body image and 31% feel ashamed of it. We cannot insulate young people from society—we should not even attempt to do so. Living in society can be difficult and challenging at times, and young people face the added pressure of social media.

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for making such a positive speech in this important debate. Does he believe that social media and advertising have a significant impact on young people, and does he agree that the Government need to take more vigorous steps to ensure that young people are protected from images that can lead them to form negative views of their own body?

Mr Kevan Jones: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. I will go on to speak about the role of advertising because, as she will know, it has changed. When we were growing up, adverts were in magazines or on television. Now, they are accessible to young people 24 hours a day, seven days a week on smartphones and tablets. That has changed the pressure on young people, as is highlighted in the Mental Health Foundation's excellent report.

Before I come on to advertising, I will touch on the issue of cosmetic surgery, which the Minister raised. Members may want to know why I am interested in the subject. It is down to a force of nature, my constituent Dawn Knight, whom the Minister has met. Unfortunately, several years ago a cosmetic procedure on her eyes led to the horrific situation that she can no longer close her eyelids. As the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow said, such procedures are not easily reversible. It is not like someone changing their hair colour and not liking it. The procedure has had a devastating effect on Dawn's life. I pay credit to her, because she has been determined to campaign on this issue. I know that she has met the Minister on a number of occasions to highlight the dangers of cosmetic surgery.

The Minister referred to regulation. I have been calling for regulation in this area for five years. I do not think there is a lack of political will, and certainly not from this Minister, but I am told that the Department of Health and Social Care is so scarred by the Health and Social Care Act 2012 that it does not want to bring

[Mr Kevan Jones]

forward any more health-related legislation. I say to Ministers that they must. This is the wild west because there is no regulation.

The Minister rightly warned people not to go abroad for such procedures, because standards are not high. Sadly, I have to say that they are not very high in this country either. Dawn's case and the cases of numerous women that Dawn has documented over the years show that surgery that takes place in this country is sold like a commodity. It is not sold as something that could threaten or change people's lives; it is sold like any other product. I am sorry, but it is not like any other product. Some of these procedures are very dangerous and can result in death.

The problem is the way the industry is structured. There are groups that give the impression that they employ surgeons and that they are hospitals. One that I have spoken about on behalf of Dawn and other victims—that is what I call them—is the Hospital Group. One would think that it is a hospital that employs surgeons and nurses, but it is not. It is a sort of marketing facility company that has a hospital and flies in surgeons from Europe, sometimes on a daily basis. They fly in, operate and fly out again. The aftercare treatment is non-existent in some cases. As Dawn's case shows, when people try to sue the individual, they find that their indemnity insurance does not cover the resulting legal case.

What we need is a properly regulated system. The fly-in, fly-out surgeons need to be banned. I am sorry, but it is not acceptable. People say, "We have the General Medical Council," but that is another of my hobby-horses. It is an organisation that is ripe for reform. The Government have promised reform of how the GMC operates, but they have not brought legislation forward. We need legislation to reform it because, as I will say in respect of another organisation in a minute, I am never a great fan of self-regulation. I was one of those who campaigned to take regulation away from the Law Society. Self-regulation has clearly failed. Nearly five years on from her complaint against the doctor, Dawn Knight is still fighting. It is not a user-friendly process for anyone to get redress for their complaint and we need to address that as a matter of urgency.

Cosmetic surgery is advertised and sold like any other commodity. There used to be two for one offers on Facebook and elsewhere—buy one procedure and get another procedure free. There were time-limited offers. Those should all be banned; they should not be allowed at all, because some of those procedures are very dangerous and people are often not aware of the dangers. I would argue that such a ban is part of the regulation we need. This is not a multimillion-pound industry, but a multibillion-pound industry and it is exploiting people's poor body image.

Before anyone had any type of cosmetic surgery, I would insist that they had a mental health assessment. Not only should the risks of the surgery be explained, but we should question whether people actually want the procedure.

Advertisers use "Love Island" to promote the idea of young women having procedures to enhance their appearance. That reinforces the image that somehow there is a perfect body to be had, but also the idea that these procedures are risk free. Having spoken to Dawn

and other victims of cosmetic surgery, I know that these are not risk-free procedures. In many cases, they lead to mental health problems afterwards during the recovery process.

As the Minister rightly said, the ones who pick up the tab are us—the taxpayers. Not only do we pick up the bill for the correction of the surgery when these organisations fold themselves into new companies and go into bankruptcy, meaning that people cannot get any redress; we also pay for the mental health services for those individuals afterwards.

I say again that we need more regulation of advertising. The Advertising Standards Authority is a toothless tiger. The Mental Health Foundation's report says that last year the ASA upheld a complaint against the producers of "Love Island" for promoting cosmetic surgery as part of the advertising package around the show. But anyone who has dealt with the ASA will know that it is slow and that it is not proactive. One of the report's recommendations is that it should be proactive in looking at adverts in advance to ensure that they are pre-screened before they go out. Again, though, that involves self-regulation, and it does not work.

I accept that we have a Government at the moment who do not like regulation and who want to strip it out. We are possibly going to get more of that nonsense over the coming months from the new Prime Minister, but I take the clear view that the state needs to protect people when they are being exploited. On cosmetic surgery, I take the clear view that people who want to have cosmetic surgery have the right to choose what to do with their money, but they should have a fully informed choice rather than being pressured by glossy advertising.

Online advertising and body image have already been raised in the debate. We have heard about the way in which adverts and other images are photoshopped and that this is somehow a positive thing that every young person should look forward to. The Minister also mentioned Botox and fillers. Those procedures are not cosmetic surgery in the sense of people going under the scalpel, but I would argue that they are equally in need of regulation because of the appalling effects when things go wrong. According to some adverts, people can simply go along in their lunch hour and have a Botox or filler treatment and then walk away in the afternoon, but those are medical procedures. They are advertised on social media and elsewhere, but Botox is a prescription drug, and it is interesting that people seem to have access to it even though they have no qualifications at all. No qualifications are needed for injecting someone. Madam Deputy Speaker, I could inject you with Botox this afternoon—not that you need it—without any qualifications or training whatsoever. The Minister was right to say that the problem with the way in which social media algorithms work is that anyone who enters the term "Botox" into a Facebook search, for example, will then be bombarded by adverts not only for Botox and fillers but for training courses on how to administer them. People can actually sign up for those courses in order to earn money.

The only regulation around this is Facebook. Dawn Knight has raised the matter directly with Facebook, but I understand that the only thing anyone can do is to say to Facebook that they no longer want this on their feed and take it down. I have written to Sir Nick Clegg, who has now gone off to live with the beautiful people

in California, to ask him why Facebook is carrying those kinds of adverts and bombarding vulnerable people with adverts for Botox and other fillers. Those adverts have no disclaimers about risk, and there is no quality control over the individuals offering the services. As the Minister said, they could be people in hairdressers and other such places. Well, I am sorry, I know Facebook is earning money from those adverts, but it should ban them. I know that the vulnerability of young people is a matter of concern for the Minister, for Dawn Knight and for me. They could be getting access to these procedures without knowing the risks, and they are being targeted by the social media companies. I am waiting to see what response I get from Sir Nick Clegg and the beautiful people in California. Hopefully, they will take some action against this.

This is a serious issue, not just in terms of the way people are personally affected; it costs the taxpayer money when cosmetic surgery goes wrong and when people need mental health support. We also need regulation. We are all focused on Brexit at the moment, and perhaps this is another area that will not be addressed over the next few months. I hope that that is not the case, and I know that the Minister will continue to argue for this reform, as she has already done in Government. I also know that my constituent, Dawn Knight, will not leave this issue alone. I will not do so either, because people are putting themselves at risk and it is the duty of the Government to take action in Parliament to protect individuals when they need it. There is a lot of pressure on young people when it comes to body image. All I would say to those young people today is this: think positively, and be kind to yourself.

3.25 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): It is a real honour to speak in this debate, and I regret that not many people are here to participate in it, but as we know, today is today. Even though I have only recently become a Member of Parliament, I echo the comments about what a pleasure it has been to work with the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), and I hope that she will continue in her post.

We have talked about many issues, and I want to pick up on what has been said about the cynicism with which advertising exploits vulnerable people. I will be speaking mostly on eating disorders, and many victims of eating disorders already have a massive problem, even before they go online. If they then order slimming pills online, for example, they will be bombarded by adverts persuading them to buy even more, which they then do. That is nothing short of exploitation, and we need to be alert to that.

We are all ultimately affected by our body image. People might say to me, "Well, you look all right", but we all think, "Well, this could be better and that could be better." We all want to please the people around us and ourselves when it comes to what we look like, and that is nothing new. It is only unusual or harmful when it so negatively affects us that it is the only thing that guides our lives. There is a certain intolerance surrounding having to have a particular look, and that is where the real danger lies. People feel they have to look a particular way rather than feeling that it would be fun to look this way or that way and to be playful with what they look

like. Instead, they are being shoehorned into a particular image, and anyone who does not fit that image can be badly affected and develop serious mental health problems, including eating disorders. I have been campaigning on the particular issue of eating disorders and mental health.

This debate is important for millions of people across the country, and I hope that we can set an example today by honestly exploring the issues. In fact, I think we already have. In a culture that is obsessed with image, we must talk more openly about the impact that body image scrutiny has on our mental health. It has been said before that we are focusing too much on how we look, rather than on who we actually are as people and what we can bring to the table, whether we are short or tall, male or female. That is one of the obsessions of our society: we are always thinking about what we look like, rather than about who we actually are.

For the past year, I have been campaigning for better treatment for eating disorders. Speaking openly about such conditions is more important than ever, because early identification and intervention are key. Mental health conditions thrive in the shadows and are protected by our ideas about what is and is not appropriate to talk about. Eating disorders have a reputation, and sufferers who do not fit cultural stereotypes are often afraid to speak out or, worse still, are refused help.

Mr Kevan Jones: The popular image of eating disorders is that they mainly affect young women, but does the hon. Lady agree that young men and people of all ages are increasingly likely to be affected?

Wera Hobhouse: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and that has been explored in several debates on eating disorders. We are somewhat hemmed in by stereotypes, and I wonder whether our age is particularly prone to that. We think eating disorders are a particular thing, so for a long time they have been a problem for young girls, but they affect people of all ages, and men increasingly. As we have explored today, body image and mental health are not gender-specific, but men suffer in silence more, because they are much less likely to talk about things, and subsequently they seek help a lot later, which can be dangerous. In fact, it is well known that the highest number of suicides is among men between the ages of 18 and 25, because men—this is a cultural stereotype that we can hopefully overcome—just do not talk about their body image, anxieties and mental health as much as women.

Research by the Mental Health Foundation published last March shows how common it is to have body image concerns, and we have heard many other statistics today. One in five UK adults have felt anxious or depressed about their bodies in the past year, and that anxiety can turn into long-term mental health problems, such as eating disorders. Across the country, eating disorders affect 1.25 million people, which is probably a conservative estimate. My work in this area supports that suggestion, and the sufferers I have met come from a range of different backgrounds, but they are united by their dissatisfaction with, and need to control, their body image. The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) has already talked powerfully about that.

[Wera Hobhouse]

Of course, eating disorders are far more complex than stress over body image. They are serious conditions that ruin, define and, all too often, end lives. However, the seeds of emergent eating disorders can often be spotted in stress or anxiety about body image. For the more than 1 million people who were identified as having an eating disorder, the outlook is not good. On average, it takes 85 weeks between someone realising they have an eating disorder and that individual receiving treatment. That lost time can be the difference between full recovery and living with a permanent disability or disorder. The Government targets introduced to limit child waiting times for eating disorder treatments were a positive step, but thousands of adults across the UK need the same measures. We need to consider the waiting times for adult sufferers of eating disorders, and I know that the Minister has already looked into that.

Understanding eating disorders better is key to improving treatment. Many sufferers still report being turned away and refused referral, because doctors have told them that they are not thin enough to be treated for an eating disorder—I know that the Minister has talked to Hope Virgo, who has been running the “Dump the Scales” campaign—but an eating disorder is not just about someone’s body mass index. By talking about eating disorders, especially in the context of body image, we can start to grasp how damaging that can be. We must educate everyone, from sufferers’ families to doctors, about the many different forms that such conditions can take and how best to treat them. Eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any mental health condition, and our mental health policy must reflect that. This is a crisis, but we are not treating it as such.

Early intervention is key. Schools, doctors and support workers must be equipped with the tools to identify when body image concerns are becoming dangerous. Furthermore, we must change the cultural conversation around body image, which can be done on many levels. As we have already heard today, social media companies have a responsibility to police the content on their websites, ensuring that anything that actively incites self-harm is taken down. Eating disorders are on the rise, and many adult sufferers are failing to receive the early intervention they so desperately need. We must do better for those suffering in silence and start having a conversation about body image, mental health and the awful reality of life with an eating disorder.

3.33 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I think we can all agree that this has been an eye-opening and interesting debate, and I start by thanking all the hon. Members present for making such excellent, personal and candid speeches. I also want to continue the theme of hoping that the Minister will still be in her position at the end of the day, because, as everyone has said, she really takes on board the cross-party consensus on many such issues, doing so with regard to the matter rather than the politics. On these things, there is always more we agree on than disagree on. Having reinforced her embarrassment, I will now move on.

Today we have heard about the impact that negative body image can have on people’s mental health, and I will particularly address the mental health of children

and young people. It is clear that more needs to be done to promote healthy body image, which should start as early as possible.

I pay tribute to the Mental Health Foundation for its comprehensive research and campaigning on this topic. It has found that even children under the age of six have reportedly felt dissatisfied with their bodies, so promoting a healthy body image from an early age is therefore a crucial step. It is obvious from what we have heard today that more needs to be done to ensure that happens.

It is heartbreaking to hear that more than half of children and young people have been bullied because of their appearance, and that one third of teenagers say they have felt shame because of their body image. The Children’s Society has found that children’s happiness with how they look has not improved since the mid-1990s, and young people themselves say that body image is their third biggest area of concern in life, after their education and employment prospects. Why, then, are we failing to address poor body image when it is such a crucial issue?

It is clear that educating young people about their bodies is an important step in improving their body confidence, so do the Government have plans to ensure that schools cover body image concerns as part of the introduction of compulsory relationships and sex education in 2020? More needs to be done to promote healthy body image and good mental health among our young people.

Classroom-based teaching should not only extend to teaching children about their bodies; more needs to be done to ensure that children understand how to use social media safely, understand how to improve their self-esteem and understand their emotions. Can the Minister outline how the Department for Education is tackling these issues in schools? I know the Minister is here representing the Department of Health and Social Care, but the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), the Children’s Minister, was here a moment ago, and they should be in close contact on this.

Children who are concerned about their body are less likely to take part in physical activity. We can all remember our school days, and I am sure we were all concerned about that. This is concerning when we know the health benefits of physical activity, so promoting positive body image can have benefits for physical health, as well as for mental health.

The mental health consequences of poor body image can be severe. Although having body image concerns is not a mental health problem in itself, having such concerns can be a risk factor for mental health problems. Mental health support should start where children need it, which is in school. Can the Minister tell the House what interim funding has been offered to schools to provide mental health support, given that the Green Paper’s proposed support package will not be rolled out nationally until 2023? Schools really cannot wait another four years for this support because, as we know, they are already struggling with their current budgets.

Where mental health problems develop, early intervention and support from mental health services is crucial. Too many young people who are not able to access the mental health support they need from child and adolescent mental health services are left waiting for treatment on

waiting lists for far too long or are turned down for help because their condition is deemed to be not bad enough. The best way to stop our young people developing eating disorders is to make sure they do not have to wait until they have an eating disorder and until they are bad enough to get that help. For children and young people who need support from CAMHS, there needs to be specific support to help them with body image concerns. What are the Government doing to ensure that support is in place?

According to a survey of family doctors, nearly all GPs worry that young people with mental health problems will come to harm because of difficulties in accessing treatment on the NHS, which should absolutely not be the case, and I know the Minister agrees. As was said at Health questions earlier, it is time to ring-fence funding for children's mental health budgets to ensure that mental health services for children are properly funded.

I have spoken mostly about the impact on children and young people, because it is vital that the causes of poor body image are addressed early to ensure that children and young people think positively about their bodies and therefore go on to think positively about their bodies as adults. People with long-term conditions, such as cancer, and new mums can also have particular body image pressures and concerns, so it is important that as well as mental health services, other health services are there to support people when that is required. In some other cases, the issue is not due to mental health but can become a mental health issue if the matter is not addressed earlier.

According to the Mental Health Foundation, cognitive behavioural therapy—CBT—and other talking therapies can help people who are struggling with body image concerns, but we know that access to talking therapies can be a bit of a postcode lottery. Will the Minister explain how the Government plan to try to end that postcode lottery?

It is worrying to hear about body image concerns among lesbian, gay and bisexual people. One third of adults who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual have reported experiencing suicidal feelings in relation to their body image. It is therefore important that lesbian, gay and bisexual people have access to support that is tailored to them. Has the Minister taken steps to ensure that lesbian, gay and bisexual people have access to appropriate mental health support?

As we know, trans body image is often linked to a specific condition called body dysmorphia, which means it is not included in the statistics I just mentioned. Trans people face specific challenges in accessing mental health support, so it is vital that the Government ensure that mental health support tailored to trans people is available throughout the country. Will the Minister explain what steps the Government are taking to provide mental health services for trans people in this regard?

We have heard today about the profound impact that social media, celebrity culture and advertising can have on young people and adults and their views of their bodies. Too often, the content shared on social media is having a negative impact on mental health. That is why it is vital that more is done to protect children and young people and vulnerable people online, including from harmful images that can affect their body image. Far too often, social media companies turn a blind eye to harmful content. More really does need to be done to

stop such content appearing online. I commend my right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) for mentioning Facebook, as well as a former Member of this place and what he might be able to do in that regard.

I am reminded of all those pro-ana websites. I never even used to know what pro-ana meant—I did not realise it was even a thing—but when I see some of those websites and some of those YouTube stars, and the sort of body image that they present as being obtainable and the norm, I think more really should be done to take those images down. I also include in all that the fact that the movie world, Hollywood, TV and Netflix have a responsibility to promote a healthy body image when they cast their shows and movies. I will not name any particular show, movie or artist, but I have in mind a particular example of casting that really does, in my opinion, promote a very wrong body image. That does cause harm. The harms caused online need to be seen and treated as public health concerns, which, as shadow public health Minister, I am passionate about.

Labour is calling for a regulator with teeth that can take serious action against social media companies and for an enforceable duty of care to deal with the harms, hate and fake images that many online companies allow to flourish on their platforms.

The Government heeded Labour's call and announced a regulator in the online harms White Paper, which is great, so it is now imperative for a regulator to be put in place as soon as possible. Will the Minister let the House know when that regulator might be expected? The process might take many months, and meanwhile children, young people and vulnerable adults are left at risk of severe online harms. The Government need to move faster and to go further, and perhaps we might see that under the new Administration—who knows—but it is clear from this debate that more needs to be done to tackle harmful content and body stigma, and to provide appropriate mental health support for everyone who needs it. Following this debate, as we have all said, I hope that the Minister will still be in her job and able to tackle this.

3.45 pm

Jackie Doyle-Price: I shall not detain the House for too long, because I think it has heard enough from me for one day. I thank Members for their generous comments, even if they might be career-limiting.

In this debate, however, there is consensus across the House. We all fully recognise the problems that we face and the need for decisive action to tackle them. I will certainly continue to work with all Members to do exactly that, because this is too important and—I make this observation—the people out there expect us to work together more often than not. Such subjects should not be a political football, and it is too important to ensure that we are tackling harms.

The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) made the observation that the debate might not be as well attended as previous ones, but to be fair we have had many such debates in this space. Many Members, even if not present this afternoon, clearly have a keen interest. I am utterly at one with her when she expressed her concern about a context in which we have normalised unrealistic body image. Such images have become so

[Jackie Doyle-Price]

normalised that it will take a lot of effort to address it. She also referred to the incident of the lady who, sadly, died as a result of accessing a Brazilian butt lift from a surgeon in Turkey. Unfortunately, she is not the only such person from this country. It is the most dangerous cosmetic procedure that can be undertaken and, as a consequence, is banned in this country. None the less, despite the ban, people are still bombarded with images and with adverts for where they can seek the procedure. That brings home the fact that we need to do much more to make people aware of the risks.

Many Members referred to the influence of advertising, and I am afraid that those organisations that profit from hosting advertising ought to have a duty of care and ensure that the material they carry does not expose people to harm. I therefore welcome the engagement that the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) is undertaking with Facebook on exactly that. It is not good enough for social media providers to retreat to the defence of, “Well, we are a liberated platform, regulated by our users.” Where they become a vehicle for things that will cause harm, those social media providers have a duty of care to the people who use their platforms. We must all continue to challenge them on that issue.

We have had lots of references to “Love Island”. Collectively, perhaps we ought to challenge use of the term “reality TV”, because it is not reality TV; it is fantasy TV. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] So that might be the outcome of today’s debate—let us all talk about fantasy TV from now on, because such programmes promote lifestyles that are not normal or achievable. Let us do that.

Mr Kevan Jones: Will the Minister challenge the producers of a show such as “Love Island” to produce a series with real people in it, rather than one with the image that they are trying to portray now?

Jackie Doyle-Price: I could give that challenge, but the sad thing is that I do not think that any of us would watch that—although I do not think that many of us watch it now. Frankly, I like my dramas gritty and real. Ultimately, ITV broadcasts “Love Island” because it attracts many viewers—many of them among the most vulnerable group we are talking about. Again, ITV should be much more responsible, although the show is one of its biggest earners. I just regret the fact that we have become such a nation of voyeurs, and we all need to reflect on that point.

It is interesting that, because the people in these so-called reality TV shows are not known to us—they are not celebrities—we do not really see what we are doing to them in these circumstances. I do not know whether any hon. Members used to watch “Big Brother”, but there was an occasion when a contestant on “Celebrity Big Brother” effectively had a meltdown on TV. The public reaction then was very different; I think it seemed more real to people because it was a celebrity and the public were invested in them. That illustrates just how pernicious these so-called reality TV shows are, with their anonymous celebrities. These people suddenly become very exposed, and we have seen the outcome for some people’s mental health when they re-enter the real world.

I know that ITV has reflected on some of those risks, but there is much more to do. As I said, let us start calling them fantasy shows.

The hon. Member for Dewsbury also mentioned the whole issue of body-shaming online. We have accepted as normal some really unpleasant behaviour online. I always use the example of drinking and driving. It did not matter that drinking and driving was made illegal; it was only when it became socially unacceptable that people really stopped doing it. We need to get to that stage when it comes to how people behave online. Again, this happens because people do not see others as real people online. When people make abusive comments online, it is because they feel that they are able to. That has got to stop and we need to lead the way.

The hon. Lady also asked what it takes to make the social media companies actually do something about this. In the context of suicide content, it took a death—and it should not take a death. With regards to other content, I suspect that it will also take deaths to get these companies to do something. That really is not good enough. I pay tribute to those who are brave enough to share their experiences of self-harm and suicide as a result of what they have seen online, because they are really helping us to drag the social media companies to where they need to be.

The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron)—I never pronounce it right—articulated the fact that this area is an artificial world that becomes more and more intense. When we start using the internet and looking at things on social media, we do find ourselves dragged into a deeper and deeper world of “like” content, and it is easy to cease to be objective in those circumstances. We have certainly seen that with regard to self-harm and anorexia sites; it is just constant. The journeys that some people have been through are akin to grooming. People can find themselves being groomed by online content by sheer accident. Given that context and given how we use devices these days, it is not difficult to see why people are becoming much more exposed to such risks. Safe ways of using the internet—using iPads and so on to access content—has to be central to any education we give children about looking after themselves because that level of intensity clearly causes harm.

The hon. Members for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow and for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) talked about eating disorders, the clinical pathways available and out-of-area places, all of which are issues that really bother me. It has to be said that we have done well on children’s access to help with eating disorders—and I think it was right to do so because if we can tackle these issues early with children, we are tackling eating disorders—but it has highlighted the risks that exist when children cease to be children and become adults. The level of service is not as good when people enter adulthood, particularly through the whole period of transition, and that in itself can cause harm. We have heard about Hope Virgo’s #DumpTheScales campaign and the fact that different clinical standards are being applied for children and adults. That is clearly something that we really need to fix and it is a key priority for me.

I also fully recognise the danger of out-of-area placements for people with eating disorders. Part of people’s recovery has to be the relationships that they have with family and friends. I have seen that very clearly with children

and young people. Generally, we need to reduce the number of out-of-area placements for people with acute mental health issues, including eating disorders, but I will not be satisfied until we have no out-of-area placements at all. Having people long term in beds in hospitals is not good for their mental health. Clearly, there are cases where there is a need for intensive treatment and we need to do that, but over time, out-of-area placements really should not be a thing.

The right hon. Member for North Durham, as usual, brought to the debate his very well-informed knowledge of this subject. I join him in paying tribute to Dawn Knight and all the campaigning she has done. She has not been shy about sharing the devastating impact of what she did, telling her story of how she just wanted to enhance her appearance and the result has been absolute hell. Neither is she shy about sharing exactly what the impact will be on the NHS as a consequence of the treatment she has had to have to put it right.

This whole area of cosmetic surgery is growing very quickly, and people are quite naive in thinking that perhaps the more money they spend on a procedure, the better it is going to be. Nothing could be further from the truth, because there are the least virtuous of people in this space. As the right hon. Gentleman says, this is the wild west. These people are profiteers. Part and parcel of enabling people to protect themselves in this environment is to really talk about the risks. There are some absolute cowboys out there. The story that Dawn tells about trying to sue the practitioner who undertook her procedure shows that that is frankly impossible. When people want to become engaged in activity that is borderline criminal, they find ways of making sure that they cannot be held to account for it. Whatever our instinctive view about people's choice, self-regulation and so on, where there is clear evidence of harm, the Government should act. We really must look at this more seriously. I am happy to continue speaking to Dawn and to the right hon. Gentleman about that.

Clearly, we need to look at the whole issue of dermal fillers. It is classed as a medical device and therefore is not on prescription, but ultimately something is being injected into the face, so we need to make sure that we are doing something about regulation. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the role of the GMC. As he says, Botox is a prescription drug, but it is clearly being administered by people who are not practitioners. Both the GMC and the Nursing and Midwifery Council have an obligation to uphold their regulatory standards. If someone is using their prescribing power irresponsibly and not being present when the product is administered, then action should be taken, and I shall expect those bodies to do that.

Mr Kevan Jones: I agree with what the Minister says, but if we look at some of the adverts—for example, on Facebook—there is no way that people who are signing these prescriptions can actually be present. Her Department should look at this area, because there are clearly people signing prescriptions and then either selling them on for a profit or giving them to people to make money out of these procedures.

Jackie Doyle-Price: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for amplifying that point, because we must do that. We give very clear indications that we expect

the NMC and the GMC to deal with this. However, we must also send a message to people out there that people will get these adverts about how to become a dispenser of dermal fillers and think that that is all they need to do, having no idea that they are committing a criminal offence. We need to educate them as well.

I will end there, because, as I say, I feel like I have been the Government at the Dispatch Box today. I look forward to continuing discussions with all Members present, who I know care very deeply about this. It is something that we really must tackle as a matter of urgency.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered body image and mental health.

PETITIONS

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call Tom Tugendhat.

Stonecastle Farm Quarry

3.59 pm

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): It is a great pleasure to be here, with you in the Chair once again, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The petition of residents of Tonbridge and Malling declares that Stonecastle Farm Quarry near Golden Green is an unsuitable location for further quarrying, and that Kent County Council and the Planning Inspectorate should not allocate site M13 for sharp sand and gravel extraction in the Kent minerals and waste local plan.

I am particularly grateful to all the residents in Golden Green and surrounding villages, including some of those present in the Public Gallery today—the advancement of public business may mean that some of them have not made it—for their work in collecting signatures and responding to the consultations that have already taken place. Including online signatures, over 1,000 people have now indicated their opposition to the allocation.

Stonecastle Farm Quarry lies on the boundary of Tonbridge and Malling with Tunbridge Wells. I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) endorses my comments today, and perhaps he will be able to speak more freely about them tomorrow. Residents in Tudeley and surrounding areas, including the Save Capel campaign group, have been actively campaigning against expansion here, and against other proposed developments in the area. I hope the House will recognise their efforts.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges Kent County Council and the Planning Inspectorate to reconsider the allocation of a site for quarrying in Golden Green.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of Residents of Tonbridge and Malling,

Declares that Stonecastle Farm Quarry is an unsuitable location for further quarrying and Kent County Council and the Planning Inspectorate should not allocate site M13 for Sharp Sand and Gravel extraction in the Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan.

[Tom Tugendhat]

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges Kent County Council and the Planning Inspectorate to reconsider the allocation of a site for quarrying in Golden Green.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002500]

Windrush

4.1 pm

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): The petitioners, including the change.org online petitioners—almost 12,000 people in just a few days—call on the Prime Minister, who has 24 hours to rescue her legacy, to resolve the outstanding Windrush cases. There is still time to right the wrongs of Windrush. The Prime Minister can stop the dehumanisation and humiliation of the hostile environment. We call on the Prime Minister to declare an amnesty and ensure that all who entered as British citizens and came to the motherland to help rebuild her after the war have their British citizenship reinstated.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), and the Government to resolve all outstanding Windrush cases by Wednesday 24 July.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of Residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the Prime Minister has spoken at great length recently about her legacy; further that if she leaves office before resolving the Windrush scandal and the many outstanding cases, then this will be her legacy; further that the Prime Minister should offer more than warm words and take action to solve the crisis she created; further that in 1948, individuals throughout the British Empire received citizenship under the British Nationality Act; further that these citizens, some from the Caribbean, came to the United Kingdom in order to help rebuild the country after the war; further that these citizens lived here, worked here and raised families here; further that the hostile environment policy accelerated during Mrs May's time as Home Secretary led to many of these citizens losing their rights and in some cases being deported back to the Caribbean; further that others lost jobs, were forced into debt and suffer from immense stress and fear because of the policy; further that the former Home Secretary Amber Rudd said in April 2018 that it would only take two weeks to resolve the Windrush cases, however over a year has passed and there is still a significant number of outstanding cases; further that what has been done to these British citizens is outrageous, unfair and must end; further that a change.org petition initiated by Dawn Butler MP on this matter has received over 9,600 signatures.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Prime Minister Theresa May and the Government to resolve all outstanding Windrush cases by Wednesday 24th of July.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002502]

Lower Limb Wound Care

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Jo Churchill.)

4.3 pm

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not normally sit when I speak in this place, but half an hour ago I was in a hospital bed on the 12th floor of St Thomas's when I heard that this debate was coming early, rather than later. There was a big rush to get me here, and there are very good doctors and nurses in the Gallery who helped me to get here, because I thought it was tremendously important to speak. I had secured this debate, for which I am very grateful, and I particularly wanted to talk on this subject. I was pleased to get it before the recess, and I was not going to miss it for anything. After we finish, I shall be returning, I hope, to the 12th floor of St Thomas's and to very good care.

The subject of this debate was brought to my attention by Lord Hunt, our colleague in the House of Lords, where they had a debate not long ago about what plans the Government have to develop a strategy for improving the standards of wound care in the NHS. As somebody who needs wound care right at this moment, I know what a big subject it is. I did not know before—I was totally ignorant—but I have discovered what a challenging subject it is for so many people.

As a patient myself, I can talk about the subject with some feeling. I have to say that it is the most painful thing I have ever come across, and I had no idea that people suffered this kind of pain. A week ago, when I had to be taken to a local hospital in Merthyr Tydfil, I was asked by an ambulance driver what level of pain I was in, on a scale of one to 10, and I said, "Nine." I do not usually exaggerate; it was that painful. I am grateful to everybody who has helped me, and I want to make sure that the service develops and people get all the help they need in such circumstances.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) on securing the debate. She often features in Adjournment debates in this House. We are very pleased to see her in her place, and we thank her for all that she does. Does she agree that many people fear that the NHS neglects leg ulcers and the required treatment is not being given? The latest statistics, according to Dr Adderley's speech at the *Health Service Journal* patient safety congress, show that leg ulcers account for 40% of chronic wounds but only 7% of the chronic wounds that are treated. There is quite clearly an anomaly.

Ann Clwyd: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making my speech for me. I am sure we will be in total agreement as my speech develops.

Some interesting points were made during the debate in the other place, including the point that wound care is a massive challenge to the NHS, but it currently lacks priority, investment and direction. I want to push the Government, if they need pushing, on the need for urgent action and the development of a strategy across care providers to improve the standard of wound care.

A staggering 2 million patients are treated for wounds every year, at a cost of more than £5 billion and rising. While 60% of all wounds heal within a year, a huge

resource has to be committed to managing untreated wounds. The NHS response is very variable. Healing takes far too long; diagnosis is not good enough; and inadequate commissioning of services by clinical commissioning groups compounds the problem, with under-trained staff and a lack of suitable dressings and bandages.

There has also been a very worrying drop in the number of district nurses, whose role in ensuring safe and effective wound care in the community is crucial. I was shocked when I talked to a friend in Cardiff about the problem of putting on surgical stockings, and her experience highlights the need for district nurses. My friend had had a serious operation, and she could not bend to pull on the stockings. I asked her what she did, because she is a widow who lives on her own. She said, "I go out in the street and ask somebody to help me." I am sure that people are very ready to help, but no one should be in that situation. I think we would all agree that the drop in the number of district nurses is very worrying.

I am told that, ideally, 70% of venous leg ulcerations should heal within 12 to 16 weeks, and 98% in 24 weeks. In reality, however, research shows that healing rates at six months have been reported as low as 9%, with infection rates as high as 58%. Patients suffer, and the cost of not healing wounds swiftly and effectively can lead to more serious health problems, such as sepsis, which is often the result of an infected injury. We also know that foot ulcers on diabetics can unfortunately lead to amputations if they are not dealt with properly.

In the other place they talked about the Bradford study, and there is a very good summary of it in the House of Lords Library. It underlines the importance of evidence-based care, with nearly one third of patients interviewed in the study failing to receive an accurate diagnosis for their wound. As the study puts it:

"Wound care should be seen as a specialist segment of healthcare that requires clinicians with specialist training to diagnose and manage... There is no doubt that better diagnosis and treatment and effective prevention of wound complications would help minimise treatment costs".

We learn most of all from our own experience. My experience is that when I first developed a farthing-sized spot on my leg, I did not know what it was. I asked my chiroprapist, who looked at it a few times and said, "I think you had better go and see your GP." I went to see my GP—a very good GP—who did not know what it was either. Eventually, I was referred to a skin specialist—this is some weeks ago, now—who looked at it and said, "I don't know what it is, but why don't you try putting Vaseline on it?" Now, I do not think the experts up there in the Gallery would think that that was a very good idea, but I did put Vaseline on it and I do not know whether that did me any harm or not. You do worry a lot when something like that happens, whether you have knocked your leg or injured yourself in some other way, and you wonder what on earth it could be.

I think that maybe diagnosis is difficult, but rapid diagnosis is absolutely essential. I am sure the Government would agree that we need to get to grips with a nationally driven strategy. Without it, patients will receive worse care for their injuries and the financial burden on other parts of the NHS will continue to increase, because patients develop chronic wounds or catch an infection that could lead to life-threatening illness.

During the course of my journey, I have met many interesting people. For instance, I did not know there was an all-party group on vascular and venous disease. I just happened to see it in the all-party notices the day after I had been in St Thomas's. I rang up the chair, the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas), and asked him if I could come along to a meeting. He said that I was welcome to. I went along and, apart from the chair, I think I was the only MP there. There was a fascinating mixture of people, who were all involved in this problem in some way.

There was somebody who runs a leg clinic, who had a lot of stories to tell. In fact, she sent me a whole pile of patient stories—there is not time to read them out today, but they are very interesting. I realised how difficult it is for patients to get the right diagnosis and the right treatment. I took a list of all the people—they are mainly consultants—and I know that some people in St Thomas's would have come along if they had known of the existence of such a group. It introduced me to the Lindsay Leg Club Foundation, which is run by Ellie Lindsay OBE, who is the president. There are leg clubs in many towns and cities around the country. She was very encouraging—I say that as somebody who was a bit afraid when they realised what they had. She rang me up several times, and her patient stories were fascinating.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I am listening with great interest to what the right hon. Lady is saying, not least because this is an important debate on something that we do not talk about as much as we should in this place. Am I picking up correctly what she is saying on patient experience? Is she saying that we should encourage patients who have been through this transition and experience to share that experience with others in order to make other potential patients more aware of what might be out there and what they could do?

Ann Clwyd: Yes. That is a very positive idea. People need to talk to one another, particularly in this House because of the age differences. A lot of people talk about this in the other House, because on the whole they are much older than we are—except for me in this place; I am pretty old. I am just surprised that I had never heard of this before. Talking encourages people when they have discovered that they have this problem to seek the right advice.

Jamie Stone: Can I make absolutely sure that I understand this? By age difference, the right hon. Lady means people of my age—I am considerably older than some hon. Members—sharing experiences with people who are younger and might need to know these things. Is that correct?

Ann Clwyd: Sorry; I did not hear the last part.

Jamie Stone: Is this about the older generation, who might have had some experience in this regard, sharing experiences so that the younger generation—considerably younger than I am—might know the potential of what they will look at or deal with in future?

Ann Clwyd: Yes. I am very glad that there is an all-party group, for example, because it is important that such groups exist. I have seen the work that has

[Ann Clwyd]

gone on there over several months. As the hon. Gentleman knows, there are dozens and dozens of all-party groups in this place—I am sure that we do not know of the existence of most of them, but it is good to draw attention to this one.

Another person I met was Professor Julian Guest, who is a health economics consultant. People are very good at sending information. He sent me a list of things that, as a health economist, he has been working on. He says that wound care requires

“a change in its service delivery model that could include...Enhanced support for safe self-care (possibly by integration with local pharmacy support and supervision)...Improved diagnostic support underpinned by increased training and education of non-specialist nurses in the fundamentals of wound management...Consistent and integrated progressive care pathway with agreed defined trigger points for senior involvement and onward referral for investigation and differential diagnosis and a shared management plan to be implemented regardless of care setting...Establishment of dedicated wound care clinics in the community, possibly in general practices.”

So there are several papers by people working in this area who are thinking deeply about it.

I heard from consultants at St Thomas's about an excellent development called the Camden Health Improvement Practice pilot wound clinic. Dr Geraghty, who runs it, is working on wound care for people who are sleeping rough—for the homeless. I think everybody would applaud that as a very necessary and useful thing to do, and we look forward to hearing more about it. I am looking at the clock, and there is not much time left, but I hope the Minister will respond on this issue, because when I think of the pain inflicted on people—luckily, my pain is managed, but the pain of the homeless, for example, who are sleeping rough on the streets, is not generally being managed—it is clear that this Camden project is a very welcome development.

I had a new knee about a year ago, which is not a pleasant thing to have done. However, I have known nothing as painful as this leg wound, and I am grateful that so many good people are working in this area and highlighting its importance. It is probably not as glamorous as others in the health service, but it is absolutely necessary for people's wellbeing, comfort and health, and I hope we can do a lot more to support people in this area, to support new initiatives and to assist the doctors, nurses and other practitioners who do such an excellent job.

I am out on parole, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will, I hope, be returning to my bed in St Thomas's before too long, and I hope to come back after the recess with very positive views and a continuing interest in the whole subject of wound care in the NHS.

4.23 pm

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenage): It has sometimes been said that MPs in this House speak about things they do not know about, and sometimes MPs speak about things about which they have only a little experience, but I do not think I have ever had the honour of responding to a debate where a Member has spoken with so much current, relevant experience. I must congratulate the right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd)—

Ann Clwyd: It is pronounced “Cun-on”

Caroline Dinenage: I do apologise—I went to university in Wales, so I should get that right.

I must congratulate the right hon. Lady, first, on securing the debate, and, secondly, on making such mammoth, gargantuan efforts to be here. She did that with some help from her friends on the 12th floor of St Thomas's, the experts in the Gallery—I am going to have to be careful what I say. She is nothing short of an inspiration to all of us, both as a long-standing Member of Parliament who is greatly respected in this place and as a human being. We are so grateful for the fact that she has made it here today, and we wish her a very speedy recovery. We look forward to her being back here to monitor every development that the Department can bring about in the context of wound care and how we look after people in hospital more generally. She is a great inspiration to all of us, and I thank her so much for raising this issue in the House.

I think we all recognise the importance of ensuring that patients have access to high-quality lower limb wound care. As a Government, we are absolutely committed to ensuring that people receive the right care in the right place at the right time, whether through acute services, a local GP or services based in the local community. As the right hon. Lady knows, wound care treatment is a vital service which, during the initial period, is predominantly provided by a community nurse. That crucial provision offers relief to those with leg ulcerations or diabetic foot ulcerations and pressure ulcers.

As Members will know, venous disease is the most common type of leg ulceration, and can cause great distress and suffering to patients and their families. The right hon. Lady spoke powerfully of the pain that she has suffered, and that others suffer, as a result of the condition. I think it is important to keep that in mind because of the side effects that having to live with enduring pain for long periods can have on a person's emotional and mental health and wellbeing.

Our priority is for leg ulcers of this type to be treated early and in the community when that is possible, without the need for further hospital admissions or GP appointments. I think that that preventative approach is right for patients and for the system. It is key for wound care to be delivered effectively and efficiently. Good wound care not only saves patients from distress and suffering, but gives nurses more time to deliver other important services, and alleviates pressure on acute services. That is why NHS England and NHS Improvement have commissioned the Academic Health Science Network to develop and deliver a national wound care strategy programme for England, which aims to improve the quality of wound care provision. It is a comprehensive programme, which covers improving prevention of pressure ulcers, wound care of the lower leg, and management of surgical wounds.

The programme's work will be informed by the following priorities. First, it will improve patient experience and outcomes by developing national clinical standards of care and a more data-driven approach. I know that the right hon. Lady is very keen on that. Secondly, it will work with industry to ensure that the right wound care products are reaching patients at the right time through the development of a much more robust supply, delivery and distribution model. Thirdly, it will aim to improve the current patchy provision of wound care training—of which I know the right hon. Lady is well aware—and

the inconsistencies in the availability and quality of educational resources. As well as improving the care provided by healthcare professionals, that will allow patients to become more capable in self-care.

The right hon. Lady raised several issues that I should like to follow up. Let me first pay tribute to the work done by the Lindsay Leg Club Foundation in relation to community-based leg ulcer care. I am pleased that the committee of the lower limb clinical workstream of the national wound care strategy programme includes members of the foundation. As the right hon. Lady said, leg clubs are organised by the local community rather than health providers, but leg club nursing teams are employed by NHS local provider services, clinical commissioning groups and GPs. That is why it is so important for everyone to work together to support people as much as they can in the community. I can imagine that when this condition starts it is so painful that people can feel extremely alone and isolated, and the provision of leg clubs and other support mechanisms in the community, to offer the information, advice and support that they need, can help them to stop feeling that isolation and fear.

I also join the right hon. Lady in welcoming the all-party parliamentary group on vascular and venous disease. It is important for us to have all-party parliamentary groups which really recognise conditions of this kind, and which are doing their best to push the Government, and us in the Department of Health and Social Care, to do everything we can to support people who suffer from them.

The programme that I was talking about started its work in late 2018, and since then has brought together a range of experts. It has recruited over 500 stakeholders from a very broad range of private and public sector organisations to its stakeholder forum, and it is important that we have people with real experience from across the country taking part in this and influencing the decisionmaking. They aim to deliver their recommendations by the end of the 2019-20 financial year. We look forward to receiving them and the positive impact that they will have on patients' lives. This is just for England, but NHS England is in communication with wound care leads in the three other devolved nations to ensure that they are sharing this learning across the piece.

The research in this area is also very important. The Department funds research into all aspects of human health through the National Institute for Health Research at the level of about £1 billion a year, and the NIHR has funded a number of studies focusing on lower limb wound care, including venous leg ulcers and vascular problems. A five-year funded programme on complex wounds comprised 11 new and updated reviews of the existing literature, a survey and interviews with people with complex wounds, their carers and health care professionals. There has also been a series of venous leg ulcer studies using randomised control trials to investigate the clinical and cost effectiveness of new versus traditional venous leg ulcer treatments from types of compression bandage through to compression hosiery to larval therapy.

The right hon. Lady also spoke about the importance of having the right staff, expertise and medically trained people to be able to deliver the care, and it is no secret that community nurses are a fundamental part of our health system; they provide vital services that ensure patients are treated where they are most comfortable, which often is in their own home, and that they are

supported to manage their conditions and to live independently. To help deliver our vision for community services, we are investing an extra £4.5 billion a year to spend on primary medical and community health services by 2023-24. The key to delivering the long-term plans and vision is ensuring that we have the right nursing numbers, particularly in the community, and that is why the interim NHS people plan is prioritising taking urgent accelerated action to tackle some of the community nursing vacancies. That will be done in a range of different ways, including increasing supply through undergraduate nursing degrees, clearer pathways into the profession through the nursing associate qualification and apprenticeships, and tackling some of the misconceptions about the role of community nurses, which sometimes deter people from entering the profession. In addition, in May 2018 we announced £10 million for incentives to postgraduate students to go on to work in some of the areas that we care very passionately about and where we want to recruit the best people, such as mental health, learning disability and district community nursing roles.

Jim Shannon: I am pleased to hear this very positive response from the Minister. In Northern Ireland we have a very good community nursing programme that is delivered through the social care services. It cares for those who need care and a change of dressing for their wounds every day. The Minister referred to contact with the regions and devolved Administrations; will she contact the Northern Ireland Assembly and the permanent secretary of the Department of Health, Richard Pengelly, so they can give some idea of what we do there?

Caroline Dinanage: The hon. Gentleman is always full of brilliant ideas and we will only move forward as a nation if we share best practice and the expertise gained from different parts of our country. So I would be very keen to speak to his colleagues at the Northern Ireland Assembly and see if we can gain any learning from that.

Jamie Stone: I could not possibly let the occasion pass without commenting. Can I take it that that promise will be extended to the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government? The issue we have heard about today is no less a problem in Scotland.

Caroline Dinanage: Yes. We do not discriminate. We are keen to talk to everyone to get the best possible learning so that patients up and down the country can benefit from all the expertise that is available.

In thanking the right hon. Member for Cynon Valley for making the supreme effort to be here today, I reassure her that both the Government and the NHS recognise the importance of ensuring that patients have access to high-quality lower limb wound care and will continue to support the work of the national wound care strategy programme for England on improving the quality of wound care, including lower limb wound care, in the country. I thank her once again for being here to make her case so incredibly powerfully. I wish her a speedy recovery and send her all our love from this House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I echo the Minister's warm comments about the right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd). We are all deeply impressed to see that she has come from her

[Madam Deputy Speaker]

hospital bed on the 12th floor of St Thomas's to raise this important issue in the House. I have known and been a friend of the right hon. Lady for more than 30 years and I know her courage and resilience so it is not a great surprise that she has done so, but nevertheless

we are hugely impressed. Like the Minister, on behalf of the whole House, I wish her a speedy recovery and look forward to having her back full time in September.

Question put and agreed to.

4.36 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 23 July 2019

[PHILIP DAVIES *in the Chair*]

UK Trade and Investment Strategy

9.30 am

Philip Davies (in the Chair): Before I call Julia Lopez to move the motion, the eagle-eyed among you may have noticed that I have decided that jackets may be removed for this debate.

Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered UK trade and investment strategy.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies, and to see some colleagues here; I must admit that, with all the anticipation of the morning, I was expecting to see tumbleweed rather than MPs in the Chamber.

By the time the morning is out, we will know who has the honour of being our next Prime Minister. The challenges ahead of that person will be profound, but so will the opportunities to reshape this great nation. Precisely 100 days will lie ahead of them until 31 October, when the extension to our EU membership expires. Each of those days will have to be used to prepare the UK's people and businesses for any eventuality and to move forward with confidence, intent and gritty resolve into our next chapter. In so doing, we must articulate a clear vision of our place in the world, at the heart of which must be both a coherent global trading strategy and a package of measures that demonstrate to international investors our determination to be one of the most dynamic, stable, open and innovative democracies in the world.

I intend to use the debate to press the Minister on what he sees as the Department for International Trade's role in those 100 days; to present some thoughts about our trade and investment strategy from the two years I have served on the International Trade Committee; and to raise the profile of DIT as it prepares to take on a more central role after three years in the back room, showing how the right trade and investment strategy can deliver prosperity to the people we represent.

Formed straight after the referendum as one of the new Brexit Departments, DIT has faced the ongoing challenge of being excluded from the Brexit process, which has been driven by the Department for Exiting the European Union, the Cabinet Office and No. 10, leaving it vulnerable to the decisions and delays of others. That has stifled proper debate about the extent to which any terms agreed with the EU will limit our ability to devise an independent global trading strategy. Accounting for the threat of the backstop and the long-term view to mirror the EU's rules via a so-called common rulebook, the Department has had to plan for everything from protracted EU negotiations that limit our room to manoeuvre to the complete freedom and vulnerability of a no-deal situation.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way so early. I may have misheard her, but I think she referred to the need to counter the threat of a backstop. The backstop is there to guarantee the Northern Ireland peace process. Unless I misheard her, can she explain why she sees that as a threat?

Julia Lopez: No party wants the backstop to come into place, because we hope there will be a free trade agreement in its place, but the hon. Gentleman will be well aware that there is much concern that the backstop will tie us into rules and regulations that hamper our ability to achieve the aims that the Brexit process was intended to achieve.

Inevitably, the dilemma I outlined has constrained DIT's ability to determine what might be offered to non-EU trading partners in any roll-over agreements or future negotiations. Perhaps all that is understandable and to some extent inevitable, given the complexity of extracting ourselves from a 40-year relationship. However, in the absence of a strong DIT voice in the Brexit process, there has been a failure to understand the potential trade-offs in the withdrawal agreement and how rapidly the rest of the world is moving on. There has also been a vacuum of informed parliamentary debate on our global trading future, leaving MPs to veer wildly from visions of chlorinated chicken and the bargain basement sale of the NHS to naïve declarations about the speed, value and impact of new free trade agreements.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this timely debate. She mentioned that Parliament in particular has not really debated these issues. Actually, we have. I put it to her that the Government have not been clear about what sort of trade deals, and how many, they have agreed around the world. Perhaps she can give us an answer.

Julia Lopez: I am not entirely sure I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. Does he want to know why the Government have not been clear about how many trade agreements they have secured?

Mr Jim Cunningham *indicated assent.*

Julia Lopez: Well, at the moment the Government are not able to enter into negotiations on FTAs, but they are able to try to agree roll-overs of those deals. As I set out, the problem for the Department has been that it does not quite know what scope it has to negotiate those roll-overs, so partners have been waiting to see what is eventually negotiated with the EU to know what negotiating leverage they have over us. That leaves the Department in a rather difficult position, and that has had an impact on our ability to roll over trade agreements.

Mr Jim Cunningham: If the hon. Lady has looked at the news this morning, she will know that Canada and India, for a start, are not at this stage prepared to enter into a trade deal with the British Government.

Julia Lopez: I am not entirely sure I heard that—I do apologise.

The state of unreality we have got into in our trade debate must end now, not least because it undermines our credibility as a negotiating partner. It is time to decide our desired trading destiny, work out how we get

[*Julia Lopez*]

there and then determine how to maximise our leverage along the way. If we are honest, we all want trade with the EU to remain virtually untouched at the same time as we open up new market opportunities. We want to acquire the right to regulate and tax as we please, and we would like to stop club membership rules such as freedom of movement. That is what the EU would term a “cake and eat it” strategy.

Boiling down the last three years, they have largely been about what price tag the EU wants to place on that goal and whether such a prospect is even for sale. In effect, the EU’s answer has been that no such deal is on offer and that we must instead pay to leave, tie ourselves into the EU’s regulatory sphere without a place at the table and wait to see whether we are granted any freedom to diverge. Unless we can find a middle ground between those positions, we will be walking away from the counter, which will introduce trade frictions and potentially tariffs into our relationship. It is important that we deal rapidly with the consequences of doing that, and DIT will have to be put front and centre of that task.

Earlier this month, when the International Trade Secretary appeared before the Select Committee, I was staggered to learn that DIT had apparently played so small a role in advance of the 29 March and 12 April deadlines for our leaving the EU. Overnight, we could plausibly have been left with no formal trading arrangements with the EU to allow for the continuation of tariff-free exchange. Indeed, that remains a very real prospect. Yet when I asked whether DIT had had any discussions within Government about drafting a simple framework for a future FTA to offer the EU at that juncture, the Secretary of State advised that the responsibility was DExEU’s, and that there would be little point in tabling an offer because the EU would simply reject it.

I do not want to open a debate about the contentious World Trade Organisation article 24 process and the likelihood of the EU agreeing to such a mechanism to maintain tariff-free trade. However, surely we can at least agree, because both the EU and the UK have said so, that at some point in the future—either immediately or after some time—the two parties will want to strike a free trade agreement. Why, therefore, have the Government not yet drafted an outline of how they would like such an agreement to look, and why is DIT being squeezed out of this important conversation? I have also heard surprising reports about how little the Government have utilised our expensive chief trade negotiator in our Brexit negotiations. The under-utilisation of DIT’s resource has been a strategic mistake.

In the next 100 days, we must prioritise the close working, if not the merger, of DIT and DExEU, such that our future relationship with the EU is seen in the wider context of what we are trying to achieve in trade. EU-UK trade, of course, will be a vital strand of our future prosperity, but it will not be the only strand. The past three years have been defined by aggressive lobbying by companies and organisations that would benefit most from everything staying the same. That is understandable, but we are not giving equal airtime to the costs of ongoing alignment.

To give a couple of examples, the Select Committee has heard from experts that the EU regulation concerning the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction

of chemicals is so onerous and expensive that all the fastest-growing developing markets are looking at adopting the non-EU model of chemicals regulation. Other experts advise that the EU’s hazard-based approach to farming standards excludes important technological advancement that could reduce the environmental impact of farming.

We must seek immediately to draft a generous framework document for an EU-UK FTA alongside a series of explicitly temporary stop-gap continuity agreements with third countries that would allow diagonal cumulation of rules of origin with pan-Euro-Mediterranean countries. At the same time, we need to return to DIT’s proposed no-deal tariff schedule and think carefully about how it can best provide leverage in any negotiation with the EU.

The Secretary of State assured our Committee that his Department would have adequate resource on 1 November to begin simultaneous negotiations on FTAs with Australia, New Zealand and the US. There is no doubt that that could introduce useful pressure and urgency to maintain a good relationship with the EU. However, we must be careful not to fetishise FTAs or to oversell what they can achieve and how quickly.

I was particularly pleased last week to see my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) manage expectations about a US deal. The US are notoriously tough trade negotiators, with in effect two negotiating partners in the Administration and in Congress, and there is a limit to what can be achieved given the breadth of matters decided at sub-federal level. None the less, as the Minister for Trade Policy, my hon. Friend the Member for Meon Valley (George Hollingbery), advised our Committee last week, given the breadth and depth of our trading links with the US, even a relatively shallow agreement could reap substantial rewards.

Our North American trade commissioner, Antony Phillipson, set out to the Department this month his strategy for US-UK trade. I would be grateful if the Minister gave us an overview of what was said, particularly on how we intend to build a strong relationship at state level and whether we have the right resources to do so. The parliamentary mandate for opening formal US-UK trade talks and ongoing parliamentary scrutiny of negotiations will be critical if such a deal is not to fall at the final hurdle or to be brought down by misinformation campaigns.

The Secretary of State is proud that the public consultation on the deal was one of the largest such exercises ever undertaken. However, I noted that of the 158,000 responses on a US-UK FTA, 152,000 were individual campaign emails and only 234 responses came from businesses. I fear that that may be indicative of a 38 Degrees-style effort to cause alarm about the future of the NHS or reduced animal welfare standards: two matters on which Ministers have already offered countless assurances.

We can do plenty beyond the US-UK FTA that will be less contentious and arguably reap benefits more quickly. Amid the important debate about the future of our fishing industry and sheep farmers, we overlook the fact that our economy is most heavily dependent on our world-beating financial and professional services. The FPS sector remains key to our ongoing prosperity, with its exports more than double those of any other sector. Our strength in this area far exceeds that of any other

European financial centre. Meanwhile, over 30% of the trade value added in the UK's manufacturing sector comes from services.

There are no guarantees in the withdrawal agreement of preferential access to the EU market for our critical service industries, and many in the City are now questioning whether we really want an enhanced equivalence deal that would leave us subject to the whims of EU regulators. The EU should have understood some time ago that growth in financial services is beyond Europe, with London business as likely to be lost to Singapore and New York as to Frankfurt, Paris or Dublin if it tries to diminish the City's competitiveness. Nonetheless, it seems likely to impose tougher recognition requirements on us. Instead of responding with mercantilist reciprocity, we must seek quickly to demonstrate that markets can trade with one another without needing to regulate each other.

The best way of testing such a model could be an ambitious global financial partnership with Switzerland, which is having plenty of its own difficulties with the EU following the expiration of its equivalence regime. A dynamic Swiss-UK agreement including right of market access, mutual recognition and regulatory co-operation could set a gold standard in future services agreements that could in time be rolled out to other important financial hubs. That will require a more involved regulator, the active co-operation of the Treasury and the engagement of professional bodies to allow for recognition of qualifications.

That is where DIT's role as convenor will become so important. The Department has established a network of new trade diplomats who sit within embassies to identify market access issues, build commercial relationships and triage problems among relevant Departments. I recommend that in key services markets we add to their number representatives from our own financial regulators, copying the example of the Monetary Authority of Singapore, which has offices around the globe, in recognition of the fact that services deals are as much about regulator-to-regulator as Government-to-Government co-operation.

A gold standard financial services agreement could be complemented by gold standard FTAs with New Zealand and Australia. I have said many times that these are not the biggest markets, but in both we have willing partners who can help advance our wider global trading agenda. They have experience in big and growing Asian markets. There is complementarity of language, culture and legal systems and an appetite to co-operate on quality food production, retail, healthcare, FinTech, defence and education. Meanwhile, at the WTO we can work together to embed important work on e-commerce and reinforce the multilateral rules-based system.

Plenty of diplomatic work can be done to enhance other trading relationships without needing an immediate FTA, though FTAs can be incredibly useful in providing momentum and focus. The Minister for Trade Policy talked at the Select Committee about the staggering size of the Chinese cosmetics market, which we find hard to access due to Chinese rules that require animal testing. If work could be done to demonstrate the quality and provenance of UK goods, such additional market access could be worth in the region of \$10 billion. That would overshadow the benefits of most FTAs with smaller countries.

The Institute of Directors talked of similar barriers to trade for UK engineers, architects and planners over Chinese design licences. Seemingly intractable market barriers in China can sometimes be lifted quickly in response to citizens' concerns, particularly in areas such as food and healthcare, where a demand for high-quality international products followed a series of consumer scandals.

DIT can not only flag such barriers and work with diplomats to remove them but highlight to our domestic businesses what kinds of opportunities are out there. The Secretary of State spoke last week about how DIT has helped a Cumbrian milk producer attend a trade fair in China that opened business to him worth hundreds of thousands of pounds.

It is important that we spot legislative developments, too. To give one example, Indonesia is to demand sharia compliance of financial products by 2025. With London one of the few financial centres with expertise in the field, our insurers and financiers could steal a march in this huge market. At the latest belt and road summit in April, the Chinese state pledged to put no more capital into belt and road initiative projects, capping the level at which Chinese banks can fund each project. That change of approach could open new opportunities to UK legal advisers, financiers and construction firms.

We need to empower the Department to do even more of that work. That will require skilled personnel. I was delighted to see the launch of DIT's new training scheme last week for trade negotiators and diplomats. We need to leave them in post long enough to develop the long-term relationships and market knowledge that reap dividends. There is currently too much churn, which is particularly problematic in markets such as China, where *guanxi*—relationship building with provincial governments—is key.

In advance of this debate, I was sent a briefing by the Open World Research Initiative, a collaboration between 15 UK universities, which is calling for a chief Government linguist to embed language policy across Government. That is a great idea. Technology is moving on at pace in this area, but to understand a language and its nuances is to gain deeper cultural understanding and stronger relationships in future markets of importance.

I would also like us to soup up the work of our international chambers of commerce as well as long-term, party-to-party political relationship building. I have spoken before about how good Germany is at that through its *Stiftung* model, which operates almost as a political diplomatic service, and its very activist chambers of commerce have presence not just in capitals but in important regional centres. We must bear in mind that some of these big Asian cities are prominent economic actors in their own right, often larger than small European countries.

Going forward, I want to see DIT work much more closely with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development to merge our international output into a coherent strategy. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands) highlights frequently, the strength of our voice on trade is fundamental to our relevance as a respected actor on the international stage.

I was pleased to see yesterday the announcement that DIT will be able to access the overseas aid budget to link our trade and aid work much more closely. In that

[Julia Lopez]

vein, the Government should work with and challenge the City of London to become the sustainable development finance hub of choice, cementing its position as the go-to financial centre for Africa and south Asia's gateway to global capital markets.

DIT also has a big role to play domestically. One of the problems facing UK business is not a lack of demand for their products but a reticence in bidding for international contracts and a real nervousness about exporting. DIT has been addressing that with energy and creativity, but such work is not given the prominence it deserves. The export toolkit launched last week is an attempt by the Department to give MPs responsibility for identifying businesses and projects in their constituencies that could benefit from export and inward investment opportunities.

DIT is uniquely placed to know how to make our domestic market attractive to the kind of inward investment that creates jobs, adds value and increases tax take here in the UK. Its end-to-end service for international investors is important, but we must also look at a single window for business registration and investment information. Similarly, it is vital that we keep an eye on the competition, because the trade promotion bodies of France, Germany and Spain are stepping up their game.

There is already a business environment advisory team that flags barriers on skills, migration, tax and development, and I would like to see its work given more prominence so that we can make the UK one of the most attractive, tax-competitive markets in the world. It should also look at how we give our financial regulators an explicit competition mandate to embed our dominance in financial services. Work must be done with the Home Office to break the link between long-term labour migration and mode 4, so that our desire to control immigration numbers does not hamper the ability of companies to move key personnel.

We must be equally alert to investment that is against our national interest. There is a big difference between greenfield foreign direct investment that creates jobs, embeds skills and generates long-term tax revenue in the UK and speculative investment—the use of these shores to park dodgy money or the strategic purchase of critical assets accelerated by the cheap pound.

I was horrified to see the exposé in *The Sunday Times* of the tier 1 investor visa, and I am similarly concerned about the security implications of allowing critical infrastructure to be foreign-owned. Our Committee is likely to recommend improved modes of data collection on FDI, so that we can better sort the wheat from the chaff and get a more accurate sense of investment trends.

We have perhaps suffered from the naivety in recent years that all inward investment is good investment, fearful that if we clamp down on flows into the UK, people will think we are closing in on ourselves. Australia and Singapore take a much more robust approach to property and infrastructure investment—particularly that affecting national security—and that does not seem to detract from their reputations as open economies. I ask that we look at the Australian model of a foreign investment review board, which rarely sees sales blocked but can add conditions to any investment, and which applies caution over foreign influence. I am pleased that the Government are already reviewing our approach via

the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy White Paper on investment that was launched in July 2018, and I would be grateful if the Minister updated us on that work.

As I said in my introduction, the next 100 days will be critical in addressing some of the strategic errors made in the Brexit process over past three years, and the Department for International Trade must play a full role in that work. It is frustrating that so little progress has been made in determining the future EU-UK trading relationship, but DIT has now had three years to establish opportunities, expand networks, and increase trade expertise, so that it is ready to go. Now is the time for the Department to be unleashed so that we can draw up a trading strategy that will grow our economy, entrench our values on the world stage, and deliver exciting exporting and value-adding investment opportunities to each and every corner of our United Kingdom.

9.51 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) for introducing this debate with so much detail, commitment and interest. Even as all eyes are on the race to become leader of the Conservative party and Prime Minister, our focus must remain where it should be: on formulating and implementing a trade and investment strategy. Whatever one's take on Brexit, people agree that it creates numerous exciting trading opportunities. I am excited by the idea of Brexit—as I know you and other hon. Members are, Mr Davies—and by the opportunities it will bring. We will gain access to a pool of countries, with which we will decide our own trade deals.

The food and agriculture sector plays a major role in my constituency. I have been consistent and vocal about the worldwide opportunities on offer, but work, effort, commitment and interest must be put in to secure them. Our farmers will be free from the chains of the EU, and able to decide their own future. The fear-mongering associated with the future of farming, post Brexit, has been another attempt by the political élite to avoid implementing the result of the 2016 referendum. The time for that has passed. It is now time to work together and prove that we can, and will, move forward. I am excited for my constituency and its opportunities. It was a great day in our country's history when our citizens decided that they wanted to remove the EU's shackles, and displayed their faith in their own abilities, their country's abilities and free-market economics.

As the hon. Lady said, a free trade agreement with the USA, China or India—all major importers—is an exciting prospect. We are not currently allowed to negotiate such trade deals while we are, unfortunately, still in the EU, but we can look to the future with optimism as we open so many new doors.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be to the advantage of the United Kingdom and the EU to reach a mutually advantageous and agreeable free-trade process? The new Prime Minister and his Cabinet must have that as the centrepiece of their strategy for a trade and investment approach once our membership of the EU has ended.

Jim Shannon: I absolutely believe that. It is time to support the new Prime Minister and that strategy, to look to the future with optimism, commitment and focus, and to ensure that we deliver what is important.

My constituency contains agri-food industries, such as Lakeland Dairies, which has a factory in Newtownards—indeed, it has two factories in Northern Ireland and two in the Republic of Ireland, and it is knocking on eastern doors. The International Trade Secretary was instrumental in securing a substantial contract worth £250 million over five years for milk products. I was also involved with that deal, but the Secretary of State pulled it over the line. We must knock on all doors with our reasonably priced and superior-quality produce. The chief executive officer of Lakeland Dairies, Michael Hanley, is clear that although he, I and others want a deal with the European Union, whatever happens—deal or no deal—Lakeland Dairies will still trade in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and across the world. In reality, things go on. Life does not stop; the sun does not stop shining. The roof will not fall in, and many things will continue as always.

Strangford is a large rural community with towns in the middle, and together with many dairy farmers I look to the future with both optimism and, in some cases, scepticism. Although I am ecstatic and very happy that farmers will have access to a greater market, we must solve the Republic of Ireland problem, stop the grandstanding of Varadkar and others, and get down to the business of a mutually beneficial deal. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) said, it is in all our interests to work towards that goal, and the quicker a bit of reality creeps in, the better.

The backstop must be removed. I am happy and pleased that both potential leaders of the Conservative party—the future Prime Minister—are committed to the removal of the backstop, which the Democrat Unionist party welcomes. The Good Friday agreement is never in danger—people throw that cherry into the mix all the time, but the agreement is never under pressure. There is no need for a hard border. Interestingly, Varadkar has said there is no need for a hard border, as has the EU and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. We are all agreed that there is no need for a hard border, so why bother having one? There are technological ways to solve the problems if there is the willingness to do so. It is now time to get behind the new Prime Minister and leader of the Conservative party, and support the process to get that deal. Perhaps the cold reality that comes with new leadership, new commitment and new fervour will take us over the line.

With a US-UK trade deal in the mix for when we eventually leave the EU, farmers in Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom should look ahead with optimism because such a deal may include dairy imports. Agri-food businesses in my area already export to the USA, and that can be expanded if the right links are created, as the Minister is doing. A trade deal with China—the largest food importer in the world—will place our farmers in a position of optimism and opportunity. China has a population of 1.4 billion and its food imports have increased from approximately \$6 million in 2005 to \$300 million in 2015. Such levels of food imports are likely to continue as the country's economy grows, and that is a potential market for us to build on. Such links offer our farmers an exciting opportunity to export their high-quality products to China if a trade agreement is reached. Again, we need optimism and to look forward in the correct way.

It is important that Northern Ireland's interests are protected in any future free trade negotiations, and we must reach a compromise on the future of trade on the island of Ireland between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. We must ensure that the Union is not weakened—that must never be allowed to happen—and that our economy has access to the pool of opportunities that Brexit creates, rather than being cut off from the rest of the UK and trapped in the customs union. The Irish backstop must go, for the sake of both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, as that will suit both countries.

Trade must continue as normal between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland—I believe anything other than that is suicide for the Republic of Ireland, which relies on the UK through Northern Ireland as a solid trading partner. None of that should be new to anyone in the Chamber, as such issues have been debated clearly for the past two and a half years. I seek to renew focus and remind people of where we should be headed, rather than become distracted by all that swirls around us.

In conclusion, if we are as focused and hardworking as businesses throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland can be, we cannot help but succeed. If we continue to be distracted, the blame will lie not at the feet of those who voted leave—the majority of people in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—but with those in this place who refused to honour that referendum result and work towards the best leave deal possible. I thank again the hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster for securing this debate, and I look forward to hearing contributions from other hon. Members and the Minister's response.

10 am

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I confess to being a bit surprised at being called so soon, but I am grateful for the opportunity to sum up. I commend the hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) on securing the debate and on the measured and well-researched way that she presented the case.

A number of the hon. Lady's comments—this may be a misinterpretation on my part—seemed to be about the place of the Department for International Trade in the Government and its relationship with other Departments. I do not care which Department sorts out this mess; I just wish that one Department, somewhere in Government, would understand that we are in a mess. It is, despite the protestations of the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), a mess of our own making. It was not created by bad people in the Republic of Ireland, France, Germany or anywhere, but by a Government who presented people with the opportunity to make the wrong decision and who proceeded to make that wrong decision as wrong as it could be.

Everybody who campaigned for leave before June 2016 promised that we would leave with a deal. Most of those who bankrolled the leave campaign are now actively and aggressively pursuing a no deal—contrary to what they promised would happen if people supported the no campaign—but we are where we are.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): The Prime Minister negotiated a deal, which the hon. Gentleman had the opportunity to vote for. He is suggesting that the campaign was based on the offer of a deal, but one was offered and he chose not to vote for it. Surely, he is trying to thwart the outcome of the referendum, whether he accepts the result or not.

Peter Grant: I have been absolutely consistent, before, during and after the referendum, that I will continue to campaign for the best trade deal that we will ever have, which is membership of the most successful trading partnership the world has ever seen. As I have said before, but perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not there—

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Peter Grant: I will deal with one interruption before I take another.

I accept the verdict of the people of my nation and of this nation. I demand—I do not ask, beg or plead—that the sovereign will of the people of my nation to remain in the European Union be respected. In return for that, I will undertake to respect the sovereign will of the people of this nation who voted to leave.

Luke Graham: The hon. Gentleman talks about the sovereign will of our nation, but we sit in the United Kingdom Parliament. Our country is the United Kingdom and the people of our nation voted to stay part of the United Kingdom. Why does he not respect the will of the people in Scotland from 2014, but suddenly respects it from 2016? He talks about the best and most successful trading partnership in history, but of course, that is the United Kingdom, of which I hope we will always be proud to sit as part.

Peter Grant: I am puzzled as to how refusing to respect a referendum that said that Scotland should continue to elect Members of Parliament to sit in this place could be consistent with the fact that I am in this place carrying out my responsibilities as an elected Member of the United Kingdom Parliament for a Scottish constituency.

The hon. Gentleman has forgotten to mention, again, that the single biggest argument of the no campaign in the 2014 independence referendum—I am ready to have a further full discussion about independence whenever he wants—was that if we leave the United Kingdom, we are out of the European Union, so if we stay in the United Kingdom, we guarantee Scotland's membership of the European Union. That promise has been shown to be utterly worthless.

We have a democratically elected Parliament and Government in Scotland with a mandate to give the people of Scotland a choice to decide on our future. It would be a democratic outrage for anybody to attempt to usurp that, especially considering that this Parliament, not long ago, unanimously and without a Division agreed that sovereignty over the nation of Scotland resides with the people of Scotland. Anybody who did not like that view had the chance to oppose it when it was put to the House; nobody did.

Jim Shannon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Peter Grant: I want to get back to the topic that the hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster diligently set out. As I said, when the starting gun is fired, I will be ready to debate why Scotland's future is not as a part of the United Kingdom, but that is not why we are here. We are here to debate how the United Kingdom, with or without some of its constituent parts, can find a new place in the world of international trade, having taken a mistaken decision to cut itself off from the biggest and most successful trading partnership the world has ever seen.

Three or four months after we should have been implementing our future trade strategy, we do not know what the aims and ground rules will be; what importance will be given to other trading partners' respect for international environmental standards; or what requirements will be set in respect of workers' rights in the countries that produce the goods that we are going to start trading in. Some of our trading partners do not have a good track record on looking after workers in their factories. Nor do we know what weight if any will be attached to the human rights records of the countries that we are chasing for international trade deals.

Since the 2016 European Union referendum, one area of British exports that has done well is weapons sales, because the number of arms licences to sell British weapons to countries that are on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office human rights watch list has doubled. In the last 10 years, the United Kingdom has agreed to the sale of weapons to every single country that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office regards as having a bad track record on human rights, with the exception—I wonder for how long—of North Korea.

Is the purpose of our world trade strategy of global Britain not so much that Britain is great, but that weapons are great? Do we intend to continue to expand the policy of selling weapons with little or no regard to their real purpose? Will we start importing goods without any concern as to the conditions that were imposed on the workers who manufactured them? That would be consistent with an independent trade strategy, but I think it would be unacceptable. I hope that the Minister will confirm that it would be unacceptable and that the trade deals that the United Kingdom will enter into to replace the 40 trade deals that we enjoy through the European Union will insist that standards of environmental protection, product safety and workers' conditions and rights are at least as high in our trading partner countries as they are under those existing trade deals.

In 2017, the Secretary of State for International Trade promised that the Government would “replicate the 40 EU free trade agreements that exist before we leave the European Union, so we've got no disruption of trade.” Will the Minister take a second or two of his summing up to list exactly which of those 40 trade deals we have replicated? I suspect that it will not take him long. Again, a promise that was made before and after the referendum—that all those trade deals would be replaced before we left the European Union—has been shown to be utterly worthless. Of course, that promise was not painted on a bus by somebody who claimed that they were not acting as a Minister, but was made by a serving Minister of the Crown.

The hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster mentioned the concern that the price of a trade deal might be to open up parts of our services to privatisation and outsourcing where domestic Governments would not have permitted that.

The Government have been very careful to say, “We’re not going to allow the NHS to be privatised.” That is good, but in this part of the United Kingdom, far too much of the NHS is already privatised for my liking. A lot more of the NHS is privatised in this country than would ever be permitted in my country. That is fair enough—if the people of England want to vote for Governments who choose to outsource more and more of their NHS and NHS support services, good luck to them. That is their right. However, the people of Scotland have voted for a Government who have explicitly said, “There will be no privatisation anywhere in our NHS.” As a statement from a national Government, that is something that must be respected.

Luke Graham: As the hon. Gentleman is talking about privatisation within the NHS, perhaps he can inform the Chamber now of the percentage increase in privatisation in the Scottish NHS and the increase in expenditure for temporary, locum and non-NHS workers used within our devolved NHS back in Scotland?

Peter Grant: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the NHS in Scotland, like the NHS throughout the United Kingdom, has a serious shortage of expert, professional specialist staff. Part of the reason for that is that his Government are making the United Kingdom a less attractive place for people to come and work. They have created a hostile environment. The hon. Gentleman can snigger up his sleeve behind me, but I have cases in my constituency where a healthcare provider had to terminate the contracts of two professionally qualified healthcare specialists because they did not meet the United Kingdom Government’s salary level requirements to be allowed to stay.

If those specialists had worked in London, where everything—prices, rents, wages—is higher, they would have met the threshold. The same provider is allowed to provide services to people in London, but the people providing services to my constituents had their contracts terminated and had to leave the United Kingdom. That is not the fault of the Scottish Government or the European Union; it is the fault of an immigration service that is based on numbers, not on human beings or the need to continue to attract the best talent and the best people we can into our NHS. It is a simple fact that there are aspects of the NHS in some parts of the United Kingdom that are run for profit that, under the policy of the Scottish Government, will not be allowed to run for profit. They will be owned directly and provided for by the public sector.

We can all have different opinions about the best way to run a health service, but it would be utterly unacceptable for a United Kingdom Government or a Scottish Government to impose a way of doing things on health authorities in England that they believed was not in the best interests of their people. It would be equally unacceptable for any Government of the United Kingdom to enter into a trade deal, without the consent of the Government of one of the devolved nations, that would undermine the devolved authority that those nations have. I have not yet heard a categorical, cast-iron guarantee, so I will give the Minister another chance to give an absolute guarantee in his summing-up that there will be nothing outsourced in Scotland’s NHS without the explicit consent of the Government and Parliament of Scotland.

One of the arguments used for our leaving the European Union—I am pleased that the hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster did not use it today, because it is completely ridiculous—was the claim that, as the United Kingdom has a trade deficit with the European Union and a trade surplus with the rest of the world, the answer was to leave the European Union and only trade with the bits of the rest of the world that we have a trade surplus with. If we only trade with people who we have a trade surplus with, the only people who are going to trade with us are those who have a trade surplus with us, so nobody can trade and it does not get us any further forward.

That argument also completely fails to recognise why it is that, particularly in manufactured goods, the United Kingdom has struggled to trade as an equal competitor with the rest of the European Union. It is because other parts of the European Union take the profits of their industry and put them back into the industry, to make it more efficient, cost-effective and competitive. For too long in the United Kingdom, the profits of industry have disappeared to a tax haven somewhere in the Caribbean or Mediterranean. Because of the way that United Kingdom businesses have run their businesses, they have not kept up.

If we look at the productivity of businesses in the United Kingdom compared with their equivalent direct competitors in parts of the United Kingdom, there is nothing in European legislation that means that Europeans sell more stuff and more profitably than the equivalent companies in the United Kingdom. That happens because they can often do it more efficiently and reliably, sometimes even in industries where the UK previously had a record as one of the best in the world.

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): In fact, we have seen significant manufacturing growth in this country in the past few years under Conservative rule. We saw rapid decline of manufacturing industries under the Blair and Brown Governments, but under the Conservatives we have seen significant growth in the manufacturing industries in this country.

Peter Grant: The fact remains that industry in the United Kingdom is not nearly competitive enough compared with industry in some of the countries that we should regard ourselves as seeking to match. I will not get into an argument about whether the previous Labour Government or the current Conservative Government are more disastrous for the people of Scotland, because frankly neither have delivered any of the things they promised to Scotland. I am aware that the hon. Member for Strangford wanted to intervene; I apologise for forgetting and I am happy to give way to him now.

Jim Shannon: We obviously have a difference of opinion, but I had an opportunity last week to go to one of the Department for International Trade’s breakfast presentations. It was clear to me from that presentation that, while the promotion says, “Great Britain is great” or “The United Kingdom is great”, it does not mean just that England is great. It means that Scotland is great, that Wales is great and that Northern Ireland is great. Therefore, together we are all doing well. I gently suggest that if the hon. Gentleman has an opportunity,

[Jim Shannon]

he should contact the Department for International Trade and he will see just where we feature. We are third in the world when it comes to promotion, and some of the things we are doing in this United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland are beneficial for everyone.

Peter Grant: I do not doubt what the hon. Gentleman says, but that leads on to something else I was going to mention. If anything is seen to be quintessentially British, I do not have a problem with our sticking a Union flag and a picture of Big Ben—the Elizabeth tower, as it is now—on it and selling it to the world on the basis of its Britishness. I do not have an issue with that. We sell according to the strong point.

But who in their right mind is going to market British whisky with a Union flag on it? Who on earth thinks that that is a strong brand? Who is going to talk about selling British haggis? Haggis is not British; haggis is Scottish. If we stick a saltire on it, it sells better and more quickly. Who came up with these ideas? In the same way, to sell Cornish pasties we put “Cornish” on them; we do not call them “British pasties”. We might put a wee British flag on it, just to remind people the Cornwall is still part of the United Kingdom.

There are a lot of national and regional identities, particularly associated with food and drink, in the United Kingdom, and the producers rightly are intensely proud of the reputation that Welsh lamb or Irish dairy products have, for example. Why on earth would anybody want to stop marketing Irish butter and Irish cheese as Irish and start trying to invent a different brand for it as British? Why would people choose to sell quintessentially English products as not being English?

Julia Lopez: One of the most wonderful receptions I went to when we were on a trade trip to the WTO in Geneva was the British ambassador’s reception, where they promoted and showcased all the wonderful produce of Scotland—particularly whisky, but also other things. What positive strategy can the hon. Gentleman set out for how the Scottish National party’s devolved Administration and the SNP representation here in Westminster will try to participate in the trade promotion of their own products?

Philip Davies (in the Chair): Order. Before the hon. Gentleman replies, let me say that Front Benchers traditionally have 10 minutes in these debates. Because of the time allowed, I have given quite a bit of latitude, but he is now up to double that time. Can I urge him to wind himself down so that we can move on to the other Front-Bench speeches?

Peter Grant: I apologise, Mr Davies.

I say briefly to the hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster that the Scottish Government and previous Scottish Executives run by other parties have done that. One of the biggest obstacles is that every time the Scottish Government try to promote Scotland abroad or the Welsh Government try to promote Wales abroad, the UK Foreign Office says, “Hold on a minute. That’s our job.” Look at the snide comments every time a Minister of the Crown from the Scottish Government goes overseas to promote Scotland.

The negative, patronising, sneering attitude—not from the hon. Lady—that the national Governments of the United Kingdom all too often experience from the UK Government must finish. The United Kingdom Government have a job to do in selling the United Kingdom abroad, and the national Governments have a job to do in selling their respective nations abroad. That does not mean that they have to get in each other’s way or fight with each other about it. It is disappointing when attempts by the devolved nations to market themselves abroad are undermined by the UK Government, simply because, as a matter of democratic reality, the Scottish Government and the Welsh Governments have different views and a different political life from the UK Government. That is what devolution is for.

I realise that I have taken more interventions than I would normally in such a short speech—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Peter Grant: Before I let the Minister intervene, I ask him to confirm that the United Kingdom Government recognise that although the United Kingdom has a trade deficit with the European Union, Scotland has a trade surplus with it. Anything that damages or even temporarily interrupts Scotland’s successful trading relationship with the European Union will be deeply damaging to the Scottish economy and therefore to the United Kingdom economy.

Graham Stuart: I am disturbed to hear about this pattern of behaviour whereby the UK Government are allegedly inhibiting the Scottish Government’s promoting Scotland. We perhaps do not have time to discuss that right now, but I would be delighted if the hon. Gentleman wrote to me setting out instances of that. I promise to investigate them fully. I have never heard such allegations before, and I would be interested to hear about them and investigate them, if he can provide them.

Peter Grant: There was a recent case in which the Foreign and Commonwealth Office refused to support visits abroad by the First Minister of Scotland. That refusal was welcomed by the Scottish Conservative party.

Luke Graham: On a point of order, Mr Davies.

Philip Davies (in the Chair): I am afraid this will not be a point of order.

Luke Graham: I seek your guidance, Mr Davies. An incident has been mentioned regarding the First Minister of Scotland, but there are no facts to back that up. She was supported on the trip to New York to speak to the UN, which I believe the hon. Gentleman was referring to. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office facilitated that. There was a lot of discussion afterwards, but we should stick to the facts. I seek your guidance on that matter, Mr Davies.

Philip Davies (in the Chair): As I anticipated, that was not a point of order but a point of debate, and not a matter for the Chair.

Peter Grant: I want Scotland to continue to be a successful trading nation. I want the United Kingdom to go back to being a successful trading nation, as it once was, but on completely different terms. Some may think that we are going back to the days of empire, when everybody else worked for nothing in hellish conditions to keep a handful of people in the United Kingdom wealthy, but that is not going to happen. The individual nations of the United Kingdom have the talent and ingenuity to succeed and compete successfully against almost any other nation in the world, but the first thing that the United Kingdom must do to achieve that is to recognise that it is no more than an equal with the rest of the world. Nobody owes it a living or is beholden to it anymore.

The hon. Member for Strangford mentioned the Republic of Ireland, which used to do 90% of its trade with the United Kingdom; today, it is about 10%. I wonder what the Irish have got right. Perhaps it is something that the United Kingdom could learn from.

10.23 am

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) on her thorough speech. In her stout advocacy for the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), whom she mentioned more than once in the course of her remarks—

Julia Lopez: Only once.

Bill Esterson: Was it only once? It felt like so much more—I cannot think why.

The hon. Lady called for the merger of the Department for International Trade and DExEU. I wonder where the Minister might fit in the brave new world of the new combined Department—whether, indeed, he has a place in it. I wondered also whether the hon. Lady's challenges to him were part of his job application for one of the roles among the new Ministers. Perhaps how well he does in that job application will depend on his responses to her questions.

I agree with the hon. Lady about the need for a coherent and global world trade strategy that is attractive to investors. We probably diverge a bit after that point, but we agree about the importance of a strong trade and investment strategy.

The folly of the Government's strategy—or lack of one—was shown in the comments of their Canada trade envoy, who set out the stupidity of publishing zero tariff schedules. It is now pointless for the Government of Canada to spend time negotiating an agreement with us, as it will not be better than the deal that we have already unilaterally given away. Zero tariffs mean opening up to importers with no guarantee of anything in return. An effective strategy would, of course, ensure the best market access to our main trading partners and build confidence among investors.

We are about to have a new Prime Minister—I am assuming it will be the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip—who advocates a no-deal Brexit and is keen on the idea of undermining our economic relationship with our nearest neighbours and a trading bloc that accounts for well over half of our trade, either

directly or through agreements with 70 countries to which we are party through our membership of that critical trading bloc. It is madness to be considering no deal. It is the opposite of the robust, considered and credible strategy that is needed. It is an act of economic self-destruction, and Parliament must do all in its power to prevent such an outcome.

Investors want us to have the best access to the EU, and so does the Labour party. Businesses need frictionless trade and regulatory alignment, and so do workers. The prospect of no deal is causing enormous damage, as businesses and investors wait or decide to move elsewhere while we delay. No deal must be ruled out. It is in our strategic interest to do so, and it is what business organisations and trade unions are calling for.

The fall in inward investment shows what is happening as a result of the lack of certainty. There has been a massive fall in investment projects and new job creation, while the number of jobs saved through investment has fallen by nearly 80%. The number of foreign direct investment projects has also dropped sharply. On the point about uncertainty, Kent County Council said in its evidence to the International Trade Committee that there is no doubt that the UK's reputation has been significantly damaged by Brexit-related uncertainty.

The British Chambers of Commerce says that we lack consistency in provision of trade support for both imports and exports, and ADS draws attention to the poor funding of the British presence at trade shows; other countries have much larger pavilions and a more coherent national offer to prospective customers. They also give a strong signal that the Government back their domestic sector. The Society of Maritime Industries made the same point in its evidence to the International Trade Committee. It submitted a photograph of the German pavilion, which was much larger than the neighbouring British pavilion. It asked: which country's message is more effective—the simple “Made in Germany” in large letters or “Innovation is GREAT” in much smaller letters? It also asked which pavilion made the companies more attractive to visit. It was in no doubt that its German competitors had better support. Our reputation has been damaged through Brexit incompetence. There is a lack of support for exporters, and no sign anywhere of a strategy for trade and investment.

To succeed in international trade, we must align our domestic and international strategies. That means delivering on the Government's stated aim of moving to a zero-carbon economy. Labour recognises the benefits to be had in jobs and prosperity from investing in the \$26 trillion global opportunity of moving to a zero-carbon world. That figure comes from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The Government say that they are committed to net zero by 2050. However, that does not stack up when we remember that we are funding fossil fuel development overseas; 99.4% of UK Export Finance provision in the energy sector went on fossil fuel development in places such as oil refineries in Bahrain. Just £1 million was spent on renewables, but £4.8 billion went on oil and gas. Raiding the international development budget—something announced yesterday by the Secretary of State—is not the answer. We should use aid to help developing nations, not to give further support to the fossil fuel industry.

[*Bill Esterson*]

UK Export Finance should be helping with the development of renewables; otherwise, we are just exporting our emissions to the developing world and elsewhere, as of course is the case when we do not include emissions from shipping and air freight in our carbon reduction targets. The emissions do not go away as if by magic just because we pretend they are not part of our carbon footprint. Christian Aid rightly says that the support for fossil fuels is incoherent. We have world-leading marine technology in tidal energy. Where is the focus on renewable energy at the heart of an exciting and financially rewarding export strategy?

Under article 2(c) of the Paris agreement, the Government's policy priority should be:

"Making finance flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development."

The figure of 99.4% going to fossil fuels from UK Export Finance is the exact opposite of the stated policy of our Government. As Global Witness told the Select Committee, UK Export Finance should measure the greenhouse gas impact of the projects it funds. The US Overseas Private Investment Corporation adopted a greenhouse gas cap for its projects in 2007, and it is no surprise that it has shifted towards clean energy investments. If the private sector in the United States can do that, why cannot we? Labour believe we can.

Global Witness says that, for trade and domestic policies to match, UKEF should no longer invest in fossil fuel projects. Ministers like to remind us that UKEF is an award winner—but why should it not win awards for its low-carbon policy? The Canadian and French export credit agencies have more stringent controls on fossil fuel support. One of the two Swedish agencies did not lend to any fossil fuel projects in 2015 or 2016. If they can do that, why cannot we? Global Witness also says that the Department for International Trade should realign export support to renewable energy. There is an export opportunity for us, if we want to grasp it, in what it describes as floating offshore wind. Why not? UKEF has stopped investing in businesses that rely on child labour. Why not take the same approach to global warming?

The Government have woefully underprepared the UK for operating an independent trade policy. Trade remedies legislation is still not ready. There is no sign of the Trade Bill passing through Parliament. Existing trade deals are vulnerable to lapsing without replacement, not least because of the incompetence of the International Trade Secretary in announcing zero tariffs, as the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) reminded us in his resignation statement as the Canada trade envoy. He described it, let us remember, as "cack-handed" planning and felt patronised by the Secretary of State when he warned of the dangers of a no-deal tariff schedule and its impact on the prospects for the roll-over of trade agreements. As the hon. Gentleman has asked, why would those who are already getting 95% of what they want rush to sign up to what the UK want in the event of no deal? It does not bode well when a Back Bencher has a better grasp of international trade policy than the Secretary of State.

Labour will align our trade and industrial strategies to promote sustainable low-carbon export growth. We will introduce a transparent and consultative framework

for the development of trade agreements, and be a strong and supportive partner of our small and medium-sized enterprise exporters. We will use trade policy as a tool to elevate rights and standards domestically and with our international partners, to ensure that the benefits of global trade are shared through society—whether that is in moving to a zero-carbon world or in enhancing the achievement of the sustainable development goals.

Trade must not be used to lock future Governments into a deregulatory agenda or to erode the capacity of Governments to legislate in the public interest. Neither can trade strategy be a series of controversial arms sales. In stark contrast to the present Government and their new Prime Minister, it is only Labour that is committed to delivering the robust trade strategy that our country needs. We will play a leading role in demonstrating that trade can be the force for good that it should be.

10.35 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) on securing the debate and on her excellent opening to it. The subject, as we heard in many excellent and some peculiar contributions, is an interesting one. Our success in trade and investment will be crucial to delivering a more prosperous, stable and secure future for the country as we leave the EU.

There has been a massive change in the importance of trade and investment in the global economy and in the UK economy. That is one of the things to be grasped. In 1990, exports constituted a little more than 20% of GDP, but now they are more than 30%. We have the aspiration of reaching 35%, making us one of the greatest exporting nations in the G7. If we look at foreign direct investment, the stock value of that represented as a percentage of GDP was a little over 20% in 1990. Now it is more than 66%. As we have just heard from the Opposition spokesman, it is worth noting that, as we neared the end of the last Labour Government, France came up nearly to meet the level of foreign direct investment stock held in this United Kingdom; whereas, I am pleased to say, on last year's figures from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the UK's stock of foreign direct investment—with the hundreds of thousands of jobs that result from it in the United Kingdom—is now greater than that of France and Germany combined. That may be one element in explaining how we have gone from a youth unemployment rate that was 45% up by the time the Labour Government left office to one that is now at the lowest level since records began.

While we talk about trade and investment we must remember what it is all about, which is the quality of life—the living standards, prosperity and security—of this nation. That is why this Government and Conservative Prime Ministers since 2010 have had such priorities. The numbers are there. People can give all the speeches they like, but if we follow the numbers, we will see the transformation that has been brought about. That is reflected in outcomes—the reduction in unemployment and increases in employment.

Bill Esterson: I am glad that the Minister mentioned numbers and outcomes. Let us look at some. Jobs saved through investment fell, from 2016 when they were 28,000, to just 6,000 in 2019. That is an 80% fall. Those are numbers. They are not exactly encouraging, are they? They are not exactly a sign of the Government's success. Meanwhile, 13% of Asian investors have reduced their investment and 14% have put activity on hold, and there are similar figures for north America—slightly lower for western Europe. How is that a record of success on the numbers?

Graham Stuart: I am grateful to the shadow Minister for that intervention. The danger is in selectively seeking those things. On every possible measure, we see the UK—[*Interruption.*] I hope the hon. Gentleman will stop barracking; he knows what is coming. Even though he pretends not to, he must have seen the UNCTAD numbers—the official UN numbers—for 2018. What did they show? They showed that in 2018, according to the UN, the global stock of foreign direct investment—the yearly amount of total flows—fell.

Bill Esterson: What, by 80%?

Graham Stuart: The overall stock fell. The hon. Gentleman is talking about flows; he should try and get to grips with this. Maybe this will be a useful seminar for him to do so.

If the hon. Gentleman looks at the stock line for Europe, which is the accumulated level—not at the flow line, as flows go up and down year by year and are essentially volatile; they always have been and I project they always will be—he will find that it fell in Europe too. The net amount fell; there was net disinvestment in Europe and in the world. What happened in the UK? It went up again, but not quite as quickly as it did before. It is the global context. By every possible measure—flow, stock, greenfield, mergers and acquisitions—we lead Europe.

We have strengthened our position in Europe. Why has that happened? It is because of the business-friendly policies that we have put in place. As the shadow Minister is feeling so aggressive, I put it to him: in what possible parallel universe in which there is increasing competition for mobile global investment, with the massive number of jobs and the prosperity that brings, would jacking up corporation tax rates lead to more jobs, more opportunities and more prosperity for people in this country? That is the trade and investment strategy of Labour.

We do not need to think just about what Labour's current policies will do; we can look back at every previous Labour Government. By the end of the 2000s, France was just about overtaking the UK; now we have more than twice as much as France. Just think of the hundreds and hundreds of thousands of jobs—I am most interested in that number. While the hon. Gentleman and his party play politics, we deliver the investments that lead to prosperity and jobs. If he is interested in going further into the subject, he should look at Ernst & Young and the pattern over the last few years. What have we seen? We have seen an increase in investments outside London and the south-east, and an increase in the share of the FDI going into manufacturing, which has been maintained and strengthened in this country.

That is the exact opposite of the picture that the hon. Gentleman tried to lay out. It is there in every figure—from the OECD, UNCTAD, the Economist Intelligence Unit, Deloitte and fDi Markets. That is a fascinating one. Some people say, "If you include mergers and acquisitions, and you include intra-company transfers, that is not real FDI. We should look at greenfield and new start-ups, not someone buying a factory. What difference does that make? What about creating a new one? Let's look at that." Who looks at that? That would be fDi Markets. What did it show last year? From memory, it showed that the UK got 1,268 projects, that France temporarily overtook Germany, with 580 projects—well done President Macron, who has put a lot of work into that—and that Germany had 560 projects. In other words, despite Brexit uncertainty, in 2018 the UK had more greenfield investment projects than Germany and France combined. On what basis would anyone other than the most devout and misguided socialist try to suggest that those figures are not good?

Jack Brereton: Does my hon. Friend agree that the manufacturing figures referred to demonstrate exactly the picture of this Government and show the investment in exports that is going on? In the Blair and Brown years we saw a dramatic decline, with factories in manufacturing industries closing up and down the country. Under the Conservatives, we have seen a massive growth in manufacturing industries, clearly in part because of the exporting success and the support for exporting in this country.

Graham Stuart: My hon. Friend is a particular champion of industries in his area, not least ceramics in Stoke. I thank him for speaking in my constituency last Friday and talking about the success that has come from the effort put into that local economy to help to turn it around and strengthen it.

Since 2010, we have been working to turn around the toxic economy legacy bequeathed by the last Labour Government and to support the pioneering, innovative, entrepreneurial brilliance of British business once again. Success has come from policies designed to promote the dynamism, openness and flexibility of our economy. A further important step was taken by the Prime Minister when she established a dedicated trade Department for the first time in British political history. The Department for International Trade has just celebrated its third birthday and is crucial to the delivery of trade and investment success.

Given that this could be a valedictory performance by me, as we get a new Prime Minister later, I pay tribute to the Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade, my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox), for the brilliant work he has done leading and establishing this Department of State. Its work will become even more vital after we leave the European Union. We must build a global, outward-looking Britain that is a dynamic and independent champion of free, fair, rules-based international trade.

Our trade and investment strategy seeks three basic things: higher exports, greater foreign and outward investment, and reduced trade barriers. Contrary to what we have heard, exports are booming. Total UK exports now stand at a record high of £647 billion,

[*Graham Stuart*]

bearing out exactly what my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) just said. They are up in real terms—[*Interruption.*] Maybe the shadow Minister only looks at numbers that suit his narrative? They are up 25% in real terms.

In 2017-18 alone, the Department for International Trade helped UK businesses to export goods and services worth around £30.5 billion, which is a year-on-year increase of 4%. We are proud of our work in encouraging more companies to export, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster said in her excellent opening speech. A lot of the difficulty is in overcoming the timidity and the concerns that companies have in exporting. Nearly 111,000 firms exported goods in the first quarter of 2019, which is 5,000 more than in the same period last year.

I have talked about the foreign direct investment numbers, but the latest figures from UNCTAD show that the UK hit a record high of almost £1.5 trillion in FDI stock by the end of last year, which is more than Germany and France combined, creating 76,000 new jobs and safeguarding 15,000 more. That was in one year and in marked contrast to 2010, when France was close to overtaking us.

To put the FDI numbers into further context, UNCTAD's figures show that FDI flows—flows not stocks; I hope the hon. Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) knows the difference—fell by 19% globally in 2018. [*Interruption.*] I am now talking about flows as opposed to stocks, so it is repetition, but about a different aspect of something that I hope the hon. Gentleman would take an interest in. FDI flows fell by 19% globally and by 73% in continental Europe. What happened to FDI into the UK? The flows increased by 20%. So much for the negative effects of Brexit uncertainty.¹

The pace of change in the global economy is increasing but, for the agile, opportunities abound. The Department for International Trade provides the platform to give the UK a unique trade advantage, by locating export promotion, trade finance, trade remedies, export licensing and international negotiations all in a single Government Department.

I want to respond to some points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster. She asked about the 100 days. We will continue to prepare for no deal to be the outcome, which is not the avowed intent of either of the leadership contenders for the Conservative party. We prepared and were in a good position ahead of 29 March, and we are working with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to be able to meet questions coming in from businesses. We are ready to meet any surge in demand at that level.

My hon. Friend asked about state-level engagement with the US. The Secretary of State and I met with Senators from Florida and Texas the other day. As we expand and strengthen the Department's reach, we recognise that it is not all about working at the national and federal level, whether in the US or elsewhere, such as in Brazil. I was pleased to meet the Governor of São Paulo, which itself has more than 30% of the GDP of Brazil. There is a lot more to be done at that more granular level in order to identify barriers and overcome them.

My hon. Friend made an interesting point about language. Given our national weaknesses on foreign languages, I hope that officials may be able to follow up on that point. She also touched on the DIT working more closely with the FCO and DFID. We are absolutely trying to do that. I am delighted that we are becoming an official development assistance Department. We have to bring trade and development together. That is how people get out of poverty. This involves so many countries. There is now the Ghana Beyond Aid initiative; I visited Ghana's investment conference in London last year. These countries do not want to be seen primarily as aid recipients. They want to be seen as countries with great entrepreneurs, great technology and great capability. That is why, after the Prime Minister's speech last year in Cape Town, I am helping to organise the Africa investment summit on 20 January 2020. It is precisely to ensure that, cross-Government, we are able to support increased investment in Africa and take advantage of the opportunities there.

My hon. Friend touched on the subject of regulators. Whether further changes are required in their missions as defined by Government is something that I will leave for others to wrestle with, but I can say that our regulators really are stepping up to the mark. The Financial Conduct Authority, with whose representatives I have met, is making a major difference. People can look at our FinTech bridges. We lead the world on FinTech—financial technology. It is enormously valuable, and we are creating FinTech bridges with a number of other countries. For instance, we are deepening our engagement with Hong Kong and Australia. In both cases, the FCA has been a fundamental part of the team as we try to ensure that start-ups there can more easily come to the UK, and vice versa. It is precisely that kind of opening up of markets that is so important.

I am not sure that I have ever given a speech from my iPad before. When the screen goes blank—

Bill Esterson: Your mind goes blank.

Graham Stuart: It is better to have your screen go blank than your mind go blank, as may have happened to the hon. Gentleman when he started to talk about FDI, on which we are doing so well.

Last year we launched a new export strategy to encourage, inform, connect and finance businesses of all sizes, with the goal of increasing our exports from 30% to 35% of GDP, which would move us to the top of the G7. We are committed to working with the devolved Administrations in doing that. I will follow up on any suggestions. I hope that, if there are problems, we can immediately sort them out. It is certainly not this Government's policy in any way to inhibit the effectiveness of the devolved Administrations in trying to promote business in their areas. We work together hand in glove. I remember that at MIPIM, the world's largest property conference, last year, I launched the Scottish capital investment portfolio. We worked closely together on doing so, and we can do so again. That is very important, particularly in the Scottish context, because, if my numbers are still correct, exports as a percentage of GDP in Scotland are only around 20%, whereas for the United Kingdom as a whole the figure is 30%. That shows the importance of helping the Scottish Government to do a better job in promoting Scottish exports, because there is huge capacity there.

1.[*Official Report*, 3 September 2019, Vol. 664, c. 2MC.]

I am proud of what we have done with UK Export Finance. We have doubled its appetite since 2010 and we have revolutionised its performance as a world-leading export credit agency. It now has a capacity of £50 billion and its offer has been extended; it is now available in 62 international currencies, so when support is provided, that can be done in the local currency, thereby reducing risk. That has helped too. We have run it at no cost to the taxpayer, lowered its cost ratio since 2010 and ensured that no UK export fails for lack of finance or insurance. Earlier this year we went further. Now, companies that are not exporters themselves but are part of the supply chain of companies that do export can access UKEF finance too.

We have convened the Board of Trade for the first time in 150 years to promote a culture of exporting and investing, spreading the benefits and prosperity of international trade to every corner of our United Kingdom. Whether I have been in Stirling or Belfast with the Board of Trade, I have been delighted to see the local response and people's enthusiasm for what we are doing at the DIT to promote trade from those areas.

Time has passed, and you would probably like me to bring my remarks to a close, Mr Davies. If I may, I shall continue just briefly. We have created an overseas network of Her Majesty's trade commissioners, the most recent one being for Australasia. There are 10 of them and they have been selected for their expertise in particular markets. They are building our regional export plans and working to secure market access across the globe.

Whether it is on promoting exports with our export strategy or promoting foreign direct investment—for which we remain the No. 1 destination in Europe, well ahead of our competitors; in fact, we are third in the world, behind only the United States and China/Hong Kong—we are determined to go further. And of course in the area of trade policy, there is not only the issue of free trade agreements; my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster was right to say that we should not fetishise them. As our second permanent secretary and chief negotiator has noted, for every one person working on FTAs, we want three or four working on market access.

Therefore, whether it involves opening up Taiwan's pork market, cosmetics in China or lowering duties on Scotch whisky going into Latin American countries, we are, across the piece, upping our game. Having a dedicated trade Department—this might be my last speech while a member of it—was a significant and important step forward, particularly given the growing importance of trade and investment to the prosperity of this country and the world. The Department—with or without me—will continue to be an advocate for an open, rules-based, liberal trading system. It will continue to work to reverse the negative impacts on manufacturing and so much of our other trade and investment performance that happened inevitably—it happened in almost all cases—under the last Labour Government. We must ensure that Labour never comes into government again, and that this Government can go out there and continue to strengthen the DIT and strengthen our prosperity in the world. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster very much for securing the debate today.

10.56 am

Julia Lopez: I thank all hon. Members and the Minister for engaging in this very important debate.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) talked of the vital agricultural interests in his constituency and the freedom that they might have in the opening up of new markets in India, the US and China—a market that is growing particularly rapidly. He says that the sun will not stop shining if we leave the EU, and he is quite right.

The hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) has a notoriously upbeat and sunny disposition. I do not want to be impish by saying that I was very interested to learn of his intense respect for the will of the people, given the simultaneous passion that he expressed for overturning the results of both recent referendums. It is a curious world in which we live.

Scotland will play an even more important role in the future in attracting regional investment and boosting exports of in-demand products such as whisky to growing markets such as China. It would have been helpful to have had a better understanding of how the devolved SNP Government wish fully to participate in what is a very exciting project.

I appreciate that the hon. Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) finds himself within a party that perhaps now welcomes only newspeak from its comrades, but I am fairly certain that my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) is not advocating no deal as his primary objective. I would like to reassure the hon. Gentleman that his dystopian imaginings about the DIT's work and the trade figures are rather wide of the mark. He expressed concern about an absence of green objectives in our trade work. He might be reassured by some of the exciting things that we are doing on green finance initiatives with the likes of Singapore, and might be interested to know about some of the work that we saw with the Select Committee in South Korea—in particular, on renewable energy and how that is helping it to reach its targets.

The Minister reminded us of what trade and investment is all about, which is the delivery of prosperity and prospects to the people whom we represent. On every single investment measure, we lead Europe. We are spreading wealth not just to London and the south-east, but to every region of the UK. My hon. Friend unashamedly peddles optimism, and my goodness this country is ready for it. My constituents and local businesses have so much to offer, and they expect the Government to facilitate their hopes and ambitions—for themselves, yes, but also for our great nation. Let us learn from some of the errors of the past few years, but be grateful for the strong foundation that the DIT has laid and that will allow us to go forward into this new chapter with confidence and energy and find global trade opportunities that deliver for those whom we represent.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered UK trade and investment strategy.

Roadside Recovery Vehicles: Red Lights

11 am

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered roadside recovery vehicles and the use of red lights.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies, and to speak under the watchful eye of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning), who is the chairman of two all-party parliamentary groups looking at this important issue.

In September 2017, a roadside recovery worker and constituent of mine, Steve Godbold, was hit and killed by a lorry on the M25. He was assisting a driver at the side of the road, wearing high visibility clothing and with amber lights flashing on his vehicle when he was struck. This tragedy has caused unthinkable pain to Steve's family and partner Sam Cockerill, while the driver of the broken-down vehicle, Nathan, has suffered with post-traumatic stress disorder after the experience.

Many would have given up after the loss of their beloved, but Sam, who is here in the Gallery today, became a spokesperson for the Campaign for Safer Roadside Rescue and Recovery: a group that has provided a united voice within the roadside recovery industry to lobby both Government and Highways England to improve safety for roadside recovery operators. The campaign is calling for greater recognition of the dangers faced by roadside recovery operators, identifying four key areas that could prevent further fatalities in the future.

The campaign is calling for a halt to the current roll-out of smart motorways, until Highways England can prove they are safe; for the Department for Transport to collect data on the number of accidents specifically involving roadside recovery workers, to provide greater understanding of the problem; and, following the success of the "Slow Down, Move Over UK" campaign, for a change to the highway code that makes clear to road users what to do when approaching a breakdown. This has been implemented in all 50 states in the US, treating drivers who disobey the safety rules of the road the same as drunk or reckless drivers.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady for securing this debate; I spoke to her before it started. Does she agree that roadside recovery workers would be much safer if red lights were used, as opposed to amber ones, given that they portray a greater sense of danger? That might change how drivers react. Pilots of these schemes could be tested in a short space of time, thereby providing the long-term benefits that she and other hon. Members wish to see.

Tracey Crouch: That will be the focus of my speech. There are nearly half a million roadside recovery operators, in a variety of guises, who deserve protection. There are many parts to the wider campaign, but I want to focus on one specific call: to allow the use of red lights by the roadside recovery industry. We are simply asking for recovery operators to be permitted to use prominent red warning beacons while attending accidents and breakdowns on the hard shoulder or on other roads; I know that my

right hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead has particular concerns around countryside roads in his area.

This campaign is supported by the wider industry of both independent firms and nationwide operators such as the RAC and the AA, and I am grateful for their briefings. Evidence given by the AA suggested that although UK motorways are the safest roads to drive on when calculated using serious accidents per billion miles, they are also the most dangerous to work on as a breakdown patrol or vehicle recovery operator; there have been at least three known fatalities of operators in the past 18 months.

There is a firm view within the industry that the use of red lights while attending a breakdown would alter behaviours enough for drivers to become more cautionary in their approach, and there is enough science to back this up. In a previous speech in the House on the wider campaign, I referenced the Rayleigh effect, which means that red can be seen from further away. With significant help from Stephen Westland, a professor of colour science at Leeds University, and Hugh Barton, from Opticonsulting Ltd, I have learned a lot more on this, including regarding the neurological response to red.

Mr Barton helpfully points out that red light as a danger signal can be traced back to the 1820s, when the first passenger trains were signalled using red, green and white flags, which were later replaced by red and green semaphore signals. Red is a useful colour for long-range warning signals, because it suffers from atmospheric scatter to a lesser degree than other colours, due to the effects of Rayleigh and Mie scattering processes: at the limit of visual detection red lights are seen as red, whereas other colours are seen as lights with no specific colour attribute.

Professor Westland provided me with some comments regarding the psychological aspect of red and its association with stop and danger. In a traffic situation, everyone knows that red means stop and danger. He kindly forwarded me an interesting paper in an ergonomics journal, which provided some interesting data on this. In one experiment, for example, the researchers presented words on a screen in one of three colours: red, grey or green. Participants had to categorise the words as being danger words or safety words. The reaction time to identify the words in the danger category was quicker when the words were red than when they were green or grey. The same sort of effect was found with danger symbols rather than words: red danger symbols are more quickly categorised as danger symbols than, say, green danger symbols. In other words, although this is a psychological effect, there are implications for performance. One could rightly surmise that a driver noticing a red light on the hard shoulder would be more likely to slow down than if they saw an orange light, and their reaction times would likely be quicker.

With that science in mind, I ask the Minister to review the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989, which currently prohibit roadside recovery vehicles from using red lights. This change in policy can be easily implemented. Highways England vehicles have recently joined the fire service in being exempt from these regulations via a statutory instrument; they are permitted to use red lights in their regulation of traffic around accidents and other road incidents. The Campaign for Safer Roadside Rescue and Recovery argue that the work that roadside

workers do on the side of the road, whether a motorway or a country lane, is dangerous and ought to receive the same level of protection. I would argue that, too. The issue is not just their safety, but the safety of those they are there to help.

Before I conclude, it would be remiss of me not to mention that one in 12 men and one in 200 women are colour blind. Although the primary purpose of this debate is to call for a change of use from amber to red beacons to protect recovery workers, for some it would make less of a difference. Perhaps part of a review could be to consider how we support colour blind drivers too, perhaps through shaping or flashing techniques within the beacon.

Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. When I was the Minister with this portfolio, sitting where the Minister sits today, one objection to this deregulation, which could save lives, was that the police did not support it. I am sure that my hon. Friend and the Minister have seen the evidence that the police now support this measure, which will save lives.

Tracey Crouch: I agree. Now that the police have lifted that objection, I see absolutely no reason why roadside recovery operators should not have that same level of protection. At the end of the day, they help the police and Highways England to open up the network, so that our roads can continue to operate and provide the great economic value that having an open and flowing network brings to the country. I hope the Minister has seen that evidence suggesting the police have lifted their objection to this and will bear that in mind in his response.

This debate was borne from tragedy, and I pay tribute to Sam for the campaign she continues to champion. This is just one part of the wider campaign but it is also the simplest to achieve. As the baton passes from one Administration to another, and we all consider what we want to be remembered for, maybe this is something—a small thing—that will make an enormous difference in protecting those who come out, rain or shine, when we are at our most vulnerable on the side of the road.

11.7 am

Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): I will only make a short speech. As I mentioned a moment ago, I had the honour and privilege of being the Roads Minister. That portfolio allows the Minister to make a massive difference to people's lives—in this case, to save lives. I held the road safety portfolio as well as the roads portfolio.

The roll-out of smart motorways was an integral part of the previous Government's programme as well as this Government's, but an unintended consequence of some of that has been that some roadside recovery workers have been seriously injured and others have lost their lives. In a parliamentary question to the Department, I asked how many roadside workers had been seriously injured or killed on managed motorways. The answer came back that the Department did not hold that information and that this was a matter for the police. I completely disagree with that. This is a matter of road safety on a managed motorway.

I do not really understand why Highways Agency—now Highways England—workers should be any safer or less safe than roadside recovery workers. In other words, are their lives worth more? Of course not. No one wants to see the people who help us in our daily tasks, whether in commerce or in getting away for the coming recess, become injured. They come to rescue us, just as I did when I was a firefighter in the fire and rescue service. I saw the sorts of work and skills that the recovery industry has when it delivers them at the roadside. It does not matter whether we are in a 44-tonne artic or in my little Morris Minor that comes out of the shed every now and again: when they come out to rescue us, they rescue us, and their lives are as important as anybody else's.

I saw the Minister turn round to his advisers when I suggested that the police had been supportive, based on an evidence session with the all-party parliamentary group. I have submitted a letter to the Secretary of State and had extensive correspondence with him about the matter, so I hope that his thoughts will be reflected in the Minister's reply.

Our suggestion, which I think is picking up credibility in the Department, is that we could pilot something and work it out on the evidence base for what could happen—although it could also be done very quickly by regulation. The vehicles would not be moving with a red light; they would be stationary, which would make it so much safer and much more tangible for the motorist that it is a danger area for them as well as for the people working at the roadside. I had a meeting with the Secretary of State only two days ago and followed it up with letters, which I am sure the Minister has seen.

People in the industry do not want special preference. They just want to be treated exactly the same as any other person working for the Government on the roadside. Their lives and families are just as important as anybody else's.

11.10 am

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Michael Ellis): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) on securing this important debate about roadside recovery vehicles and the use of red flashing lights. I would like to take the opportunity, if I may, to express my sympathy for those affected by the individual, tragic case that she referred to and that provoked the debate. I am also grateful for the intervention and speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning).

I very much admire the work performed by the men and women of the roadside rescue and recovery operations. They provide a crucial service to stranded motorists and motorists in danger, and they do it 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in all weathers including severe weather conditions. As well as providing comfort and relief to those who have broken down and having a substantial positive impact on the individuals they rescue, they support the wider economy by getting goods moving and preventing the build-up of congestion on our very busy road network. A report published by Highways England in 2017 noted that business sectors reliant on the strategic road network contributed more than

[Michael Ellis]

£314 billion to the UK's economy, while current projections suggest that the cost of congestion to the freight industry will be £14 billion in 2040.

It is clear that the work of recovery operators can be hazardous, particularly when they operate on roads with fast traffic, such as motorways and other parts of our strategic road network. It is important that we do all we can to provide a safe environment for operators to work in and for people who use the network to travel through. I am sure it has not gone unnoticed that the United Kingdom has some of the safest roads in the world, but the effect of every death and serious injury on our roads is devastating for the individuals involved and for their families; I absolutely recognise that.

The Government will continue to lead the way in improving road safety. This is a major national issue that demands close co-ordination across government agencies, the devolved Administrations, local government, enforcement authorities and a range of other bodies. We therefore published our road safety statement very recently. The road safety action plan last week outlined no fewer than 74 actions to reduce the number of people killed and injured on our roads.

Tracey Crouch: I have to beg the Minister's forgiveness, because I have not read every detail of the road safety plan, but can he tell me how many of those 74 actions relate to roadside recovery operators?

Michael Ellis: I commend the document to my hon. Friend. I cannot give her the exact number at the moment, but perhaps she will allow me to write to her about it.

Highways England is the Government company charged with operating, maintaining and improving England's strategic road network of motorways and major A roads. It therefore has a key role to play in moving broken-down vehicles to a place of relative safety to await recovery or in closing a lane to make it safe, in exercise of its powers under the Traffic Management Act 2004 to stop and direct traffic.

Sir Mike Penning: I am fascinated to hear that Highways England is now moving vehicles and pulling them off the motorways. When I was the Minister, I asked how many vehicles it moved and the answer was zero, so I do not know quite where the Minister's information is coming from.

Michael Ellis: What I said was that Highways England has a key role to play in moving broken-down vehicles. Of course, it is all part of a team effort, including the blue-light emergency services as well as Highways England, when it comes to closing roads to improve safety after a road traffic collision or other breakdown circumstances.

Highways England is part of the SURVIVE group, which has developed and sponsors a detailed national standard to improve the safety of breakdown operatives, employees and customers during breakdown and recovery operations. Certification to the standard demonstrates that management systems are in place, with procedures established to meet safety standards, legislation and best practice for the industry and help road recovery operatives to carry out safe and rapid recovery of vehicles

with minimal risk. The SURVIVE standard was introduced in 2015 and amended in 2018, and more than 500 organisations are currently accredited to it—a significant achievement that demonstrates real professionalism within the industry, which I congratulate.

The Government also recognise the benefit of improved vehicle construction standards. The road vehicles lighting regulations were amended in 2010 to require all new goods vehicles over 7.5 tonnes, including those used for road recovery purposes, to be fitted with conspicuity markings to the rear and side to illuminate the vehicle at night. Fitting such markings is optional for smaller vehicles, including the smaller recovery vehicles, but vehicles over 7.5 tonnes must have them. That requirement was brought in by this Government in 2010.

Amber warning beacons can be a valuable tool for conveying important information to other road users. The road vehicles lighting regulations restrict the fitting of amber warning beacons to vehicles with a specified purpose—including recovery vehicles, as well as vehicles used for highway maintenance, refuse vehicles and so on. Additional requirements limit the use of amber beacons to specific functions in order to avoid proliferation; for example, recovery vehicles may use the amber warning beacon only when attending an accident or breakdown, or while towing a broken-down vehicle.

Despite these existing measures, I realise that there is a call from the industry for the use of red flashing lights, because it sees added benefit in them. The police and some fire service vehicles are legally permitted to use red flashing lights, but even those blue-light services must use them under additional guidance issued to their trained drivers. Highways England traffic officer vehicles, which patrol our strategic road network of A roads and motorways, are permitted red flashing lights, but only when operating on live carriageways, not on the hard shoulder. I am aware that comparisons are often drawn between the operations of traffic officer vehicles and those of road recovery operators. Both traffic officers and road recovery operators perform incredibly important work, but as we know, recovery operators should not operate in live running lanes. To emphasise an important distinction, Highways England traffic officers should only use red flashing lights when operating in the live lane to control traffic. They, too, should use amber lights when stationary in other situations.

Tracey Crouch: I humbly suggest that after the debate, the Minister looks at some of the additional briefing papers that have been sent to him in advance of it, because the roadside recovery industry is not calling for the use of red lights in live carriageways, nor is it calling for the operation of red lights while its vehicles are moving. It is specifically asking for the use of red lights while stationary, attending a vehicle, because as I pointed out in my speech, the neurological and psychological response to a red light is very different from the response to an amber one. The industry is not calling for anything that is difficult to achieve.

Michael Ellis: I am not suggesting that it is—I know it is not—but I am making an allusion to Highways England traffic officer vehicles and what their rules are, so as to differentiate between the current rules for traffic officer vehicles and those for recovery vehicles.

The evidence that we have is key, and I have noted what my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford has said about the Rayleigh effect and the scientific evidence about colour. Research into the effectiveness of red flashing lights on vehicles was also carried out in 2010 by the respected Transport Research Laboratory for what was then the Highways Agency, in support of its traffic officer services, so some work has been done on this topic in the recent past. In that study, drivers' responses to the display of amber and red lights, both on the hard shoulder and in a live lane, were considered to identify which configuration produced the lowest risk to traffic officers. It concluded that flashing lights may make something more visible by attracting attention, but also that too many lights or lights of too great intensity may cause distraction or obscure pedestrians in or around a stationary vehicle.

Assuming that drivers are paying attention to the lights on a stationary vehicle, it is vital that they identify what the hazard is and what action might be necessary while they still have reasonable time to act. That requires early recognition of whether the hazard is in a live lane or on a hard shoulder. Permitting the wider use of any restricted lighting function, including red flashing lights, needs careful consideration, because the warning message they are intended to give will become diluted if they are used too often. Ultimately, that will be to the disadvantage of those who currently use them.

Sir Mike Penning: I was the Minister in 2010 when that report was done, and I questioned whether it was a defence of the Highways Agency—as it was at the time—or was trying to improve what the regulation was doing all the way through.

I was out on patrol with the police on the M1 only six or seven weeks ago, and the concept that only Highways England traffic officers use their red lights in a live lane is tosh. They were sitting on the hard shoulder with us, and thank goodness they did, because we had some very near misses while we were waiting for a recovery vehicle. Telematics are available, so that could be stopped, and that is exactly what the industry is offering now, but we are not talking about live lanes; we are talking about the hard shoulder, where these people—I am sorry to use emotive language, Mr Davies—are frankly being wiped out. I am sorry, but the Department for Transport is not looking at this with an open mind; I will say that the Secretary of State is, because this debate is completely different from the conversation I had with him.

Michael Ellis: I assure my right hon. Friend that the Department is looking at this with an open mind, as I hope will become clear as I continue my remarks.

Apart from recovery operations, there are many other legitimate reasons for vehicles to operate on the roadside. We have to bear in mind that any move to extend the use of red flashing lights will need to consider those additional purposes and the broader effects. However, I emphasise that I am aware of the work of the all-party parliamentary group for roadside rescue and recovery and the Campaign for Safer Roadside Rescue and Recovery, and the excellent work they have been doing to engage with stakeholders and witnesses from across the industry to develop an evidence base to support the call for a change in regulation that my right hon. and hon. Friends have referred to.

I understand that the APPG's call for evidence resulted in a number of detailed responses, including from the AA and RAC, two of the largest recovery operators in the UK. Responses were also received from the National Police Chiefs Council and several other organisations representing the interests of those involved in the industry and supporting those injured during their work. We will need to properly consult the blue-light emergency services on their views about the use of red lights on recovery vehicles, and I am conscious of the fact that this campaign has attracted the support of many right hon. and hon. Members of this House.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has raised this issue with me, in light of the conversation he had with my right hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead. I have discussed this matter with my officials, and I know that the Secretary of State has raised this point as well. In light of the work by this campaign, by my right hon. and hon. Friends and by the APPG and others, we have asked officials to carry out a review of the available evidence in the context of existing policy on red flashing lights, and seek advice on whether a more flexible approach might be appropriate. I think that is the principal wish of my right hon. and hon. Friends, and it is something that we can agree to. That review is expected to take several months, and it will be done efficiently.

In the meantime, I draw the attention of the House to the measures that recovery operators can already take to improve the conspicuity of their vehicles beyond amber warning beacons, within the existing regulatory framework. Those include the use of retro-reflective materials to increase conspicuity at night or under low-light conditions, and the use of fluorescent materials to improve daytime visibility. It is also possible to use additional rear position lights, brake lights and hazard warning lamps. Work lamps may be used to illuminate the working area for the operator when the vehicle is stationary, and illuminated signs reading, for example, "recovery vehicle" may be used.

In the longer term, the Government recognise the need for better evidence and are currently undertaking a review of the national casualty data that we collect. As part of that review, consideration will be given to the merits of collecting specific casualty data for personnel performing roadside recovery or repair. I heard what my right hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead said at the beginning of this debate, and we will look into that issue.

Sir Mike Penning: I am really pleased that there is going to be a review. Can we wait for the evidence and recommendations of the APPG for roadside rescue and recovery before any decisions are made? There will be lots of evidence in that review.

Michael Ellis: I would certainly expect, and will require, that my officials have the fullest possible reference to the work of the APPG on this subject.

My Department has awarded the RAC Foundation almost half a million pounds to pilot new ways of investigating road crashes. It will trial a different approach to identifying and understanding common themes and patterns that result in death and injury on the public highway, and can help to shape future policy.

[Michael Ellis]

I believe that operators using the broad range of measures available to them and following the best practice guidance set out by the SURVIVE group should be able to recover stranded vehicles in relative safety. However, as I have mentioned, the Department for Transport is very conscious of the excellent work that that group does. We will be reviewing this issue over the coming months, and will undertake a review of existing policy and report back.

Question put and agreed to.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended.

Child Maintenance Service

[SIR EDWARD LEIGH *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the effectiveness of the Child Maintenance Service.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank everyone for attending, and the House of Commons Library and the digital engagement team for their contributions to the debate.

Members are likely all aware that the Child Maintenance Service, which administers the 2012 child maintenance scheme, is frequently raised by various means in this place. This year alone, up until the end of last week, 28 cross-party MPs, including me, have asked a total of 109 parliamentary questions directly related to child maintenance. On the Floor of the House, three MPs have suggested holding a debate. All those instances correlate to the processes and the performance of the Child Maintenance Service, which is failing many constituents across the British Isles—both paying and receiving parents.

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): Order. Could you speak a bit louder, please? The acoustics are not very good in here.

Martyn Day: No problem—I appreciate that.

The last request for a debate on improving the Child Maintenance Service was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley), who secured an Adjournment debate on the Child Maintenance Service some 20 months ago, to highlight concerns about the inadequacies of the service that she had become aware of through her constituency work. Those concerns include the struggles and inconsistencies faced by constituents dealing with the Child Maintenance Service, as well as sensitive safety issues faced by domestic abuse survivors.

I commend my hon. Friend's efforts to remove the 4% charge that parents with care who have survived domestic abuse have to pay when they are left with no option but to use the collect and pay service. Besides effectively meaning that 4% of children's maintenance entitlement goes to the Treasury, it is also a means for an abusive paying parent to perpetuate their control over the receiving parent, thereby continuing the cycle of abuse. As my hon. Friend highlighted in November 2017, it is commonly known that one of the biggest impediments to domestic abuse survivors achieving independence from the abusive relationship relates to financial control.

All those months ago, the Minister responding to my hon. Friend's debate, the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), advised that the Government aimed "to take immediate action to re-establish compliance wherever a parent fails to pay what they owe"

and that one of their priorities was ensuring that action was taken

"to maintain compliance in the statutory scheme, so that...children can benefit from maintenance payments."—[*Official Report*, 16 November 2017; Vol. 631, c. 701-704.]

It will shortly become evident that that prioritisation is not happening, certainly in the cases that I will raise.

Another way the Child Maintenance Service has been raised is through a private Member's Bill sponsored by my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows). The Child Maintenance Bill aims to remove certain fees charged by the Child Maintenance Service, and to make provisions for child maintenance payment calculations. The Bill was read the First time on 6 November last year, but still awaits its Second Reading. Perhaps the time has come for it to make some progress.

Furthermore, just last month the Child Support (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2019, which amend child maintenance legislation to enable the delivery of the child maintenance compliance and arrears strategy, were approved in the House. The then Minister, who is also present today, announced that the Child Maintenance Service was working well, and pointed to the

"tough new sanctions for those who evade their responsibilities".—*[Official Report, 11 June 2019; Vol. 661, c. 583.]*

However, I called for today's debate because, as its regular appearances in parliamentary matters, which I have just highlighted, clearly show, the Child Maintenance Service might be working well for some but is certainly not working well for all. The debate requests that relate in particular to the processes and performance of the Child Maintenance Service show that many constituents across the British Isles, both paying and receiving parents, are being let down by the current system.

I warmly welcome the introduction of tough new sanctions for those who evade their parental responsibilities, but if the enforcement actions are not applied they are a blunt tool that does nothing to encourage paying parents to meet their obligations. We must not see a repeat of the National Audit Office report of March 2017, which noted that, compared with 2012-13, in 2015-16 there had been, with regard to the use of some types of collection and enforcement action in respect of arrears due for the 1993 and 2003 schemes, a 69% decrease in the use of deductions from earnings orders; a 73% decrease in bailiff referrals; a 77% decrease in liability orders, which allow enforcement powers to be used; and a 98% decrease in prosecutions.

Today's debate will consider the difficulties faced by so many of our constituents and the reasons why the Child Maintenance Service is failing them. In doing so, our discussions will hopefully also consider what can be done to remedy those failings, so that all children can benefit from receiving maintenance payments that are consistent and compatible with the paying parent's income level.

In my constituency alone, I have been contacted by 55 people who have essentially reached crisis point due to the treatment that they have received because of the Child Maintenance Service procedures. Those 55 cases represent the tip of the iceberg in my opinion. It has an impact across extended families as well. A father of one parent with care felt compelled to speak to me independently to describe the financial and emotional devastation that his daughter and grandchildren were experiencing because the paying parent was doing everything in his power to dodge his responsibilities.

I will momentarily discuss that case in more detail, and others in my constituency, but there must be a fundamental deficit in any system that allows that to happen. We must do all that we can to address that deficiency. The numbers that I am seeing suggest hundreds

of detrimentally affected family members in my constituency alone, and tens of thousands across the UK. Clearly, the ineffectiveness of the Child Maintenance Service has a negative impact on a significant number of people.

That is certainly supported by the nearly 1,000 people who responded to the House of Commons Facebook post and the Mumsnet thread that invited comments ahead of the debate. I thank each and every person who made the effort to share their experiences on those forums—many of them were quite traumatic tales. Unfortunately, time limitations restrict me from disseminating individual accounts, although I will highlight the stories of my constituents, which mirror many of the issues raised on those forums. However, I can state that almost none of the paying and receiving parents who responded had had a positive experience in dealing with the Child Maintenance Service. Recurring themes included problems arising from payments being calculated on gross income and on incorrect and out-of-date information, and how calculations result in poverty and debt, which lead to mental health impairment and even suicidal tendencies. Additionally, users experience inconsistent information and standards of service.

My constituent Susie first approached me nearly four years ago, in September 2015, after the father of her children moved to self-employed status and dramatically decreased the maintenance he paid for his children's upkeep. Indeed, during the non-resident parent's change of employment status he paid nothing towards his children's upkeep for almost a year. Susie suspected that he was not being truthful about his declared earnings, as they did not equate with the lifestyle he enjoyed. She approached the Child Maintenance Service to investigate but was duly advised to contact Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, which in turn told her to contact a private investigator—an unlikely financial priority when someone is struggling to provide for their children. HMRC procedures are arguably another matter for debate in this place, but that will have to wait for another day.

Before the 2012 child maintenance scheme was introduced, the resident parent could apply for a variation if a non-resident parent had either a lifestyle inconsistent with their income or assets of more than £65,000. In May 2017, the Work and Pensions Committee called for those provisions for parents to challenge child maintenance awards on the grounds of assets and lifestyle inconsistent with income to be reinstated—a call that I reiterate and support—and two private Members' Bills have been introduced since April 2017 that have, thus far unsuccessfully, sought to implement such a change. However, although the Government's position is that they have

"no plans to reintroduce this provision",

they have, since December 2018, introduced a new notional income criterion that they say would

"be useful in a range of scenarios including where we believe paying parents have made an effort to use complex financial arrangements to evade their responsibility."

At least one step has therefore been made in tackling that type of liability dodging, but it needs decisive action to back it up, not the decrease in action that I have witnessed.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for setting out the issues so clearly. I have a constituency case at the moment in which the absent father's business is clearly

[Gavin Newlands]

doing very well—we just have to look at his Facebook page to see how much business is coming his way—yet his employer and the director of his business, who happens to be his mum, claims that the business has no income at all. That is not an uncommon situation. Does my hon. Friend agree that more has to be done to punish those who would try to get round the current system to get out of paying for their own children?

Martyn Day: I agree with everything my hon. Friend says. That type of scenario is one of the recurring themes that I have seen repeatedly in the 55 cases that my office is dealing with.

After five months and numerous interventions, it was eventually accepted by the Department for Work and Pensions' financial investigations unit that the paying parent did have additional unreported income, yet my constituent's hardships continued when she was asked to complete a variation form that would start an investigation, as there had been no record of contact before 12 February 2016. My office forwarded a complaint that was finally responded to 10 months later, in December 2016.

Six months after that, Susie found herself in a similar situation and had to make another formal complaint to the Child Maintenance Service because of its inefficiency, which resulted in a second conciliatory payment being made to her. Then, in October 2017, she won an appeal that the paying parent had raised, and wrote to the Child Maintenance Service with some queries about the award. However, despite numerous calls and letters, she received no response until January 2018, after seeking my intervention again.

I could continue to relay the consistent and ceaseless catalogue of errors that constitutes Susie's case; suffice it to say that, currently, the paying parent has raised yet another appeal, while Susie is still waiting to receive the award from the first tribunal and has had to make another formal complaint, due to the Child Maintenance Service again ignoring her correspondence and thereby not complying with its own guidelines. Four years down the line, and around 90 recorded interventions on my constituent's case later, there is no conclusive resolution to her difficulties.

Despite the availability of a spectrum of collection actions and enforcement powers to collect arrears, they are seldom used. Indeed, the single parent charity Gingerbread has contended that there can be

“a lot of prevarication and foot dragging”

before the CMS uses its powers to collect arrears; the Work and Pensions Committee said in May 2017 that the data published by the Child Maintenance Service

“reinforced the impression provided by stakeholders that the CMS is reluctant to use its enforcement powers.”

Sadly, Susie's is not an isolated case. Another constituent, Anne-Marie, contacted me last August after enduring three years with no financial support from her child's father. In this case, the paying parent had been so unco-operative with the Child Maintenance Service that he had been put on a deductions from earnings order, where his employer was obliged to make maintenance payments directly from his wages to the Child Maintenance Service. However, to avoid the 20% charge that that

method of payment incurred, the paying parent requested to go on to the direct pay system, cutting out both his employer and the Child Maintenance Service, and leaving the receiving parent dependent on his sense of fairness. Without my constituent's permission, his request was granted.

Anne-Marie eventually received an apology from the Child Maintenance Service for doing that, but the admission of regret did not prevent her difficulties from escalating. The Child Maintenance Service did not tell the paying parent's employer that it had changed the payment method, resulting in another payment being sent to it that it refused to pass on to the receiving parent. By August, when Anne-Marie contacted me, she had not received any child maintenance for nearly six months and that continued, despite the deductions from earnings order being reinstated, for another four months. By the time she finally received a payment, nearly 10 months had passed.

The reinstated payments were short-lived and they lapsed again after a payment on 25 January 2019. Instead of the service complying with the evidence given by the DWP to the Work and Pensions Committee in 2016 and 2017 that

“all cases move across to enforcement immediately after the first missed payment was missed”,

Anne-Marie had to contact the service herself on 4 March. She discovered that, once again, no action had been taken. On 11 March, she wrote to me again, explaining the reality of her frustrations. I quote from her correspondence:

“I am finding it difficult to get in constant contact with them as I am on hold for at least 20 minutes before I even get through to someone then I need to explain the whole case to a stranger which then takes at least 30/45 mins. I cannot always do this during my work time and after work they are reduced to skeleton staff at CMS and are unable to help. I am at my wits' end and do not know how I can progress with this.”

This was a common sentiment in many of the cases.

One of my staff members contacted the Child Maintenance Service on 26 April to try to understand the failings in this case. When she asked why immediate action was not being taken when the deductions from earnings order was not being complied with, she was told that although the CMS is alerted as soon as a payment is missed, it does not have the resources—the staff—to deal with it immediately, as the staff work chronologically. When she further enquired why no enforcement action had been taken against the employer, despite it not complying three times, she was told that any court action raised is stopped if there is subsequently compliance, which means the whole cycle has to start again if the employer makes another payment and then it stops again. It is a constant stop/start process. My staff member was ultimately advised that the procedures for enforcing the payment of arrears in child maintenance were not being adhered to because the operational powers laid out in legislation fall short in practice.

Speaking to Anne-Marie again on 10 July revealed that, after all this time and despite my involvement, things have still not improved for her. That is hardly surprising. During the Adjournment debate secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Lanark and Hamilton East, the Minister said:

“We are continuing to increase the operational resources allocated to enforcement, with 290 full-time enforcement case managers in place as of September 2017.”—[*Official Report*, 16 November 2017; Vol. 631, c. 701.]

In answer to a written parliamentary question, I was advised last week that the overall head count of part-time and full-time enforcement case managers on 30 June 2019 equated to an overall full-time equivalent resource of 220.91, with 104 being employed full time. Clearly, operational resources have not been increased; they have actually decreased. It is therefore also unsurprising that Department for Work and Pensions figures show that arrears owed in respect of child maintenance rose by more than £7 million in just three months, between December 2018 and March 2019.

It is not only the receiving parents who are being failed by the Child Maintenance Service. One of my constituents, Craig, had a shortfall of direct payments due to work circumstances. The shortfall amounted to about £90, which he paid after the Child Maintenance Service contacted him. He contacted me in February, because even though he provided proof of payment to the CMS several times, it continued to arrest his wages without any warning. Three weeks later, the Child Maintenance Service found the evidence that Craig had in fact paid the outstanding amount that he had been contacted about. However, he was not refunded the 20% charge that had been incurred, or even offered an apology.

It has been well documented that the 2012 child maintenance scheme was designed to encourage parents to work together following separation and, where possible, make private, family-based arrangements for the child. That premise was reiterated in the Commons Chamber when the statutory instrument to the child support regulations was commended to the House last month. Yet, although both Craig and the receiving parent in this case agreed that direct pay would work best for them, that option was not facilitated by the Child Maintenance Service.

On 6 March, a payment breakdown was requested to clarify what payments were to be paid and when they were to be expected and, up until yesterday, that had still not been received. Craig's experience has been that he was not listened to and was, in fact, harassed; it made him feel that the system was biased against the paying parent. That feeling has been echoed in correspondence that I have received over the last four days from people in other constituencies all over the British Isles—one of whom actually said that the Child Maintenance Service

“encourages parental alienation and assists financial abuse and coercive control.”

I find it deeply regrettable that the situations I have highlighted here today, and those I have very recently become aware of but have been unable to highlight due to time constraints, indicate that the Child Maintenance Service is not fulfilling its charter commitments to keep the interests of children at the heart of everything it does, by being responsive, reliable and respectful of the best ways to manage individual cases.

In each of the three constituency cases that I have highlighted, and in others beyond, the lack of communication between the Child Maintenance Service and the paying and receiving parents has been a significant factor. That could be so easily remedied, yet would be an important amelioration for the service users. I hope the Minister will take that on board.

2.49 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. For the past four to five years, I have been the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on alternative dispute resolution. I am also an associate of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators, with a professional interest in mediation. I pay special tribute to all those who carry out mediation in the difficult circumstances of a family break-up. It is far better for parents to come to their own arrangements than have a one-size-fits-all approach imposed on them. I have seen that in my professional and personal experience.

The Child Maintenance Service sets out a process for reaching an amicable agreement. It is not a naive, buddy-buddy approach for trying to get people to work together. It recognises that there are fundamental differences and difficulties that have arisen as a result of the break-up of a marriage. It encourages civility in the way people address each other and take forward their discussions, which leaves the CMS to deal with the really difficult cases—the ones in which there is a tremendous amount of acrimony. Indeed, I would suggest that most cases we face, and the cases that the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) has described, fall into the category of difficult cases that do not lend themselves to amicable agreement.

Despite the times we live in, we recognise that it is usually the mother who has custody of the children, but that is not always the case. Fathers can face crisis because their circumstances have changed. However, each case is unique and takes time to work out. To go back to what I said earlier, they cannot face a one-size-fits-all approach. All such cases are emotionally charged—they have to be, given the circumstances in which they occur. When they are emotionally charged, there is enormous potential for complaints. I have come across many mistakes made by the CMS that have left people with very little disposable income.

Under the previous Secretary of State or the one before her, I put forward a complete list of things in the benefits system and CMS—not to complain about them, but to help her focus on how to improve them. It is a great shame that nothing has come of them. If I forward to the Minister the list of things that I had already forwarded to the Secretary of State, will he take them up to ensure that we can deal with these problems as we go along?

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that on many occasions—certainly in my constituency case load—the cases are primarily about a change in circumstances that has been notified to the Child Maintenance Service, but for some reason the notification has not been acknowledged and acted on? It is only months later, after a lot of trauma and difficulty, that it is rectified. It could all too easily have been resolved if it had been investigated at the time when the information was forwarded.

John Howell: The hon. Gentleman makes a perfectly legitimate case for the sort of example that he gives. I agree that speed is of the essence in dealing with these things, but the CMS has simply brushed over some cases. The system has not been fully explained to either party so that they understand exactly what will happen, what their rights are, and how they can deal with the case.

[John Howell]

In my experience, it is also true that many of the individuals involved in these difficult cases have not had explained to them in detail what information is required of them. There is a tremendous amount of going back to the beginning and helping people through this process.

The CMS has plenty of powers to ensure that people do not disguise their true income, and that we fully take into account unearned income—for example, income from property and land. The CMS has the power to remove passports, to cope with the situation in which an errant former spouse might have gone off to sun himself on the beaches of Monte Carlo and is not paying his child maintenance.

This whole situation is quite new, and we need to wait a little time to allow it to work itself out, so that we can see whether the CMS can be made to work better. However, it is showing itself to be slow and, as the hon. Gentleman described, failing to take action when cases have been brought before it. That means one thing: it is not the other parent, but the child, who loses out. That should be at the centre of all our thoughts and all that we are trying to do with the CMS.

2.56 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir Edward. I congratulate the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) on securing this important debate, and on his comprehensive introduction to the subject. Like him and other hon. Members, I receive many complaints about the Child Maintenance Service. It is one of the constant themes in constituency surgeries—so much so that I recently took the opportunity in business questions to call for a debate on whether the service is meeting expectations. In my view, it often falls short. Following that request, the Minister's predecessor invited me to come and meet him—to his credit, he took an active interest in the issues I raised, and I was impressed by his commitment to refine and update the system. It is true that there is a very difficult balance to be struck, and there are always examples of where the system is not working, so I welcome the opportunity to raise certain issues.

My constituents feel that the system is not doing as well as it could do. It is no exaggeration to say that the issues I will raise are matters that my caseworker and I were progressing through only last Friday. It seems to be a common theme that issues arise very frequently. It is not good enough, for a service that is supposed to support vulnerable people at their time of need. In an ideal world we would not need such a service because parents could reach an agreement between themselves, with no third-party involvement, and stick to those arrangements. However, we do not live in an ideal world, and it is quite often necessary for the Child Maintenance Service to get involved. It hopefully ensures, at least in theory, that the parents contribute to the cost of bringing up their children after a relationship has broken down.

Meeting the needs of children should be the most important thing. The reality is that child maintenance is a vital source of income for many families, especially those on low incomes. Gingerbread reports that child maintenance lifts a fifth of low-income, single-parent

families out of poverty, so we cannot underestimate the impact that a good system has on improving children's lives.

It is deeply concerning that we have several cases of non-payment at the moment. Of course, constituents do not come and see us to say that the payments are all going through smoothly. I am sure that hon. Members have very similar experiences—I am particularly talking about cases in which the paying parent has been on the collect and pay service, but after six months of compliance they request a move to direct pay, to avoid the fees that the collect and pay service incurs. Unfortunately, we often find that payments are not received once the paying parent has moved back to direct pay, leaving the receiving parent having to chase the matter through the Child Maintenance Service until it refers the case back again to collect and pay. That whole process can often result in several months of no maintenance payments being received; obviously, that can leave parents financially vulnerable. That is not just the case for my constituents; Gingerbread said in its survey that receiving parents are often forced into lengthy, time-consuming efforts to recover late payments.

Much more consideration should be given to the history of payments before it is agreed that someone can leave the collect and pay service. A history of many years of non-payment or late payments should not be disregarded just because of six months of compliance where compulsion is involved. Non-payment leads to arrears, which in the worst case can run to thousands of pounds and can add additional difficulties in getting regular payments made on time.

Although the Government have introduced measures to improve enforcement and collection of arrears, I am concerned that the level of arrears is creeping up. The lack of effective enforcement could be a cause, which would not surprise me since some of my constituents feel that the Child Maintenance System is often more concerned about meeting the priorities of the paying parent than the receiving parent. It seems to take the view that some payment is better than no payment at all, and it does not want to push the paying parent too hard for fear of losing everything. I understand that anxiety, but it can be interpreted as a desire to limit the number of cases administered through the collect and pay service. That view is bolstered by the Department's evidence to the Select Committee on Work and Pensions in 2017, in which it said that it knew that some parents were staying in an ineffective direct pay arrangement rather than moving to collect and pay.

The 25% threshold for changes in income that has to be reached before payments are recalculated is artificially high. If someone gets an annual cost-of-living pay rise each year, it could be a decade before a recalculation is needed.

My constituents are experiencing unreasonably delays with the complaints resolution team. In one case, we have been waiting two months for a response from the Child Maintenance Service. Despite regular chasing in another case, we have been waiting three months for a decision on reimbursement that was referred to the service by the Minister's predecessor some time ago. Such long delays cause unnecessary emotional and financial stress, leaving the parent without the day-to-day support that they are trying to recover.

Finally, I would like to say a little about my caseworkers. We all benefit from the hard work of caseworkers, and I pay tribute to those who, day in, day out, work very hard for the people for Ellesmere Port and Neston. When they raise child maintenance issues, they usually use the MP correspondence unit in the first instance. However, there are occasions when the issue is more about the way the legislation works. In that case, it is appropriate for me to raise those matters with the Minister directly. However, my caseworkers find that even in those cases, they are sometimes referred to the director of the Child Maintenance Group rather than the Minister. That leads me to question whether the Minister sees the issues raised. I hope that the Minister, if he remains the Minister—he could be elevated to much-deserved higher office very shortly—will investigate those concerns.

I should make it clear that the Child Maintenance Service is operating far more effectively than the Child Support Agency did. I have an example of how poor the old system was. A constituent's income had significantly increased but the CSA did not carry out any recalculation, so he assumed that he did not need to increase his maintenance payments. When his son reached 18 and his case was closed, it decided to recalculate and found that he owed £17,000. He clearly owed that money, but because the system did not work properly, he is now paying his ex-wife a considerable amount every month for the care of his son who is now an adult and living with him. That is an absurd situation, which I hope we will not see under the new regime.

With child benefit and child tax credits frozen since 2016, child poverty on the rise and nearly half of all children in lone-parent families in poverty, it is vital that we get this right. The Child Maintenance Service must deliver, and it must do so promptly, reasonably and fairly.

3.4 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): It is a pleasure, as always, to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) on securing this important and timely debate.

My constituents continue to bring me their concerns and issues with the Child Maintenance Service. I am grateful for the way that my exceptionally capable casework team at Borestone Crescent in Stirling, Rachel Nunn and Euan Blockley, deal with them. There are undoubtedly good people at the Child Maintenance Service—I pay tribute to them for their hard work and service—but I am concerned about what my constituents and my caseworkers tell me when they come to my office to get help.

People understandably already feel fraught and upset—they are in a situation that they never anticipated, and feel vulnerable and sometimes deeply hurt and angry. That means that communication on these sensitive matters must be clear and understandable. Too many vulnerable people caring for children feel that the system is less than transparent and too confusing. Sometimes, for good reason, they feel lost or trapped in a process they do not fully understand, and they are frustrated and upset.

The good people at the CMS often deal with very sensitive cases; I can only imagine how hard it is. That said, I know too many constituents who feel they have been treated unfairly—being left hanging on the phone

for ages, as has been mentioned; not being able to speak to the relevant people despite repeated attempts to contact them directly; being accused of lying and cheating. I am not saying those cases are typical—the Minister knows that—but they are the examples that are brought to my attention by my constituents, who have contacted me because they feel they are being failed by the CMS in some respect. I want to give them a voice.

I mentioned clarity of communication. When my constituents come to see me and my caseworkers, they usually bring the correspondence they have received from the CMS. The feedback I get, and my own experience, is that those letters are hard to read and even harder to understand. Notices of changes to payments come with little or no explanation. That is upsetting to people who already feel very insecure. There is the matter of backdated payments, which was also touched on. Sometimes it is just not clear to my constituents how a calculation has been made. People feel confused about what they are reading, but there are no immediate answers because communication with the CMS is not easy.

There is too often a problem with conflicting advice. My constituents say that they are told one thing on one day by one person they speak to at the CMS, and something different the next day when they speak to someone else. That concerns me, as I know it will be the Minister. Quite rightly, the CMS tries to get parents to sort things out between themselves—that is a good principle—but when that fails, the CMS needs to take prompt action to give support to families with children. It is often slow, for some unfathomable reason, to escalate its support and to use collect and pay.

I am sure the Minister has heard this many times before, probably from me: I understand the 20% collection fee on the paying parent, but I still do not understand why the receiving parent should have to pay 4% on an ongoing basis. I can fully understand the principle of encouraging both parents to sort things out for themselves, but on an ongoing basis, where there is obfuscation on the part of the paying parent and where the receiving parent most often needs every penny they can get their hands on, why should they have to go on paying a fee on what is collected for their children?

I acknowledge the challenges of collection. There are challenges when the paying parent's income is not evident or is disguised or hidden, or the person is self-employed, and through some invisible support they declare little or no net income year upon year, or they keep changing jobs and cannot be tracked down. But what difference have the measures announced a year ago made to the performance of the CMS in limiting child maintenance avoidance? What has been the impact, for example, of beefing up the financial investigation unit at the DWP? Is the Minister, a man I greatly admire and respect, satisfied that the current set of enforcement powers is adequate? Is it now beyond question in the Minister's mind—because the question arises in other people's minds—that the CMS is fit for purpose? May I seek assurances in respect to the actual day-to-day delivery of the CMS client services? I want to be specific about this.

First, does the client system that the CMS uses flag outstanding action points? My constituents have to go through the whole story every time they phone up. Why does not the system alert the CMS managers when actions and feedback are due to go to clients? In my experience,

[Stephen Kerr]

in just about every setting, too much communication is a bad thing. Secondly, is there a standard for answering calls and speaking to clients? Constituents tell me that they wait a very long time to get a call answered and then are kept waiting before they can speak to the relevant contact. Cutting waiting times on the phone alone will reduce the levels of frustration that people who need the help of the CMS experience.

Finally, is there a searchable system of frequently asked questions that CMS managers and officers can use to answer routine questions, so that the advice is not only correct every time, but consistent? Consistency in advice to vulnerable people is an undoubted virtue, and greatly desirable. We have put in place a system because it is essential for the sake of the people whom we should keep in focus—the children in families that have split up. It is no fault of the child if their parents decide to end their relationship. We should therefore move heaven and earth to support the welfare of our children. In most cases people will stand up to their responsibility and provide for their children, but where they do not, we must take all steps to see that support is paid. We have a duty to get that right and to be as fair as possible. I look forward to hearing the Minister's reply.

3.12 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) for setting the scene so well, with lots of detail. The thrust of the issue is this: no matter what constituency we hail from, I can guarantee that questions have been raised over the effectiveness of the Child Maintenance Service. Each of us who has spoken so far, and the others who will speak after, will reinforce that.

On the news I have read numerous reports of single parents being left with thousands of pounds of debt because of the loopholes that the scheme is cluttered with. In my own office, not a month goes by without several Child Maintenance Service cases, and each one is unbelievably annoying and frustrating for my staff and me. They are even more frustrating for those trying to get the money that they are owed. There are issues with non-resident parents finding a loophole through being self-employed.

The biggest issue is with the self-employed. My hon. Friend the Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) referred to how their circumstances change. I will give a couple of examples, without mentioning any names. When we understand the resources that somebody had three months ago and what they suddenly have today or maybe a year later, we wonder what happened. Did they lose it all on the horses? Where did it go? I am talking about people who own properties and cars and so on. There are many such cases because of the complicated financial arrangements required, which raises the issue of the effectiveness of the Child Maintenance Service alone. We know that the Minister is really interested in his subject matter and is committed to what he does. I appreciate that, but there needs to be change, especially for the self-employed.

My constituents tell me that another problem is that when they phone up the Child Maintenance Service, they get a different person every time and have to tell their story again. There must be a methodology.

I understand that there is a high turnover of staff in the Child Maintenance Service, probably because of the complications of the job. Some people stay, but not enough. I suspect that that is because of their knowledge of the subject. Despite the legal requirement for the ex-partner to help cover the expenses of the single parent, the majority of whom—not all—are women, it has been reported that that is not the case. According to a National Audit Office report in 2017, the DWP acknowledged that 75% of alleged arrears were impossible to collect. Are they impossible to collect? Perhaps some might be. It is possible that people could be out of work or could be ill, but I suggest they are trying to avoid making their child maintenance payments.

Some figures show that the DWP does not track compliance for the monthly payment scheme for seven in 10 cases. With respect, I say to the Minister that tracking compliance seems elementary for the DWP and should be done without any nudging or requests from anyone in this debate today. Clearly, the Child Maintenance Service has far to go before we can extol the work being done. I am also mindful of the civil servants working in one of the most highly pressured situations. They do their best, but are tied by what it is becoming clear to me is ineffective legislation and regulation. Some of the staff members tell me that we need better legislation, better regulation and resources as well. If that is the case, let us see whether we can do that.

Figures from UK law firm Slater and Gordon have identified that 11% of mothers have been forced to depend on food banks to provide food for their children. This is factual. It is a fact in my constituency and is a fact for the mothers as well. We have food banks in my constituency of Strangford. I have seen the mothers come in. A self-employed person who has a fairly high standard of living has left the mother with the children, and with the mortgage as well, because they have walked off and left it. They probably had a joint credit card and the male partner has run up the debt. I must be careful with my language and remember we are in Westminster Hall in the House of Commons. They have cleared off—I was thinking of another word, but I cannot use it—and left the credit card debt for the mother to find. It makes me, and I suspect others, very angry. The aim of the scheme was to ensure that that did not happen, and it is very sad that some parents—I stress the word “some”—will not play their part in feeding their family after they have left the home.

Other husbands who have left their wives have made payments voluntarily, so some people do the right thing, but then we come to cases such as the one I had in the office a month ago. The guy had multiple properties and a six-figure sum in the bank, and all of a sudden, within less than nine months or thereabouts, it was all away. Where has it gone? Why are the wife and the children not being looked after when clearly there were resources there? Again, circumstances change. He moves house and it seems to be a game of cat and mouse to try to get him, but it goes on and on.

Department for Work and Pensions figures show that CMS arrears rose in the three months between December and March by £7.4 million. Clearly, the DWP is not getting the money that it should. If the figures rise, it tells me that more cases are coming in, but it also tells me that the DWP is not being effective. The problem is not getting better or being fixed, which is why I support

this matter being discussed in this House today and the call for action to be taken. At the end of the day—the Members who spoke before mentioned this; this is the real issue for me—it is the children who miss out, caught in the middle of this mess. It is grossly unfair. They deserve better, and it is up to us as Members of Parliament, and I gently say to the Minister it is up to the DWP, to ensure that they are given better. Those poor children should not have their parents turning to food banks to feed them when there is a parent in work, who should be doing the right thing by them. The system needs to be either reformed or completely reworked.

I have given examples, and there are others, with people who drive around in flashy cars. I know how the system works, and it is possible; but I will say this: it takes diesel or petrol to fill the car up. If someone is living in a fancy house, whether rented or not, and is going out to dinner at least twice a week, that is an over-indulgent lifestyle if there is an ex-wife down the road with children who is not getting the money. Those are the things in the stories I am told, and sometimes I see such things from people I know, never mind anyone else. I am pleased that the majority of people make their commitment and pay their money. There is another example fresh in my mind, concerning a guy who had a very successful business. He and his wife had parted company; it was not her fault, by the way. He decided one day to close the business, and had no resources. Yet he left her with a debt and the children to feed. People sometimes engineer circumstances to ensure that they do not have to make any payment.

The figures I referred to are outrageous. It is pretty clear from them that the CMS is not as effective as it could be. That is no fault of the staff. According to what they tell me, there is a need for better legislation, regulation and resources. The hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk mentioned someone being told to hire a detective to do a private investigation and to come back with the details. I know that it takes time to get together the detail and information, especially if someone is deliberately trying to avoid paying for their children. I know how difficult it becomes, but I stress that it is the children who miss out.

If not for the sake of the single parents out there, act for the sake of the children. The least that they deserve is a system that ensures their parents get the money they are entitled to, to feed and water them, and look after them. The cases of missed payments and the lack of action from the CMS need to disappear. We need a better system and a better way of handling things, before the next batch of children reach their teens and look back to see that their mothers have slogged and sacrificed and never got a penny of help. It is not only figures in a bank account that we are discussing; it is the quality of lives of children in the UK. Change is needed to get things right and make people accountable for their children, as they should be. As to those who deliberately try to avoid paying, we must catch them and make them accountable.

3.22 pm

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) on securing this important debate.

The question of the effectiveness of the CMS is one that my team and I frequently discuss in the office, after yet another case is brought forward. I suspect that all of us in the Chamber could have used up 90 minutes ourselves, talking about our experience. I am grateful that we have the opportunity to air some of the issues today. I want to focus on two cases that my office has been dealing with that sum up the issues that both paying and receiving parents often face.

One case that I have been working on for a long time, of which the Minister is aware, concerns a paying parent who has gone through much adversity throughout his life. Following the breakdown of the relationship, the receiving parent took the case to the CMS, which contacted HMRC and obtained the most recent income information from 2015. My constituent at that time had a well-paid job, so the maintenance calculation was substantial, but he had left that employment in the previous tax year and, combined with the breakdown of his relationship and the sudden death of his brother, who was killed in a hit and run, he struggled to cope mentally. Nevertheless, the maintenance calculation would obviously remain until he could prove that he no longer earned that income. He phoned up many times to start the process but could never follow it through because of a chaotic lifestyle and deteriorating mental health. He frequently went AWOL and would be uncontactable even by his family, who were having to help him with his rent and bills to try to get him back on his feet.

My constituent found the CMS unapproachable and difficult, and simply could not deal with the situation he was in. He did what many people do when they feel that they are at the bottom of a rut in their lives, and shut the whole situation out, not responding to or even opening letters. Despite a P60 the following tax year proving that he did not earn anywhere near the income on which the maintenance was based, the CMS refused to reconsider the decision. The paying parent was out of time to appeal, because he lacked the knowledge, capacity or support to do so, and is now thousands of pounds in arrears that are entirely incorrect, based on the CMS's rules, and completely unpayable, owing to the dramatic decline in his income.

Of course, MPs frequently see receiving parents who have an incredibly difficult time getting the money they are owed. Recently, a receiving parent asked the CMS for a variation, as their ex-partner was earning about £100,000 per annum. As is common for someone on such an income, that paying parent had a rather good accountant and was able to disclose to the CMS an income of less than £400 per week—a completely bogus figure. The maintenance calculation was minuscule as a result. Other receiving parents have highlighted issues with their former partner diverting money into pension schemes and other arrangements, to reduce their income and hence their maintenance contributions.

While the CMS is there to ensure that paying parents pay their liabilities, it should have a responsibility to every person involved in the claim—the parent who is paying maintenance but in many cases is unable even to see their own child; the receiving parent who has lost a household income and is supporting a child, often on their own; and of course the child or children at the heart of the whole thing, whose family has broken down and who may now find themselves at the centre of an angry battle between their parents over maintenance.

[Paul Masterton]

It is not right that some of our constituents are paying wrong amounts and incorrect arrears, and it is certainly not right that parents are not getting the money they are entitled to and are left struggling because of loopholes. The CMS has an incredibly difficult task, but while things have undoubtedly got better than they were under its predecessor organisation, it is not in my experience effective in handling particularly difficult or complex cases.

Relationship breakdowns are never easy on anyone, so it is essential to have a functional system, with an understanding that it is dealing with real people, who may be going through the most difficult times in their lives. Too often, dealing with the CMS can feel robotic and impersonal, with neither parent feeling properly listened to or supported. We can do better.

3.26 pm

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship again, Sir Edward. I sincerely congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) on securing this important debate.

Children living in single-parent families are at almost twice the risk of poverty of children who live with both parents. Tory austerity cuts, coupled with the rise in living costs, mean that maintenance matters even more to protect children from poverty. Victims and survivors of domestic abuse should be protected by the UK Government, not punished financially for their inability to engage with their abusive ex-partner. We have heard from hon. Members about various issues to do with the CMS. Indeed, I suggest that almost all Members who have spoken today could have exchanged speeches and still felt that what they said was their own.

My knowledge of the CMS comes from speaking with and helping both non-resident parents and parents with care who are let down by the system; however, it is ultimately children who are being let down. I am sure that many Members taking part today who advocate more effective enforcement will no doubt have received messages from non-resident parents who think that MPs are not standing up for them. I should like to put the record straight right now: the CMS is failing all parents and there are indeed ways in which it could be reformed to be fairer to everyone.

There are many non-resident parents who meet their full responsibilities and more. Everyone involved in this debate, and those watching it, should bear in mind that the CMS is about ensuring the welfare of children. I have been campaigning for its reform for some time. Indeed, I introduced a private Member's Bill, the Child Maintenance Bill, based on the many issues that were highlighted as I tried to help constituents. The CMS has been roundly criticised by all parties in this place, which should signal to the Minister that it is time for sweeping reforms and an urgent root-and-branch review. The Government have a clear responsibility not just to parents or Parliament, but to the children whose lives can be changed for the better.

A cultural problem with enforcement exists in the CMS, which allows parents to evade their responsibilities, and arrears to build. Between December last year and March this year, arrears under the CMS rose by £7.4 million,

from £966 million to £973.4 million. During the same period, £58.5 million was owed under CMS's collect and pay service, through which the CMS monitors and pursues collections, yet only £40.6 million was paid. Some 33% of parents referred to the collect and pay service have paid nothing, and the remaining 67% can be guaranteed only to have paid "some" maintenance.

The UK Government wrote off £2.5 billion of arrears that had built up under the former Child Support Agency—money that still rightly belongs to children. The new CMS is now going down the same path because arrears are building up. The UK Government must crack down on enforcing payments to ensure that children receive their rightful maintenance. When £973.4 million of arrears have built up and that number is increasing, it is obvious that the CMS requires a full and thorough review.

Recent powers to confiscate passports look good on paper, but passport confiscations are seen as a PR stunt designed to scare parents into payment rather than direct enforcement. The Department for Work and Pensions estimated that approximately—wait for it—20 passports would be confiscated each year. Those are token powers, as well as being costly and time consuming to pursue. Greater emphasis must be placed on collecting arrears, and I hope the Minister will commit to ensuring a cultural shift within the CMS.

In Australia, departure prohibition orders are in use for those evading maintenance payments. The UK currently uses DPOs for tax evaders and those who have been dubbed "NHS tourists". Unlike confiscating a passport, which takes time and lasts only for two years, DPOs can prevent people with two passports from leaving until their arrears are paid. Strict criteria could be applied before triggering a DPO, and I ask the Minister to consider such a provision. In most cases it is difficult to legislate to improve maintenance collection. We need an institutional willingness, both within the CMS and from Ministers, to crack down on non-payment.

Many hon. Members have already mentioned customer service, and from my experience, parents often testify that the quality of service offered by the CMS is extremely poor. My staff and I have also experienced that. The CMS uses an extremely complex system full of caveats. More must be done to inform parents about how it works. Common themes that emerge from my casework include a lack of explanation, differing explanations, a lack of consistency between caseworkers and a lack of written communication. More must be done to lift the standard of service generally.

Parents should be encouraged to make their own maintenance arrangements, but where that is not possible, parents with care should not be subject to the 4% maintenance tax. It is not right that a child is deprived of essential support because of their parent's persistent non-payment. The UK Government have rightly waived the £20 application fee for victims of domestic abuse or violence, and the maintenance tax must also be waived. That tax is incurred by a parent through no fault of their own and exists as another act of harm against a non-resident parent's ex-partner and their children. Will Ministers commit to looking seriously at the fairness of the maintenance tax on families?

On one particular point—the income change threshold—the law is unfair to non-resident parents. I agree with the former Minister that there must be a balance between

financial stability for both parents and the operational efficiency of the CMS, but the 25% threshold can disproportionately benefit wealthier parents and impact on poorer parents when incomes change. We should not return to the 5% threshold of the CSA; instead, we should set a more reasonable threshold of between 15% and 20%. Will the Minister consider that proposal?

Many non-resident parents keep to their maintenance calculations and make the payments required of them to support their children. We should focus on improving the situation of those who are being let down by their ex-partner, the CMS, and the UK Government. A parent with care might find it difficult to find work that is flexible enough to accommodate caring for their child, or to afford childcare without giving up something else. They could be hit by the two-child tax credit cap, and might struggle to access the personal independence payment or see their income decrease under universal credit. They might find that a family-based arrangement is not possible, but if they approach the CMS, they are charged £20 for it to provide a calculation.

A parent might move on to the direct pay scheme, but find that their ex-partner refuses to meet payments. They might frequently report that to the CMS, but have to explain their situation to a new call handler every time. It is months before any action is taken, during which time the parent is unsure about what is going on because written communication is minimal—we heard from the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) about how difficult it can be to understand a written communication from the CMS.

The CMS may eventually use a deduction from earnings order, but perhaps the ex-partner earns much more and hides their income and fails to be properly assessed. Because the ability to request a variation for unearned income must be prompted and the parent with care might be unaware of that, maintenance calculations are frequently lower than they should be. Through no fault of their own, by having to rely on state help to force their ex-partner to pay for their child, the parent with care is charged a 4% maintenance tax when payments are eventually collected. That might be the worst-case scenario, but it is what many families experience.

We have heard from Members of all parties about the ways in which the CMS fails parents with care, non-resident parents and ultimately the children who rely on it. When discussing child maintenance, people often lose sight of why the CMS exists in the first place. We should all try our best to put party politics aside when discussing this issue—you will agree, Sir Edward, that we have achieved that today—but if there is continued inaction, then the party in government should rightly be held to account, especially if it is ignoring advice and views from its own members who have passionately advocated for reform through action.

As arrears under the CMS near £1 billion, the UK Government have been lucky that this issue has not received the public attention it deserves. People are right to criticise the Conservative party's austerity agenda—universal credit, the two-child cap, the bedroom tax and all those other policies implemented by this Government. The growing debt owed to children in Scotland and the rest of the UK deserves to join that list. When the charity Gingerbread says that maintenance can lift one in five children out of poverty, the UK Government must sit up and listen.

Will the Minister conduct a full root-and-branch review of the Child Maintenance Service that must consider the 4% maintenance tax, lowering the income change threshold, the standard of service and an institutional shift to crack down on maintenance arrears, both current and historical? Children are at the centre of this debate and they should be at the centre of CMS and UK Government priorities. I hope the Government will listen to the concerns of Members and parents, and start to take radical action to secure the support that children truly deserve.

3.39 pm

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) for securing such an important debate and for his continued work on this issue.

Before I address the substantive and specific issues about the Child Maintenance Service, I want to start by recognising the timing of the debate and the context in which we are having it. This week, many schools across my constituency break up for the summer holidays, and of course, in the constituencies of Scottish Members, many have already done so. Summer holidays should be a time for fun, activities, rest and relaxation, but for far too many children, their experience—and, tragically, their future memories—will be of hunger, hardship and sadness.

A recent report from the Trussell Trust showed that food banks experienced a 20% rise in demand for emergency food parcels for children last summer. More than 87,000 food parcels went to children in the UK during the summer holidays in 2018, which was an increase of one fifth on 2017. Shockingly, the Trussell Trust is concerned that the summer holidays will be even busier this year, as overall demand continues to rise across the UK.

Whatever the challenges or otherwise of the administration and technicalities of the Child Maintenance Service, it is important to recognise, as hon. Members have argued, that it does not operate in isolation from the wider pressures and challenges on children and families. When we discuss it, we do so with the objective of ensuring that those children, who are often the most vulnerable, can access the support that every one of them deserves, as rightly argued by the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr).

Child maintenance payments can be vital for families, especially those on low incomes, to protect children from poverty. As my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), highlighted, research shows that they alone lift a fifth of low-income single-parent families out of poverty. We must remember that lone parents are particularly vulnerable to poverty. One in four is in persistent poverty, twice as many as in any other group, according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The inadequacy of social security arguably makes child maintenance an even more vital source of income for struggling single parents.

We recognise the importance of ensuring that families and children receive what they are entitled to. However, as we have heard today, it is fair to say that there is limited evidence that the system is achieving that aim. A recent report from the charity Gingerbread has shown that there are major problems with the system of direct

[Mike Amesbury]

pay and, worse, that the Government are not doing anything to effectively address them. The Department for Work and Pensions does not track whether payments are made, which means that it cannot report on compliance in two thirds of cases.

According to Gingerbread, collect and pay charges are not sufficient to deter parents from not paying in full and on time, nor is there any evidence that it encourages collaboration between parents. Furthermore, it found that

“arrangements are prolonged by unclear thresholds for enforcement”, with the Department experiencing a 69% decrease in the use of deduction from earnings orders,

“with inconsistent follow up from caseworkers and poor communication”,

as many hon. Members have highlighted. That is despite a previous ministerial pledge that the Department would act within 72 hours of a missed payment.

The Gingerbread report continued:

“The hands-off approach, compounded by poor administration, places the burden of responsibility for pushing for Direct Pay enforcement onto receiving parents”.

That will sound familiar to many hon. Members, who have constituents with similar stories from many other areas of the DWP's responsibility. The fact that it feels so familiar suggests that the problem lies not with individual professional members of staff, but with the culture and leadership at the top of the Department. Indeed, some of the testimonials make it abundantly clear that the system is not working.

We must not forget that this is not simply a question of processes or systems; it is about children, relationships and emotions. A system that divorces itself from the realities, or ignores the consequences, is not fit for purpose. Parents interviewed by Gingerbread said:

“The balance of power is completely wrong. I have to basically keep him sweet so that he contributes”

and

“We had no other option...it's just unbelievable that the child would have to pay 4 per cent out of their money when they've never done anything wrong.”

If the Government's objective is to ensure that children do not become the victim, financial or otherwise, of relationship breakdown, it seems clear that that is not being met by the current approach. As we have heard, 33% of paying parents were non-compliant in the first quarter of 2019 and by the end of March 2019, cumulative arrears under the CMS were £275.3 million. That is £275.3 million that should be going to children. The cases that we have heard leave even more gaping holes in a system that should be supporting children.

We have several clear asks of the Minister. First, does he accept that the current system—not just the Child Maintenance Service, but many other aspects of social security, such as the five-week wait for universal credit, the benefits freeze and the two-child limit—is not fit for purpose and needs to change? Secondly, will he introduce tighter monitoring of direct pay compliance, so that we have a clear picture of its effectiveness? Thirdly, will he commit to introducing an improved and more transparent service so that we can ensure effective enforcement for late payments and offer hard-working staff the appropriate guidance, training and, importantly, as highlighted by

hon. Members across the Chamber, resources? Fourthly, will he review the effectiveness of collect and pay charges for receiving parents?

There appears to be little evidence that the current arrangements encourage payment or communication between parents. The result is that many children end up paying a further penalty and some parents are forced to collaborate with a previous partner, which can create a toxic environment for the children.

I look forward to the Minister's response. I very much hope that if we return to this subject in 12 months' time, we will have an improved picture that fundamentally puts children centre stage.

3.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time—and hopefully not the last, Sir Edward. I congratulate the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) on securing this important debate on the Child Maintenance Service. I also thank hon. Members from both sides of the House for their contributions, which have been passionate, compelling and based largely on constituency cases. I know that, at the heart of it, everyone is driven by doing the right thing by the children involved.

I have met several hon. Members present to talk through some of the issues that their constituents have raised about the service. I have committed to making sure that we get things right first time. I also had the opportunity to hear directly from single parents during a recent visit to Gingerbread, where I heard at first hand about some of the important issues that they face.

Many points have been raised, so we have a lot to get through in a limited time. I stress that I hold regular surgery sessions, as many hon. Members present know, and I am happy to take offline any of the questions that I cannot cover in my response. I stress that I have been in post for just three months, and I would urge hon. Members across the Chamber not to underestimate my determination, while in this role, to improve the service.

I will start by setting out the Government's approach. My Department is currently delivering a new child maintenance system, run by the Child Maintenance Service, which is designed to specifically address the shortcomings of the CSA.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): My constituent understood that his case with the Child Support Agency was closed on agreement in 2003, and there had been no attempt to collect any moneys for the past 16 years. It is only as part of this closure programme that my constituent has been contacted and asked to pay £30,000. Does the Minister share my concern that there has been such a big gap and no attempt to collect the money? There is also conflicting guidance implying that some CSA arrears incurred before July 2006 can be statute-barred. Will the Minister clarify that and meet me to discuss the matter further?

Will Quince: My door is always open to colleagues from both sides of the House, and I would be happy to meet the hon. Lady to discuss that particular case in detail.

I mentioned the shortcomings of the CSA, which did not provide the right support to parents and was expensive to run. We have learned from mistakes of the past: where the previous system often drove a wedge between parents by taking away their responsibility and choice, the new system encourages collaboration at every stage. We know that a constructive, co-operative relationship between separated parents has a direct positive impact on child outcomes such as health, emotional wellbeing and academic attainment—a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell). That is why, wherever possible, we support separated mothers and fathers to work together in the interests of their children and set up their own family-based maintenance arrangements.

Private family-based arrangements allow families to create flexible arrangements that work for their individual circumstances. Such flexible arrangements can include sharing of care, agreements over who will pay for essentials and treats, and financial transfers. They can change as the children grow and can help children to experience having both their parents take an active role in their lives.

We recognise that, post separation, the majority of parents want to continue to do the right thing for their children. We want to ensure that as many families as possible have an effective arrangement for maintenance in place; for those who are unable to make a private arrangement, the Child Maintenance Service provides the support of a statutory scheme. The Child Maintenance Service delivers a simplified statutory system with increased levels of automation, which allows cases to be processed much more quickly and with higher levels of accuracy than was achieved under previous schemes.

The CMS provides an effective, efficient service, to be used as a last resort where parents are unwilling to meet their responsibility to financially support their children voluntarily. This means that cases in the statutory service tend to be more difficult and relationships between the parents in these cases are often fraught and conflicted. While we continue to use all the tools at our disposal to maintain compliance and recover arrears, it is sadly inevitable that some arrears will accrue, as some parents go to great lengths to avoid their responsibilities. That is not acceptable and we are taking action to tackle it. Last November, this House approved regulations tackling a number of issues—closing down loopholes, introducing tough new sanctions for those who evade their responsibilities, and dealing with the historic arrears that built up under the Child Support Agency.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk and my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) raised questions about the CMS's performance. The Child Maintenance Service is performing well. The most recent statistics show that 94% of new applications were cleared within 12 weeks and 79% of change of circumstances actions were cleared within 28 days. We are seeing unprecedentedly high levels of compliance, with 67% of parents due to pay child maintenance through the collect and pay service having paid some maintenance in the quarter ending March 2019, up from 60% one year earlier.

Although the case load on the service has been growing steadily since it opened in 2012, the number of complaints and appeals received still represents less than 1% of that case load. We have continued to refine our processes to maximise compliance and debt recovery. Debt as a

proportion of all maintenance arranged by the service has fallen since the launch of the 2012 scheme, from 17% in March 2015 to 11% in March 2019.

A number of colleagues, in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling and the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows), rightly mentioned customer service. The focus so far has largely been on tackling arrears and on recovery of debt, but my clear steer to officials is that I want the focus to be on customer services. We know that more than 80% of calls are answered, although I still think the 20% that are not is too many, and I want them answered in a timely fashion. My focus, while I remain in this role, will be on customer service.

A number of hon. Members raised the issue of enforcement, and we are taking far more action in that regard. We now have several court-based powers, including the use of enforcement agents, otherwise known as bailiffs, to seize goods, forcing the sale of the paying parent's property. Approximately 7,100 paying parents in England and Wales are currently being pursued by civil enforcement agents for unpaid maintenance following a referral by the CMS.

Hon. Members also mentioned that the service can apply to have the paying parent sanctioned—by being committed to prison or disqualified from driving, for example. In addition to that, in regulations in November last year we launched the ability to disqualify non-compliant parents from holding a UK passport, which we believe will act as a strong deterrent. The service initiated 900 sanctions in the quarter ending March 2019 as a last resort against non-compliant paying parents.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) raised the question of complex earners. We are aware of a small number of parents whose maintenance liability is inconsistent with their financial resources. Some choose to support themselves via a complex arrangement of assets rather than taking a salary. We are taking action to address that.

Parents can request a variation so that most forms of taxable income can be taken into account in the maintenance calculation, which will make it harder for individuals to avoid their responsibilities by minimising the amount of child maintenance they pay. The new powers that we introduced last year allow us to target complex earners via a calculation of notional income based on assets. In addition to the gross annual income provided by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, we can capture income derived from property, savings and investments, including dividends, and other miscellaneous income. We also have the Financial Investigation Unit, which can investigate those parents who declare suspicious earnings or, where appropriate, refer to HMRC for tax fraud.

The FIU was first introduced in 2014, and since 2017 we have tripled the number of staff in that unit. It will look at any case where the receiving parent raises a concern over income and provides basic evidence to support it. I should stress that around 60% of FIU cases show no evidence of suppression of income. Nevertheless, it is an important part of the service. The hon. Gentleman also referred to the self-employed, which I suppose is similar to the situation of complex earners. We have new powers, enabling us to do deep-dive exercises and get to the bottom of cases where individuals are trying to suppress or disguise income. Perhaps I will meet him separately to go through that in a little more detail.

[Will Quince]

My hon. Friend the Member for Henley raised a number of points about the accuracy of CMS assessments. The accuracy of maintenance assessments has significantly improved; our annual client fund account shows that it is at 99%. Furthermore, the National Audit Office has not qualified CMS accounts for the past two years, which represents a significant improvement.

The hon. Members for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) and for Motherwell and Wishaw brought up the 25% threshold. I understand the concerns that they have raised. The point of the 25% threshold is to ensure that maintenance calculations are relatively stable, so both clients know what to expect in terms of payments. It also ensures that both parents are able to budget with certainty and provide ongoing maintenance for the child. I have met with the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw to discuss this, and it is important to stress that most people's income does not change to that degree over the course of one year.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton) and the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston—

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): Order. Could the Minister allow time for the mover to sum up the debate?

Will Quince: I am sorry, Sir Edward. I am conscious that I have not been able to cover many of the issues raised, but I hope hon. Members can see that the latest statistics show that the reformed Child Maintenance System is already making a big difference to the lives of separated families. We are seeing progressive improvements to the efficiency of the service. Our priority remains ensuring that this service is fit for purpose and, while I am in post, I will continue to ensure that it is.

3.59 pm

Martyn Day: I am grateful to all the hon. Members who have come along and taken part today. There were many common themes, and, although I have no doubt that the system works for many, there remains a significant minority for whom it does not. We heard repeated themes of a lack of communication and of problems requiring faster action, greater use of enforcement powers and more action against those who are self-employed and are hiding their income. I am grateful for some of the points the Minister made, but the fact that the Financial Investigations Unit has existed since 2014 suggests that clearly there are still problems. I hope that, with the additional staffing it has gained, we will see further action in the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the effectiveness of the Child Maintenance Service.

Vanessa George: Early Release from Prison

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op):

That this House has considered the early release of Vanessa George from prison.

It is good to see you in the Chair for such an important debate, Mr Hollobone. I am grateful to hon. Members from both sides of the House who are here to stand in solidarity with the parents and children affected by this case. I am here to speak on behalf of the children who attended Little Ted's nursery in Plymouth, their parents and their families. I hope to give a voice to their fears, anger, pain, horror and genuine concern about the early release of convicted serial child abuser Vanessa George.

Vanessa George was sentenced in December 2009 and charged with seven offences—two of sexual assault by penetration and two of sexual assault by touching. She was also charged with making, possessing and distributing indecent images of children. She was given an indeterminate sentence for reasons of public protection, and was to serve a minimum of seven years for her crimes against toddlers and babies.

The judge—Mr Justice Royce—said to Vanessa George on sentencing:

“I cannot emphasise too strongly that this is not a seven-year sentence. It is emphatically not. It is, in effect, a life sentence. Many, and I suspect everyone so deeply affected by your dreadful deeds, will say that would not be a day too long.”

The parents were let down twice: first, by the lack of a robust system to protect their children, whom they entrusted to Vanessa George and Little Ted's nursery; and secondly, as they have told me—some through tears—as the woman who abused so many children will be released early. I will return to this in a moment, but it is worth noting that most of the parents I have spoken to found out about the early release through the media, not from the Parole Board or the authorities. As soon as I heard about the release, I wrote to the Secretary of State asking him to intervene, and personally and urgently to review the decision to release Vanessa George. The more details that emerge, such as the fact that she still refuses to name all the children she abused, the more I am sure it is still too early for that woman to be released.

We are here today because I—we—believe that Vanessa George should not be released early. I believe that the decision should be reviewed urgently, and that every step should be taken to keep her behind bars. I believe that she should be in prison for the entire childhood of the children she abused. I believe that she should not be released or considered for release until she has named all the children she abused. I believe the police should reopen investigations into cases not on the original charge sheet but for which she is the sole or principal suspect. I believe that any criminal justice system that carries such a low bar for remorse that she is not required to name her victims to be eligible for early release is a system that is not working properly in the public interest. I believe that there needs to be a greater role for victims in early releases.

I believe all that because I want every child that George filmed and photographed being sexually assaulted to live for the rest of their childhood in safety. I want their parents to know that the woman who committed those unspeakable acts is locked away and out of reach of their kids until they become adults themselves. She robbed those children of their childhood, and we should protect what remains of it. She has refused to confirm the extent of her actions and the total number of her victims. That leaves every parent who sent their child to Little Ted's nursery living with a life sentence of not knowing whether their child was one she abused and whether images of their child being abused still exist in some rotten corner of the dark web or on a pervert's hard drive somewhere. She should not be released until she has named every single one of the babies and toddlers she abused.

I have been made aware of legal precedent whereby additional charges have been investigated, and further charges put to gain justice for those crimes, which would have the effect of keeping that woman behind bars. I want the police to reopen investigations into these crimes, so that George can be kept behind bars if she is guilty of them in addition to the offences of which she was convicted.

Furthermore, the victims need to be given more information and the reports that they are currently denied. They should receive more appreciation for their brave and courageous advocacy—especially the parents who gave evidence and submitted testimony to the Parole Board. The Parole Board acts under the direction of the Secretary of State and Parliament. This debate is necessary and timely in helping to update that direction.

I feel so strongly about this because over the past few weeks I have taken the time to listen to the parents of the children Vanessa George abused. These are some of their comments.

"How can I tell my child that I don't know whether she was abused or not?"

said one. Another said:

"I do not know what I will say to her if she were to ask me about the offender."

Another told me:

"She will be out soon, but it doesn't end for us."

Another said:

"I told them what releasing her early would mean and they ignored it."

Another said:

"I gave the police my email address and phone number as I wanted updates about her! I've had no email or phone call from them whatsoever!"

Another said:

"It seems to me she is saying the words but if she had real remorse then she would have shared more information to help the families".

Perhaps most simply and brutally, one said:

"I found out on Facebook that the woman who abused my child was being let out. We were supposed to be told, but we weren't."

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making a powerful case, albeit one that is difficult to hear. One of the challenges is that we do not know the true extent of this individual's offending, and therefore the true number of victims. Does he think that

changes ought to be made so that people can be attached as people of interest to the case, so they are not missed out and do not find out through Facebook, which is abysmal?

Luke Pollard: I do. There is a difficulty in this case in the difference in the definition of a statutory victim and a discretionary victim. My hon. Friend's suggestion is a good one, because regardless of the official tick-box definition of the victims, the people connected with the case must be kept informed, especially about the release of the offender.

I am grateful to the Minister for the time he spent with me ahead of this debate and for his professional, non-partisan and sincere support for the victims in this case. On behalf of the parents, I have a number of questions. Will the Minister review the Parole Board's decision to release Vanessa George early? Will the powers that the Government have taken following the case of serial rapist John Worboys apply in the case of Vanessa George? The Minister has told me those powers have not yet commenced. Will he tell me whether that is true, and whether Vanessa George's legal team argued for consideration of her case ahead of those powers commencing? Did she try to get out early, knowing that she would not be able to if she left it any longer?

The serious case review into Vanessa George found:

"Although she was not senior in her position, other factors such as her age, personality and length of service could have created an illusion of position of power and encouraged a sense of trust...It is also the case that George is of the ability to behave in a highly manipulative manner and hence gain high levels of trust in others".

May I ask the Minister for the strongest possible assurances that the manipulative nature of Vanessa George has been properly assessed by the Parole Board?

Furthermore, I have been made aware of legal precedents from similar cases that may provide a chance, no matter how slim, to keep Vanessa George off our streets. It would ensure that there is an investigation of additional crimes that were not on the original charge sheet but for which she was the sole and primary suspect.

On how many counts was George originally charged? How many of those remain on file with her as the principal suspect? I understand that she was charged with just seven, but that scores more remain on file. Is the Minister aware of any recent cases when it was brought to the Parole Board's attention that the main suspect due for release was the main suspect in many other cases that were not on the charge sheet? Was that considered in this case? Did the police make representations to the Parole Board where cases in which George was suspected were not proceeded with? I realise that the police and the CPS do not always send the full charge list to the courts for fear that juries may be confused, trials may be too long and other charges may be put at risk. Are there cases where George was the sole or primary suspect in which charges have not been laid but could be?

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): I take the opportunity to pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his tireless campaigning in this area. He has shown himself to be a passionate champion of the people of Plymouth, and he has my full support.

Luke Pollard: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. The fact that my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter), and I are both here demonstrates that we have cross-party support and is testimony to the fact that all of Plymouth stands in revulsion at what has happened and in support of the families.

I turn to the broader issue of how parents were informed about the early release of Vanessa George. The vast majority of the parents I have spoken to told me that they found out from Facebook and local media. I know that in cases where the identity of victims is uncertain it is hard to identify statutory victims for ongoing communication, and informing everyone can be hard, but more effort should have been made in this case to tell victims ahead of Vanessa George's release that that would be happening. Will the Minister therefore ask the Parole Board to look again at how it communicates with victims, both statutory and discretionary, in particular in cases of extreme child abuse?

That is not just relevant to this case: the all-party parliamentary group on adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse found that most survivors were not informed of their abuser's release. That poses a particular risk where the abuser is settled in a town or city close to the survivor. In this case, I believe restrictions will be in place so that Vanessa George cannot settle in Devon or Cornwall, but victims should be told in a timely and respectful manner of the release of an offender. Surely, that is even more important in cases of extreme child abuse.

Will the Minister join me in extending an invitation to the new Victims' Commissioner to come to Plymouth and meet the parents in order to feed into a stronger and more robust victims code, which I know the Minister's Department is currently consulting on? If the victims code is to be better understood and supported, cases such as that of Vanessa George must inform how the Parole Board better communicates with and informs, listens to and engages with victims; otherwise, the Minister's ambition for the victims code to be a living statement of rights will not be achieved.

Finally, will the Minister look at what constitutes adequate remorse for parole in extreme child abuse cases such as this one? All offenders released early must show remorse for their crimes. They have to take steps to show that they understand the severity of the crimes they were convicted of and their impact on the victims, and to show genuine contrition. I cannot reconcile that with Vanessa George's continued refusal to name which babies and toddlers she abused and which she did not.

That we do not know who was abused denies those children tailored help for the consequences of that abuse and leaves each parent with a life sentence from which there is no early release. Not knowing whether their child was one of the babies Vanessa George penetrated and filmed must eat away at them every waking moment, and being forced to live with that trauma is unimaginably devastating. Will the Minister set out what guidance is provided to the Parole Board and whether he believes the terms around remorse are sufficiently robust? Currently, I do not think they are. Vanessa George should not be released until she has named every one of her victims.

In conclusion, I want to say something directly to the children who attended Little Ted's nursery in Laira in Plymouth and their parents. Most of the children who were abused still do not know about it, but that does not

mean they do not carry scars from the assaults. The accounts I have heard from parents of how children lived with the consequences of assaults on their tiny bodies will haunt me for a long time, and I can only imagine the weight of that on the families who deal with it on a daily basis. The system let those children down once. We must not let them down a second time.

The parents have shown so much bravery and courage throughout all this. News of the early release has reopened old wounds and brought back horrors that no parent should experience. I am in awe of their tenacity. Plymouth is very proud of them. I have heard parents explain the emotional torment of deciding whether to tell their child that they may have been abused but they are not sure whether they are a victim. Parents have told me that this early release came out of the blue and they were not told by the Parole Board. That took them back to the horror and shock of hearing about the abuse for the first time back in 2009.

Parents, especially single parents, have told me they feel so alone, but I say this to them: "You are not alone. You are believed. And whatever happens with this release, you have my commitment, and I imagine the commitment of all Members present, to stand with you to demand better for your child and for every child in this country." I can only consider the news of Vanessa George's early release to be a kick in the teeth, not just for those babies and toddlers she abused but for their families and friends, for the whole of Plymouth and for all those impacted by the ripple effects of her actions across the country. I hope the Minister will be able to give some hope to the people I am here to represent.

4.15 pm

Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con): I commend the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) for raising this issue and for the commitment and passion he showed on behalf of his constituents, which does him credit. He made a very powerful speech, and I thank him for graciously allowing me to speak for a couple of moments before, importantly, the Minister responds.

I endorse all the hon. Gentleman's comments. Although the appalling crimes committed by Vanessa George took place in his constituency, the shockwaves caused by that atrocity impacted the whole of our city and the country as a whole. I remember it only too well; it is probably the worst, most traumatic event in my 27 years in this place. Along with my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), who is currently at the Invictus trials in Sheffield supporting injured servicemen, I have supported parents caught up in this scandal for many years. Of course, it is not going to be resolved in just a few years.

I am deeply disappointed by the decision of the Parole Board to release Vanessa George on licence. I have had reasons to doubt its robustness several times during my years as a Member of Parliament. Of course, in the case of John Worboys, which the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport mentioned, the Parole Board misread the public interest and the courts had to intervene. The Parole Board does not always get the balance right between the interests of the perpetrator, and the impact on victims and the public interest. In this case, it has fallen well short. I also agree with the hon. Gentleman that the way some of the victims found out about this early release is appalling.

Nine years is not enough of a punishment for the trauma that this woman inflicted on many lives and families in Plymouth, the true depth of which will not be known for some years yet. In my opinion, she should serve at least another 10 years in custody before being released on licence. I join the hon. Gentleman in asking the Minister to ask the Parole Board to think again.

4.17 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Robert Buckland): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I add my thanks to the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) for securing the debate. I am grateful to him for his remarks. He has approached this issue very constructively, because he seeks a higher degree of justice for the constituents he represents. That is absolutely right and proper.

I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter) for his contribution. He rightly reminded us that, although my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) is not with us today, they have worked with people affected by what were heinous and wicked crimes.

I well remember the commission of these offences because my children were of that age at that time. I think there are very few of us, either in the House or outside it, who do not remember our revulsion and shock when we heard about these appalling acts. It was a shocking abuse of trust. It was a series of offences that left us all shocked. The remarks of Mr Justice Royce, the trial judge, summed it up very well. I have read the transcript of his remarks and obtained at least one version of the indictment to understand fully the offences to which this offender pleaded guilty. There were 11 in all: five counts of sexual assault, one count of making 124 indecent images, and five counts of distributing a range of indecent images of children, not alone but with others. That brought home to me the dangers of the internet for the first time and how this level of abuse can be magnified by people who stop at nothing to satisfy either their own dreadful compulsions or the lusts of others. It is a particularly horrible case.

Vanessa George was sentenced in December 2009 and received what was then still available to the court: a sentence of imprisonment for public protection—an IPP, as we call it—with a minimum term of imprisonment at seven years. The judge calculated the seriousness of the offending to mean this: had George contested the trial, she would have received a determinate term of 21 years. The judge, as the law requires, had to give her credit for a guilty plea of one third, so she would have received a determinate term of 14 years if she had pleaded guilty. The calculation of the seven-year term was in accordance with the law as it then stood.

It is important to understand that, because from my reading of the judge's remarks and my understanding of the indictment, it seems to me that the full extent of the criminality was reflected in the indictment. There do not seem to be any other offences that were left to lie on the file. I have conducted a preliminary investigation, which I will conclude, and if there is any change in that position, I will write to the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport.

That is an important distinction between this case and the John Worboys case. Hon. Members will recollect that Worboys had been made subject to a similar IPP

sentence and the Parole Board had directed that he was to be released on licence in January 2018, but in March the High Court quashed the decision and ordered the Parole Board to take a fresh one. It did that and concluded that the public could be protected only by keeping Worboys in closed prison conditions. As a result of that important case, the Government introduced a number of new safeguards to ensure that the mistakes made then should not be repeated. We need to view the Parole Board's decision to direct the release of George in the light of those safeguards and, indeed, the more robust system now in place as a result of the action taken by the Government.

I will answer as best I can the hon. Gentleman's questions. The new regime came into force on Monday of this week—22 July—just after he and I spoke about the case. That does not have a retrospective effect, but it will affect cases from now on. I also assure him that, from what I am told, there was no attempt by the legal team to try to expedite the hearing to avoid the new rules.

An oral hearing in the George case took place over two days. The first date was 21 May. On 2 July, another day was set aside for the Parole Board to hear statements from the victims who had been identified and to take fully on board their concerns and position. After that two-day hearing, a decision was made. The answer to the hon. Gentleman's first question about the review is that because it predates the change, the only course of conduct open to me or the Department is a judicial review, and I have to say that on my examination so far of the procedure, I do not see the sort of flaw that would justify a court giving permission for judicial review.

I think the hon. Gentleman knows what I am talking about when it comes to the test that has to be applied for judicial review. In reaching any release decision, the parole board must follow a detailed process. It must comply with the statutory rules in place, which include the panel considering a dossier of evidence sent by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service. New checks were introduced by the Government on that procedure after it was discovered that, in the case of Worboys, the dossier had not included the important sentencing remarks to which I referred, because that will tell the Parole Board, as it did in this case, what the judge took into account in terms of the sentence. In the case of Vanessa George, the judge rightly took into account her refusal then to reveal the full identities of the children she had abused. He made specific and important acknowledgement of that. Just as he took into account her guilty pleas, he tempered that with what was obviously an aggravating factor at the time. I confirm that those remarks were very much in the dossier in this case.

There were also deficiencies in the Worboys case to do with the reports themselves, which did not deal in sufficient depth with the considerable evidence of wider offending, even though Worboys had not been prosecuted for all the offences he was alleged to have committed. It was then that HMPPS issued guidance to report writers on how such evidence should be addressed. Indeed, as I have said, it seems that, on my reading of the indictment, there is not evidence of wider offending in this case.

We know that an oral hearing was held, and I confirm that at that hearing a representative of the Secretary of State was present. Unlike in the Worboys case, in the George case all the report writers recommended release.

[Robert Buckland]

I have spoken about the victim contact scheme. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that there was a problem there, in that because of the lack of identification, we did not have a statutory basis on which to operate. However, the National Probation Service did offer the victim contact service on a discretionary basis to the 18 parents who responded to the initial contact in 2009 and said that they wished to be kept informed of developments. Eight victims responded to further contact, of whom six submitted a victim personal statement. Representations were also made about licence conditions, which would be imposed should George be released, including an exclusion zone for the entirety of Devon and Cornwall, which has been agreed to. Further, the panel has left it open to any other victims to make representations regarding licence conditions should they wish to do so in future. I invite the hon. Gentleman to ensure that that happens—we have spoken about it already—and I will do everything I can to facilitate the process. I absolutely understand the widespread concern about the decision, but as I have explained, on the information that I have been given, it seems that there are not the grounds for me to make a legal challenge.

Before the hon. Gentleman comes back, let me say a little more about how the offender will be managed in the community. George is barred for life from working with children. She is on the sex offenders register for an indefinite period. She will be supervised by the National Probation Service, working with the police via the multi-agency protection arrangements, and there is an extensive set of licence conditions. If she fails to comply in any way, and in such a way as to indicate a heightened risk, she will be recalled; that means further incarceration behind bars.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me about the position with regard to the victims code. I readily agree to the suggestion, and I am sure that the new victims' commissioner, Dame Vera Baird—I know her well—will be interested to speak to him and to victims to feed into the important process on strengthening the code.

The question of remorse is a subjective one. That, in my view, is not really where the Parole Board should direct its attention; it should look to the question of acknowledgment and whether it can be satisfied on what it hears that the offender has really started to acknowledge, or has acknowledged, the gravity and impact of her offending. Remorse, frankly, is a subjective matter, and I would be very concerned if that became the only or major criterion by which a Parole Board assessed the risk of an offender. It has to be about risk rather than mere words that can be said in a hearing.

With those assurances, I hope that the hon. Gentleman has received at least some answers to his important questions.

Luke Pollard *rose—*

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. Is the Minister giving way?

Robert Buckland: I have finished.

Question put and agreed to.

Transport Links: Nottinghamshire

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

4.30 pm

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered improving transport links in Nottinghamshire.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone, and I thank colleagues who have come to speak in today's debate.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to debate this issue. I am glad to see Members from neighbouring constituencies in Nottinghamshire here for this important discussion, which is perhaps taking place at a helpful time, given that tomorrow we will see a new man in No. 10. There may be an opportunity to make the case afresh for better transport infrastructure in the regions of the United Kingdom and to rebalance our economy.

I will open with the comments and suggestions passed to me by my hon. Friends the Members for Sherwood (Mark Spencer) and for Newark (Robert Jenrick). Because of their Government positions they are unable to speak in debates such as this, but they have been involved in discussions about the issues that I will raise. I plan to cover railways, road junctions, congestion and other issues that all require Government support and funding, as well as various other issues to add to the great list for the Department for Transport to deal with.

Mansfield is the largest town in Nottinghamshire. It requires improved transport links to neighbouring areas if it is to flourish and we are to boost the local economy. Many people see Mansfield as a commuter town for Nottingham or Sheffield, but we do not have suitable transport links to make that possible.

I start by discussing the extension of the Robin Hood line as part of the East Midlands franchise. I am pleased that the new franchise holder will have to make a business case for extending the line; that is a big step forward after a long campaign. Local lines need to be upgraded and extended, rather than there just being a focus on big national projects. Regardless of the value for money argument, I fully recognise the potential positive impact of HS2 on Nottinghamshire, particularly if we can link up the north of the county with the hub at Chesterfield, as well as the city and suburbs with Toton. Without the east-to-west connections, which we discussed in a debate here just a few weeks ago, we will not make the most of the economic potential of HS2.

If the Robin Hood line were extended to Ollerton, with trains calling at Shirebrook, Warsop and Edwinstowe, there would be huge economic benefits locally. Extending it would mean improved links for my constituents to jobs and tourism across north Nottinghamshire. The ability to attract new employers to old pit sites at Thoresby and Welbeck comes from efficient access to major motorways and railway services. In the longer term, it would end just short of the HS2 hub at Chesterfield and potentially offer huge growth and jobs to all north Nottinghamshire.

While I am talking about rail, I will take the opportunity to highlight the Midlands rail hub to the Minister. It is championed by Midlands Connect, who I met just this afternoon. The Midlands rail hub is a £2 billion package

of smaller improvements that would lead to more passenger and freight trains across the midlands in key areas. It works in a collaborative way with Network Rail, which is unusual and pleasing to see. It needs just £25 million to continue to drive that forward and make the proper business case. I hope the Government will support that as we go forward. The Robin Hood line is the most significant railway project that would help improve links for my constituents.

When it comes to roads and junctions, I am afraid I have many more asks of Government. We all know that many towns across Nottinghamshire, and elsewhere, are gridlocked by a huge growth in housing and traffic, on roads that simply were not meant to take it. There are pinch points that cause chaos. One example is the A60 Sainsbury's junction in Mansfield, where at key times people can sit for literally hours queuing to get out of the retail park. Residents have complained for years about that congestion.

I have been working with Nottinghamshire County Council for over a year to get plans and costings in place to improve that junction. Final proposals have been submitted to the Department for its views. I hope Ministers will look favourably on them when they are submitted to the new funding scheme that I understand opened this weekend. Hopefully, the Minister will touch on that in his closing remarks. A relatively small amount of funding would have a huge impact on that area. There are many bottle necks like it—far away and abstract from Westminster, but important for the local areas that they affect. This particular one is set to get worse if we do not deal with it and do something effective in the short term, with the building of some 2,000 homes nearby.

With new housing developments being built around Mansfield, Warsop and across Nottinghamshire, improving transport infrastructure and links between areas has never been so important. Last month I visited the site of proposed developments at Spion Kop, which lies to the north of Mansfield before Warsop. It was good to see the proposals, including infrastructure and new facilities, but unless there is support there for congestion on the A60, which is already an incredibly busy road, it is going to cause problems.

There needs to be an overall collaborative approach, working with Highways England and Government to deliver improved transport infrastructure. The congestion on the A60 is a very similar challenge to that of Newark, which I will touch on shortly on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Newark. Solutions have been put forward to that Newark congestion and the Mansfield challenge is a similar one.

There are economic opportunities from road investment in the region, including the A617, which is known as the Mansfield and Ashfield regeneration route, or the MARR. It has grown steadily to accommodate new housing, and it could expand further to support new jobs and provide a route for the increasingly heavy traffic around Mansfield. We would benefit hugely from dualling the rest of the MARR, particularly in light of the positive announcement of 1,800 new jobs to be created there at Summit Park commercial site. We can unlock more of that economic potential with improved transport links. There is an opportunity to divert some traffic around the town rather than plough through the middle of it. That would also help reduce to reduce air pollution in the town.

I want to take a bit of a whistle-stop tour around some nearby issues. They are not in my constituency but this debate is about Nottinghamshire transport links and I want to touch on a wider range. I am pleased that Nottinghamshire County Council has been working to unlock the economic potential of the A614, upgrading that route and reducing congestion at Ollerton and other junctions on the route. My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood has been campaigning on that for a long time. The Department for Transport announced last October that £18 million of funding would be allocated to the council for those improvements, which cover six junctions along the A614 and A6097 between Ollerton and Lowdham. The scheme aims to support planned housing developments along the route.

In Newark, serious accidents on the A1 and the A46 can cause frequent delays. The interchanges there, including with the A17, are particularly busy at peak times, which has a knock-on effect on the town and the Cattle Market roundabout, especially when the Nottingham to Lincoln train crosses and everything gets stopped, sometimes for prolonged periods. The A46 Newark northern bypass project will see the widening of that route and the creation of a dual carriageway, raising the last section of the A46 between the A1 and M1 to expressway standard. That will make a huge difference to the town and, more broadly, to north Nottinghamshire. Again, it is something that my hon. Friend the Member for Newark has campaigned about for many years, to improve the network and reduce congestion in the town.

The county council has been working on several important improvements, including the introduction of CCTV at 12 sets of traffic signals on the A38 in Ashfield to enable traffic to be actively managed in real time. That is Mansfield's key route to the M1 as well, and can be a bit of a nightmare. Junction 27 is also an issue. One of the features of Mansfield as a town is that, although we are close geographically to the M1, it can sometimes be a struggle to get there, particularly for commuters. I would like to see more funding and support for projects that can review things such as traffic light phasing and tackle localised gridlock.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): My hon. Friend makes a valuable point about the wider road network. He will know that, inexplicably—it was unexplained at the time—a previous Labour Government detrunked many roads in Nottinghamshire, where I was a county councillor, and in Lincolnshire, where I am an MP. It is critical that the roads that remain trunked—Highways England roads—interface with the roads for which our county councils are responsible in as efficient and effective a way as possible. Will my hon. Friend join me in calling on the Government, the Department for Transport, to ensure that that connection is central to their plans?

Ben Bradley: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the key challenges, as I mentioned, in getting from Mansfield to the M1 is precisely how the M1 and the junctions there interface with the A38 and those access routes. Bringing together people such as Midlands Connect, which oversees the regional infrastructure, with those proposals in the future will be vital to make sure those things fit together and we can get the best possible efficiency from our local transport system.

[Ben Bradley]

As I mentioned, we have new commercial building at the Summit business park and we need to look to make further improvements on the A38. The area around Kings Mill is already struggling and additional traffic could, if not managed properly, cause problems. As my right hon. Friend said, the need for forward planning and collaborative working around such areas is important.

Unlocking the economic potential of not just Mansfield but all of north Nottinghamshire would be of huge benefit and can be done with some fairly simple solutions sometimes, but it requires that forward planning.

I wanted to mention bus services. I have had complaints from constituents about the early finish of bus routes in the Mansfield area. Staff working late shifts—or even after 6 pm, in many cases—are unable to use buses to get home again. Those living in Forest Town, Oak Tree, Bellamy or Rainworth—areas outside the main rail route—cannot use trains as an alternative, so I would like to see more frequent and later bus services in those areas. I hope the council will work with my constituents to deliver.

The council spends £3.6 million to financially support more than 60 contracts on bus routes across Nottinghamshire. Many support services operate on fixed routes at peak times, to get people to work, education and doctors' surgeries, but we also need to look at other issues, such as social integration, isolation and ensuring that people can get to work at other times.

I was pleased to see that two new routes have been created in Hucknall, to serve new developments. The C1 and C2 Connect services will go across Harrier Park, near Rolls-Royce, and the Vaughan Estate. From Sunday, those buses will join the existing routes to create better local infrastructure in Hucknall, to serve the train station that connects to Nottingham and the east midlands train services. That is a good example of public transport connecting up with good planning and offering residents a good local service. Funding for those routes has been supported by developers of new housing schemes, which shows the importance of those funding arrangements and creating the transport infrastructure to support new developments. I hope the residents will use those services and it will be viable to increase them in the coming years.

To sum up, Mansfield is well situated to act as a commuter hub for Nottinghamshire and Sheffield. We have relatively affordable housing, some great small businesses and a historic town centre, which I hope will receive funding from the future high streets fund and the stronger towns fund. I have been pleased to see Mansfield's bid to the future high streets fund taken forward. That is positive news. We could develop locally as a commuter hub, bringing in affluent young professionals who want to get on the housing ladder and enjoy the benefits of having Sherwood forest on their doorstep. With the right infrastructure and support, Mansfield could offer an incredible lifestyle.

We have huge potential to make the most of tourism. The Robin Hood line could connect us closer to Sherwood forest. We are making good progress, with new hotels being built. Improving the road and rail network will encourage more visitors, which will in turn boost our local economy and support our brilliant local shops. We are, after all, at the heart of the old Sherwood forest, with countless attractions scattered across the county.

It is important to aid the economic growth of post-industrial towns more broadly across the UK, to reverse the trend of aspirational young people feeling that they have to leave our towns. I want people who finish school in Mansfield to see the great potential of living and working in such a beautiful part of the world, and improving transport links is an important factor in their future decisions.

Increased funding to improve transport links across Nottinghamshire is a key requirement to drive that change. I hope that the potential for a focus on regional infrastructure will come good under a new Prime Minister. It is unfortunate that this debate coincides with the new Conservative party leader's speech to the 1922 Committee, which I am sure has distracted many colleagues this afternoon.

I thank all my constituents for their engagement on this debate. Many commented on my Facebook post this week, when I asked them to raise their key transport issues. From the responses, it was clear how important these issues are to people in Mansfield and how incredibly frustrating they find some of the issues that I have raised. I hope that the Government will focus on the benefits of improving transport in our towns and across Nottinghamshire. I look forward to hearing the views of colleagues from other parts of the county about their priorities.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. The debate can last until 5.30 pm. I am obliged to call the Opposition spokesperson at around 5.7 pm and he has up to 10 minutes to speak. The Minister will have 10 minutes to respond. Ben Bradley will then have three minutes at the end to sum up.

We are blessed with a galaxy of talent from Nottinghamshire and a former Minister of State for Transport from Lincolnshire, who, if we are really lucky, might give us an erudite, literary reference with a well-timed intervention as the debate continues.

4.43 pm

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): It is a great privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. If I knew what erudite meant, I would try to do it. I congratulate my colleague from Nottinghamshire, the hon. Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley), on securing this important debate. He raised many important issues, which, as he pointed out, affect not only his constituency but the whole city and county of Nottinghamshire. The interrelationship between all of our constituencies and the surrounding counties is very important. It is also significant and of benefit to us that my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) chairs the Transport Committee.

I have some general remarks and then I will come on to some specific points for the Minister. I serve on the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, where we have increasingly been discussing climate change and other green issues. We have heard from David Attenborough, Extinction Rebellion and a number of other fascinating witnesses. They have signalled the importance of transport in reducing our carbon emissions. I know that the Minister and the Department are aware of the contribution they have to make, so it is not a political point, but I ask the Minister to continue the

work that he and his Department are doing, and to put that at the forefront of what he says. Clearly, many of our younger constituents, who cannot yet vote, are demanding that we do more in that area. Things that were once regarded as a bit off the wall, such as cycling, are now regarded as mainstream policies. I ask the Minister to reflect on that and continue the Department's work.

In Nottinghamshire and the midlands as a region, we feel that we miss out. Both Conservative and Labour Members feel that our area of Nottinghamshire does not get its fair share, whatever the amount of public spending. That is why I welcome the contribution from the hon. Member for Mansfield. Whatever the arguments about the size of the cake, there is an agreement to be made for a fairer distribution of funds. I ask the Minister to ensure that those funds are fairly distributed.

There is, quite rightly, a lot of talk about London and the south-east—much of that is the engine of our economy. There is a lot of talk about the northern powerhouse, which is significant. There is a lot of talk about north-south connectivity, which is also important. But there is a bit called the midlands—as the Minister and you, Mr Hollobone, will know. The Minister is responsible for this. All I am asking—all the region is asking—is that people making decisions in London do not always choose those who shout the loudest or those with the most compelling brand, so that we in Nottinghamshire and similar areas get a fair share of the existing cake.

As the hon. Member for Mansfield ably said, the Midlands Connect demand on rail services is a hugely imaginative project, but it will require Government money. If the Government mean anything by devolution, they will see that these are local decisions, which local people want to make for their own benefit. Importantly, as the Minister will know, it talks about not only north-south connectivity, but east-west connectivity. For Nottinghamshire, the ability to get to Sheffield or across to Birmingham—even to get to Leicester and Coventry—is significant. The rail services there demand a huge amount of investment at a regional level, to ensure that that happens. I ask the Minister to ensure that that is contained within the Government's future investment decisions.

I will also make a plea for local stations—as the hon. Member for Mansfield did regarding the Robin Hood line, which is of benefit to all of us. In my constituency there are three local railway stations. Those stations—Netherfield, Carlton and Burton Joyce—could and must be used as a much more significant way for people to move from the suburbs to the city centre and beyond. Building on the existing framework is very important; again, I ask the Minister to look at that point.

I thank the Department for its work with Gedling Borough Council and Nottinghamshire County Council on the Gedling access road, a very complicated project that will be of benefit to the local community. All partners—including Nottingham City Council, as my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) knows—have contributed to bringing it to fruition. I ask the Minister to keep an eye on it and ensure that it moves forward as swiftly as possible.

I have a couple of specific asks to benefit Gedling. The city council and others have developed the tram network, which is a brilliant investment in the city and its surroundings in the Nottinghamshire County Council

area. The Minister knows the geography and the organisation of local government in Nottinghamshire, where the county council's area is very close to the city centre. The tram has made a big difference, and people have worked together to deliver it. Discussions are ongoing about the feasibility of extending the tram into Gedling. I ask the Minister to work with the borough, city and county councils to create a feasible project and bring it to fruition.

The hon. Member for Mansfield was right to say that something that often gets missed out, along with cyclists, is buses. Indeed, when I spoke about railways in a debate last week, a couple of people said, "Vernon, don't forget the buses." People in my area understand the importance of the investment in HS2 and the rail network to economic growth and prosperity, but the vast majority of them are more interested in whether the buses run properly and conveniently. It must be said that we have a very good bus service in Nottingham, but it is really important that it should run properly and to time and be reasonably priced, which overall I think it is.

To be fair to the Minister, there are challenges with respect to transport. There has been investment in the area, but as with everything, we would like that progress to accelerate. The green aspect of transport will play an ever-increasing role in future—that is certainly something that young people have demanded in my area, where transport is an issue. I know that the Minister understands this, but Nottinghamshire deserves more of a share of the national cake than it gets. So does the whole midlands region, particularly the east midlands. I hope that he will bear that in mind in future investment decisions.

4.53 pm

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate; I congratulate the hon. Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) on securing it and on his powerful and detailed case. It is also, of course, a pleasure to follow the erudite contribution of my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker).

As an east midlander, Mr Hollobone, you know that I am making a brave decision by wading into the age-old debate about whether the city of Nottingham is part of Nottinghamshire. I suspect that it is slightly in the eye of the beholder, but I am chancing my arm by speaking in the debate. We have time, so I hope the hon. Member for Mansfield will be generous in allowing me to make a couple of points.

First, the midlands rail hub is an excellent scheme. I know that Transport Ministers and Treasury Ministers have had the details for a while now, because I secured a debate last month on east-west rail connectivity that focused on it. In the context of infrastructure schemes it is relatively cheap, but in bang for buck it is exceptionally impactful. It would mean 24 extra services an hour east-west, 36 more freight paths and 6 million more rail journeys per year. It would be a very good project not only for business in our community, but for the environment. Its pricing makes it a really good investment case for this country, so I am very interested to hear the Minister's reflections on it.

Sir John Hayes: Brian Chesky said:

"Travel is a new experience that can transport you out of your everyday routine".

[*Sir John Hayes*]

However, that is only true if people can get to places quickly and conveniently. In respect of rail, the hon. Gentleman is right that further investment is necessary in Nottinghamshire—and in Lincolnshire, by the way. It is vital that our smaller railway stations have regular services into the evenings and at the weekends, to allow people to enjoy those new experiences and be transported beyond the routine. I hope that he will support my call for the Minister to confirm, today, that he will make that extra investment in Lincolnshire, in places such as Spalding, and in Nottinghamshire.

Alex Norris: I have learned a veteran lesson about how to get Spalding into a debate about Nottinghamshire, but I absolutely agree with the right hon. Gentleman's point. The hon. Member for Mansfield made the case very strongly for the Robin Hood line; I would say the same about Bulwell station, and my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling talked about Netherfield and Carlton stations. Our stations are critical, and we know that our constituents value them. When we talk about nationwide projects, we have to understand that our communities access those services through local stations, so they need to be of high quality. I will say more at the end of my speech about the importance of connecting towns to big cities.

The arguments for the midlands rail hub are very strong, and I hope to hear the Minister's reflections on them in due course. I will also be writing to the new Prime Minister, along with other hon. Members—I encourage colleagues present to sign up—about the hub, in the hope that we can give it the best possible airing as soon as possible. A lot of the arguments for it are also strongly true of HS2, which I also wish to mention because I believe that it will have a transformative impact on our community.

There are a lot of similarities between Mansfield and Bulwell, and the north and west of Nottingham in general. We know that successive decades of deindustrialisation have meant deep-rooted social challenges in both our communities, and that work is the way out of those challenges. Projects such as HS2 at Toton, the expansion and support of East Midlands airport—now the biggest pure freight airport in the country—and the development of the power station site when it comes on stream with green energy and green technologies have real potential to add tens of thousands of skilled jobs to our communities. We need to come together to support them.

I hope that the Minister and his civil servants recognise that the east midlands is speaking with one voice. Pretty much everything that the hon. Member for Mansfield said, other than his references to Mansfield, could have been in my speech two weeks ago. We in the east midlands used to be criticised for not getting out of one another's way; it was said that one of the reasons why other areas got investment, but we in Nottinghamshire did not, was that we could not agree between ourselves so we gave a non-verbal cue that we were not serious. I hope it is recognised that that is not the case now. We have significant plans, we have broad buy-in and we are ready to go.

Vernon Coaker: I emphasise to the Minister, and to his civil servants who are listening, that what my hon. Friend says was demonstrated only last week when the

all-party parliamentary group on the east midlands reached cross-party consensus on the importance of the area around Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station and East Midlands airport and the new industrial development there. There was cross-party agreement that it can be a hub and a driver for the whole region, both through transport links and through industrial development.

Alex Norris: That cannot be stated enough. That triumvirate of sites is the future for my community. In the future, my constituents—my neighbours—will look to Toton as much as to Nottingham city centre. The time for these projects is now, and they portend a very exciting future for our region, which I am proud to be part of through the all-party group and beyond.

Let me finish by returning to a central theme of this debate, which all our speeches have mentioned—the idea that we ought to have high ambitions for infrastructure at a national level. We ought to be really robust about those projects, because they are not only good at stimulating the economy in the short term; they are the building blocks of a thriving and productive country.

When we talk about those projects, when we understand them and design them, we have to link them up to the communities that they are there to serve. If it is just about connecting city centres, whether in Derby or Nottingham, to somewhere like Toton we will have missed the point. We will have lost the full financial impact of those projects, and we will have lost the hearts and minds case as well, because people in Bulwell, Bilborough, Aspley or Bestwood will rightly say, “Hang on a minute. What is the value to me if I have to go 20 minutes into town to then go out again?” There is a real challenge there, and we have to be really creative.

That could be through light rail, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling has mentioned; we have a great light rail network in Nottingham, with real scope to develop it further. It could be through buses, which as we have heard are the mode with which the majority of people will engage. It could be on foot or by bike, but we have to link up those big projects with our towns. In that way, people will get the benefits from those projects and support them, and we will all get the growth that we are seeking.

5 pm

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate and serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken today, and in particular thank the hon. Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) for securing this important debate. I recognise his commitment to his constituency and his interest in the lack of affordable, high-quality transport that his constituents face.

Transport is obviously a central issue in Nottinghamshire, as it is for the country as a whole. Before tackling some of the wider points that have been made, I urge the hon. Gentleman to continue to press the issues that he has identified this afternoon, both on his colleagues in the county council on which he serves and on the Minister. I also commend the effective approach to transport taken by Nottingham City Council, which has an award-winning, council-run bus and tram service, and where investment in public transport has improved the lives of passengers and is creating an attractive environment for businesses to invest in.

A lack of affordable public transport and, indeed, transport as a whole has a huge impact on many people. It makes travelling to work difficult, and potentially limits access to vital services such as doctors or local shops. For young people, a lack of affordable transport can limit access to apprenticeships, college or university. Investment in transport is an important driver of economic growth; we have heard about the effect that regional imbalances in investment can have on growth. Most of all, in our interconnected world, cutting carbon dioxide emissions from transport is central to tackling the threat of climate change, something that is only too evident today.

Labour would take a much more strategic approach than the current Government, based on the public interest and the needs of the economy as a whole, and would take urgent action to avert a climate crisis. That is in contrast with the current state of much of our transport system, part of which the hon. Member for Mansfield has described, as have colleagues on the Labour Benches.

It is important to consider the scale of the crisis. First and foremost, Britain depends far too much on its roads as a mode of transport. The pollution, choked high streets, terrible congestion and carbon dioxide emissions caused by cars and lorries are unsustainable. I am afraid that at the moment the current Government's policies are making that problem worse with more traffic, a lack of action on congestion and pollution and, on local roads, a huge backlog of potholes. The Government's priority should be to invest in public transport and deal with that range of issues, taking traffic off our roads and reducing congestion for those who have to drive.

Under this Government, our railways are also expensive, both for the passenger and the taxpayer. The current franchising system is both expensive and ineffective, and has repeatedly failed. Quite simply, there is a need for much greater investment across the whole country, as we have heard today with particular reference to Nottingham and Lincolnshire. Fares have risen dramatically, and the ticketing system is far too complicated. A Labour Government would bring the railways back into public ownership, saving huge sums that are currently wasted on bailing out franchise holders. We would reduce fares and tackle the regional inequality that has so badly affected areas such as Nottinghamshire.

A Labour Government would also tackle the serious issue of local transport, which my colleagues referred to when they mentioned the problems with buses. Our bus services have been cut by 45% since 2010, leaving older and disabled people isolated, younger people unable to get to work or education, and commuters let down and ripped off by increasing fares. There has been a chronic lack of investment in walking and cycling, with just 1.5% of the Department for Transport's budget spent on those two modes of transport, despite their importance. If Britain had the same levels of cycling as the Netherlands, our carbon dioxide emissions from cars would be cut by a third, because of the large number of journeys of around a mile in length currently made by car. It is also worth noting the importance of the link to public health, which I am sure the Minister is aware of. If we all walked a mile a day, we would be significantly healthier. There would also be a knock-on effect of freeing up valuable road space for those who have to drive, such as the emergency services and some businesses.

We should invest in delivering high-quality local transport, restoring cuts to bus services. An incoming Labour Government would introduce a new young person's bus pass. All local councils would be allowed to regulate bus services and set up new council-run companies, such as the outstanding one in Nottingham that we have heard about. We would also raise investment in cycling and walking to reduce emissions and improve health.

As we have heard today, we face serious transport problems in this country, including in the east midlands. The Government should be taking much more urgent action to address those serious problems. A Labour Government would tackle the issues of pollution, congestion and poor infrastructure, with a clear strategy and programme of investment for the future.

5.6 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Michael Ellis): It is a pleasure to serve under you, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) on securing this debate on improving transport links in Nottinghamshire.

Her Majesty's Government—this Government—are investing vast sums in cycling, pedestrian access, equestrianism and all forms of active travel, and have invested many billions of pounds in road maintenance. When this Government created the national pothole action fund and invested in it some years ago, I played a part in that. This Government have made significant investments in transport, because good transport links are a key enabler of growth, employment, access to education—all aspects that are doing extremely well in this country—skills training, and seeing our friends and family. Transport is a key link in all those areas.

Nottinghamshire sits within a region that is at the heart of the United Kingdom's transport network. The east midlands has been alluded to; my constituency of Northampton North is also within that region. We know that investment is not just crucial to regional success but key to national success, which is why we are building HS2, the new backbone of the national rail network. We are improving capacity and connectivity and building on growth, and the midlands will be the first region to benefit from that new railway. Nottinghamshire will be served by a new hub station at Toton.

That is also why we are investing £1.8 billion in the region's motorways and trunk roads, including in vital improvements to the M1 motorway, which I, along with many millions of others, use regularly. It is why we are investing £1.7 billion from the local growth fund, including through investments in transport schemes across the midlands region.

Vernon Coaker: I thank the Minister for the start that he has made to his remarks. It would be of real interest in Nottinghamshire if the Minister could say a little more about what he expects the Government's policy to be with respect to HS2, given the commitment of the man who is now to be Prime Minister, who has said that there will be a review of HS2. My constituents and local authorities have asked what that means, so could the Minister elaborate on that for us?

Michael Ellis: I understand the hon. Gentleman's question, but at this point he will have to wait and see. The Prime Minister at the moment is my right hon.

[*Michael Ellis*]

Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), and we will have to wait and see what happens in the next few hours and days. However, the Government have invested, and continue to invest, in HS2, as I have said. His point about the east midlands is a very good one, which he should continue to pursue.

Today's debate is very timely because Nottinghamshire stands on the cusp of getting a new train operator. East Midlands Railway, run by Abellio, will take over the franchise on 18 August—only about three weeks from now. Under the new franchise, passengers will benefit from new trains with more peak-time seats, reduced journey times and more than £17 million in station improvements. Abellio will oversee the introduction of brand-new, more comfortable and more reliable trains, including the replacement of the entire existing inter-city fleet, so this is a vast investment.

Passengers will benefit from an 80% increase in the number of morning peak seats into Nottingham, Lincoln and St Pancras. East Midlands Railway will also be at the forefront of the Government's commitment to deliver a cleaner and greener rail network, which we are very focused on. It will trial hydrogen fuel cell trains on the midland main line and run zero-carbon pilots at six stations along the route. There will also be more car parking spaces, more ticket-buying facilities, more flexible smart ticketing options, free wi-fi, high-quality mobile connectivity, improved Delay Repay compensation and £9.4 million of investment to deliver commercial and customer service improvements at stations—all positives.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield mentioned the Robin Hood line. I know that the start of the new franchise will be of great interest to him and other Members. I recognise his work as a tireless campaigner for improvements to the Robin Hood line between Nottingham and Worksop, on which his constituency sits. Under the new franchise, the Robin Hood line will benefit from a later evening service on weekdays and a new Sunday service. It will also get refurbished, modern trains providing a more reliable and comfortable service with free on-board wi-fi, USB points, at-seat power and increased luggage space. I know I sound a little bit like an advertising guru here, but—[*Laughter.*] Or maybe less of the guru. The fact of the matter is that those are very positive things that will help vast numbers of passengers.

My hon. Friend and other Members in the region are campaigning for the Robin Hood line to be extended to Ollerton via Shirebrook, Warsop and Edwinstowe. As he will know, the new operator of the east midlands franchise is required to submit a business case for that extension within the first year of the franchise. That business case will be reviewed to decide whether the line should be extended, mitigating the risk of reopening a line that might not be financially and economically beneficial. One of the many ways in which we differ from the Opposition is that we are always focused on ensuring a financial and economic reality to our plans.

Moving from rail to road, I recognise that my hon. Friend is keen to see improvements to the key roads serving his constituency—he has that in common with Members across the House. I know that the key roads serving his constituency include the A60 and the A614. In particular, he highlighted congestion issues at the

A60 Sainsbury's roundabout, as I believe it is referred to colloquially. I note that Nottinghamshire County Council has produced a high-level appraisal of the options for improvements. It is now for the council, as the local highway authority, to develop a more detailed case for investment.

My Department has just announced £348 million to boost the quality of local highways over the next four years. As part of that, the local pinch point fund totals £150 million and will ease congestion on some of our busiest roads. My Department also provides nearly £4 million—to be precise, £3,916,000—to Nottinghamshire County Council each year for small-scale transport schemes, including road safety measures and reducing congestion. However, I emphasise that it is for each local authority to decide how it allocates its resources and which transport improvement projects to support.

I hope that my hon. Friend will welcome the fact that the stretches of the A617, the A60, the A38 and the A614 that serve Mansfield are now classified as part of the major road network. That means that they could in future be eligible for improvements funded through the national roads fund, which is subject to regional prioritisation decisions. The major road network is a new programme that will make substantial amounts of new investment available for road enhancement schemes on a network of the most important local authority roads. It will improve co-ordination and targeting of investment to reduce congestion, unlock housing delivery, support all road users and support economic growth.

As my hon. Friend will know, a package of six junction improvements along the A614 and the A6097 corridor has been chosen for early entry on to the major road network programme, after being identified by Midlands Connect. That is good news for his area because, subject to a satisfactory assessment of an outline business case, including a value-for-money analysis, funding will be available from the national roads fund from 2020 to 2021 for construction of that scheme.

I think my hon. Friend spoke about the Newark bypass and the A46. I know that he understands the clear and uncontroversial importance of the A46, which provides an important regional, and indeed national, link. With Government funding, Midlands Connect, which is the sub-national transport body for the midlands, has been working hard on a route study for the whole of the A46 from the Humber to the Severn. Midlands Connect regards the route as of key strategic importance and believes that targeted improvements to it could really help to unlock growth.

The first road investment strategy—RIS 1, as it is called—said that we would develop the A46 Newark northern bypass scheme during the first road period, which is 2015 to 2020, for delivery in a future RIS period, subject to the work showing that the scheme offered value for money. The scheme would involve widening the A46 north of Newark in Nottinghamshire to a dual carriageway, bringing the last section of the A46 between the A1 and the M1 to expressway standard and improving the A46/A1 junction to allow for better traffic movement to Newark and Lincoln. Work to develop the scheme has been undertaken by Highways England to inform decision making about the second road investment strategy, which will cover the period 2020 to 2025. We expect to announce our decisions on that later this year, so watch this space.

Moving to the issue of local roads as opposed to the A roads and strategic roads, it is not just enhancements to key local roads that are vital to local people and businesses, but proper maintenance—ensuring that the local highway network is in good condition. That is why the Government are investing £6.6 billion in local highway authorities in England outside London between 2015 and 2021. That includes £296 million for a pothole action fund, which is being allocated to local highway authorities between 2016 and 2021 to help to repair potholes or preferably stop them forming in the first place.

That funding is not ring-fenced; its use is entirely at the discretion of highway authorities, based on their local needs and priorities. Between 2015-16 and 2019-20, Nottinghamshire, which is a great and beautiful county, which I know from my previous role as tourism Minister has a great deal of attraction for visitors as well as residents, will have received £85 million to help to maintain the local road network and more than £19 million for small-scale transport improvements.

Businesses regard good roads, both strategic and local, as vital to commercial success, and having them in an acceptable and safe condition is hugely important to us all—especially to me as road Minister—whether we are car users, lorry drivers, bus passengers, cyclists, pedestrians or equestrians. Let us face it: most of us are many of those things. That is why investment is so vital.

Let me turn to the measures that the Government are putting in place to improve local bus services, which my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield mentioned. Each year, my Department provides a quarter of a billion pounds in direct revenue support for bus services in England, via the bus service operators grant scheme. Of that £250 million, more than £43 million is paid directly to local councils outside London to support buses. That particularly supports buses that are not commercially viable, but which local authorities in any given area may consider socially necessary. The rest of the money goes to commercial bus operators. Without that support, fares would increase and marginal services would disappear. Nottinghamshire County Council is receiving more than £1 million from that scheme this year alone and has been successful in securing almost £1.5 million to fund six new electric buses and the supporting infrastructure.

Government funding supports the approximately £1 billion spent by local authorities on concessionary bus passes every year.

Matt Rodda: Some local authorities have completely cut support for socially important buses—I think of another midlands county, Oxfordshire, where there is no support at all. Has the Minister considered that it might be worth ring-fencing some of that money? He has talked glowingly about what is a very diminished pot, yet some of his colleagues on Conservative-run local councils are taking money away.

Michael Ellis: The Government have committed to protecting the national bus travel concession, which is of huge benefit to around 10 million people, allowing free off-peak local travel anywhere in England. Local authorities have a responsibility in this area, and we ask them to exercise their responsibilities and their discretion in this matter, because the concession provides older

people and those with disabilities with greater freedom than they might otherwise have, greater independence and a lifeline to their community. I think that local authorities of any political hues would want to look very carefully at these areas.

I might add that the Government recognise that although the deregulated bus market works well across much of the country, in some areas the deregulated market has not always responded effectively to the changing needs of the population, which is why we introduced the Bus Services Act 2017. It contains a range of options for local authorities to improve local bus services and drive up passenger numbers. In addition to franchising, there are new and improved options to allow local transport authorities to enter into partnership with their local bus operators, to improve services for passengers. We want local authorities and bus companies to work together to make bus travel more attractive, and we hope that the new powers in the 2017 Act will make that more feasible.

I have highlighted the work of my Department on many modes of transport. In addition, by integrating housing and transport policy and talking across Government and across Departments, we are accelerating the delivery of homes by improving transport and are creating well-connected and liveable places. I am pleased that we are working jointly with counterparts at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on a broad range of activities, including the housing infrastructure fund and housing deals.

Vernon Coaker: The Minister is just about to come to his concluding remarks. As he was speaking, one transport issue did occur to me. We know that it is Government policy to drive towards the end of combustion engines and the provision of more electric cars. In terms of transport in Nottinghamshire and across the country, can the Minister say what the Government are doing to ensure greater provision of electric charging points?

Michael Ellis: If I may say so, the hon. Gentleman makes another very good point. That is something that the Government are working on, and my Department are investing in it, including in innovative companies, to assist in developing new ways of creating charging points—for example, contactless charging. My Department and this Government have also been investing in improving the charging infrastructure and are working with companies, including the industry, on how to do that. It is a key priority going forward, because we want to encourage electric vehicle use; in fact, we are leading the way in that area. If I may, I will write to the hon. Gentleman in more detail on the issue of charging points.

In conclusion, I hope I have gone some way towards assuring my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield of our strong commitment to transport in Nottinghamshire. That strong commitment is also one for Northamptonshire, which you, Mr Hollobone, may have an interest in—in fact, I think you do, as do I—and one for all counties throughout this country, because we recognise that transport is fundamental not only to the economy, but to quality and wellbeing of life.

5.26 pm

Ben Bradley: I thank the Minister for his remarks. I thank the hon. Members for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) and for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) and, of course, the shadow Minister for their contributions. I also thank

[Ben Bradley]

my hon. Friends the Members for Sherwood (Mark Spencer) and for Newark (Robert Jenrick), who, as I said in my speech, cannot contribute to this debate because of their roles, but who have had many a conversation with me in the build-up to this debate about their own priorities, which I mentioned in my speech.

I welcome the discussion about consensus from Opposition Members. It is absolutely correct that every time we debate and discuss these issues—in the House or locally—we all broadly agree, across the parties in Nottinghamshire, on the key priorities that we need to deliver, and agree that Nottinghamshire needs the fair slice of national investment that I hope we will see.

I thank the Minister for his response, especially his comments about initial improvements that we will see on the Robin Hood line, in terms of the quality of the

trains and the regularity of service under the new franchise. I also thank him for his comments on the pinch-point funding for congestion. I can assure him that his Department will be receiving the bid for the A60 at Sainsbury's as soon as humanly possible, to try to get that over the line. I am sure he will not be surprised to know that I will continue pushing not only that cause but many other Mansfield and Nottinghamshire-related transport issues. I look forward to the Government's support for the foreseeable future.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered improving transport links in Nottinghamshire.

5.27 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Tuesday 23 July 2019

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Consumer Update

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): Last week, on Thursday 18 July, I gave a speech at the Social Market Foundation which considered three current challenges in relation to competition. The speech is available on the Department's website at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/competition-rules-must-continue-to-evolve-with-emergence-of-digital-platforms>.

The three challenges are: reducing consumer harm caused by the "loyalty penalty" in sectors such as cash savings, mortgages, household insurance, mobile phone contracts and broadband; second, addressing the new competition issues that are arising in digital markets, including in relation to the market power of large platforms; third, harnessing the power of competition to raising the UK's productivity.

In conjunction with this speech, the Government last week brought forward publications relating to the role and performance of the UK's competition institutions. Together, these pave the way for further consideration of potential reforms to address the challenges identified.

Strategic steer to the Competition and Markets Authority

On Thursday 18 July, I published the Government's strategic steer to the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA). For each Parliament the Government issues a non-binding strategic steer to the CMA. The intention of the steer is to support the CMA in achieving its legal duties and objectives to promote competition, both within and outside the UK, for the benefit of consumers and the UK economy. The steer provides a transparent statement of how the Government sees competition fitting with its wider objectives for the economy alongside the CMA's accountability framework.

Review of aspects of competition law

I also laid before Parliament on 18 July the review of aspects of the law on competition as required under sections 46 and 56 of the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013. The review considers the effectiveness of competition enforcement and changes made to the competition regime by the 2013 Act.

The review finds that the direction of travel is broadly positive. More competition cases are being opened, merger reviews and market studies are being brought to a conclusion more quickly, and stakeholder views suggest a good degree of confidence in the regime.

The review notes that we need to consider how well-equipped the UK's competition framework is to respond to current and future competition challenges. In its upcoming Competition Green Paper, the Government will take a wide-ranging look at the institutions, powers and tools that promote and enforce competition in the UK.

Consultation on the statutory audit services market

The Government have also published a consultation in response to the statutory audit services market study by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA).

We have a problem with audit quality, as has been recognised and analysed by Sir John Kingman's review, the BEIS Select Committee, the CMA and, more recently, the Financial Reporting Council itself. This is why it is right that we continuously review our audit regime to maintain the UK's world-leading position.

In October 2018, I asked Lord Tyrie, Chair of the CMA, to consider what can be done to improve competition in the statutory audit sector. I took this action because I want the UK to continue to benefit from a high-quality, competitive and resilient audit services market. Good governance underpins our modern industrial strategy and audits are a vital contributor to the trust and confidence required in a modern economy.

The CMA's final report concluded that the statutory audit market has fallen short of what the UK needs in a modern economy, and made a series of compelling and wide-reaching recommendations to improve quality and increase choice in the audit market. I am most grateful to Lord Tyrie and his colleagues for their detailed and comprehensive study, which captures evidence and views from a wide variety of stakeholders. I share their concerns, and I am pleased that this study complements a wider body of work being undertaken to improve audit quality. Most importantly, we have endorsed Sir John Kingman's recommendation to replace the Financial Reporting Council with an independent statutory regulator with a new mandate and powers.

The Government are committed to creating a fit-for-purpose and proportionate regulatory regime that delivers a competitive and resilient audit market that works for shareholders, investors and the wider public. I would welcome views on the CMA's final proposals. I would also strongly encourage proposals from the sector outlining what they believe could be done to address the CMA's concerns on a voluntary basis ahead of regulatory intervention. The Government will then develop a full set of proposals for reform taking account of both the recommendations from the CMA and the outcome of Sir John Kingman's Review of the Financial Reporting Council. I do not believe that the Government need wait on the outcome of Sir Donald Brydon's review of the purpose of audit before continuing with the process of reform of the audit market.

The consultation document will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and is available on the gov.uk website. The consultation is open for 8 weeks and I look forward to the continued contribution of interested parties.

[HCWS1794]

Government Chemist Review

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore): The 22nd annual review of the Government chemist has been received. The review will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses plus those of the devolved Administrations in Wales and Northern Ireland. The review will also be laid before the Scottish Parliament.

The Government chemist is the referee analyst named in Acts of Parliament. The Government chemist's team carry out analysis in high-profile or legally disputed cases. A diverse range of referee analysis work was carried out during 2018, which included pioneering work undertaken to detect mycotoxins in sultanas and Brazil nuts; pesticides in animal feed and formaldehyde in food contact materials, and on molecular biology approaches to support "consumer as analyst" devices for food testing.

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

News UK: Sharing Journalistic Resources

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Jeremy Wright): On 10 January 2019, News UK submitted an application to vary certain conditions put in place in 1981 by the then Secretary of State for Trade. The changes proposed by News UK would allow The Times and The Sunday Times to share journalistic resources, subject to the agreement of each newspaper's editor.

Having considered News UK's application and representations made following an invitation to comment issued by DCMS on 17 January, I announced, in a written ministerial statement dated 11 April, that I was minded to accept News UK's application to vary the 1981 conditions.

However, in considering the proposed new undertakings as a whole, I also noted that the existing governance arrangements lacked clarity and certainty over roles and responsibilities. Following discussions between News UK and Officials, News UK submitted revised undertakings which substantially meet my concerns.

On 27 June, as required by legislation, I issued a further consultation notice seeking views on the changes to News UK's revised undertakings. Two responses were received. Neither response raised any issues that would warrant me seeking further modifications to the undertakings from News UK. Accordingly, I have today formally decided to accept the new undertakings and have today issued a notice of acceptance. A copy of the notice of acceptance with the final signed undertakings and the revised articles of association of Times Newspapers Ltd (TNL) and Times Newspapers Holding Ltd (TNHL) will be published on the Government website. My Department will shortly publish in the issues note circulated to News UK prior to the discussions with Officials.

The new undertakings creates an explicit requirement for the CMA and the Secretary of State to monitor the effectiveness of the obligations placed on News UK and the TNHL Independent National Directors (INDs). As part of this, I can confirm that in line with the Government's commitments on the handling of media merger cases, that DCMS will publish a non-confidential version of the reports from the TNHL INDs which have to be submitted to DCMS and the CMA annually.

[HCWS1798]

EDUCATION

Parliamentary Question: Correction

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): Information supplied by the HR Capability and Business Partnering Division of the Department for Education has been identified as containing incorrect facts in the response provided to two parliamentary questions from the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), concerning the number and proportion of staff employed in each group of the Department that are apprentices.

In response to PQ226124, the correct figures for the end of February 2019 are that the Department for Education employed 251 apprentices. These can be broken down as follows:

<i>Area</i>	<i>No of Apprentices</i>	<i>No of Employees per Area</i>	<i>Proportion that are Apprentices</i>
Early Years and School Group	40	1901	2%
Education and Skills Funding Agency	77	1543	5%
Government Equalities Office	0	103	0%
Higher and Further Education	9	501	2%
Operations Group	110	1740	6%
Social Care, Mobility and Equalities	15	677	2%
Legal Advisers Office	0	14	0%
	251	6479	4%

The Government Equalities Office is captured in Department for Education data because they were still employees of the Department for Education at the end of February. Legal Advisers Office remain departmental employees.

Following the identification of this issue, we have completed an audit of our database. A rigorous new process has been put in place to ensure the robustness of our data.

[HCWS1801]

Higher Education Student Finance

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore): I am announcing details of student finance arrangements for higher education students undertaking a course of study in the 2020-21 academic year starting on 1 August 2020.

Maximum tuition fees for the 2020-21 academic year in England will be maintained at the levels that apply in the 2019-20 academic year, the third year in succession that fees have been frozen. This means that the maximum level of tuition fees for a standard full-time course will remain at £9,250 for the 2020-21 academic year.

Maximum undergraduate loans for living costs will be increased by forecast inflation (2.9%) in 2020-21. And the same increase will apply to maximum disabled students' allowances for students with disabilities undertaking full-time and part-time undergraduate courses in 2020-21. Maximum grants for students with child or adult dependants who are attending full-time undergraduate courses in 2020-21 will also increase by forecast inflation in 2020-21.

We are also increasing support for students undertaking postgraduate courses in 2020-21. Maximum loans for students starting master's degree and doctoral degree courses from 1 August 2020 onwards will be increased by forecast inflation (2.9%) in 2020-21. And the same increase will apply to the maximum disabled students' allowance for postgraduate students with disabilities in 2020-21.

Further details of the student support package for 2020-21 can be found at gov.uk.

I expect to lay regulations implementing changes to student finance for undergraduates and postgraduates for 2020-21 late in 2019 or early in 2020. These regulations will be subject to Parliamentary scrutiny.

The Government will consider the recommendations of the independent panel to the review of post-18 education and funding, published on 30 May 2019, and will conclude the review at the spending review later this year.

Higher education student finance for 2020-21

Fees for full-time and part-time undergraduate students.

Maximum fees for full-time and part-time undergraduate courses will remain at 2019-20 levels in 2020-21.

The maximum fee for standard full-time courses offered by approved (fee cap) providers with an access and participation plan (APP) and a teaching excellence and student outcomes award (TEF) will remain at £9,250 in 2020-21.

The maximum fee for full-time accelerated degree courses offered by approved (fee cap) providers with an APP and a TEF will remain at £11,100 in 2020-21.

The maximum fee for part-time courses offered by approved (fee cap) providers with an APP and a TEF will remain at £6,935 in 2020-21.

Lower maximum fees will remain at 2019-20 levels in 2020-21 for (i) courses offered by providers without an APP and/or a TEF and (ii) overseas study years, work placement years and short final years of full-time courses.

Students undertaking courses at approved (fee cap) providers will be able to apply for up-front tuition fee loans to meet the full costs of their tuition.

Maximum fees for undergraduate courses offered by approved providers are not capped. Students undertaking courses at approved providers will be able to apply for up-front tuition fee loans towards the costs of their tuition which will remain at 2019-20 levels in 2020-21: up to £6,165 for a standard full-time course; up to £7,400 for a full-time accelerated degree course and up to £4,625 for a part-time course.

Living costs support for full-time undergraduate students.

Loans for living costs for new full-time students and continuing full-time students starting their courses on or after 1 August 2016.

Maximum loans for living costs for new full-time students and eligible continuing full-time students starting their courses on or after 1 August 2016 will be increased by forecast inflation (2.9%) in 2020-21.

The maximum loan for living costs for 2020-21 will be £9,203 for students living away from home and studying outside London. The equivalent loan rate for students living away from home and studying in London will be £12,010; for those living in the parental home during their studies, £7,747; and for those studying overseas as part of their UK course, £10,539.

Loans for living costs for new full-time students and continuing full-time students starting their courses on or after 1 August 2016 who are eligible for benefits.

Maximum loans for living costs for new full-time students and eligible continuing full-time students starting their courses on or after 1 August 2016, and who are eligible for benefits, will be increased by forecast inflation (2.9%) in 2020-21.

The maximum loan for living costs for 2020-21 will be £10,490 for students who are eligible for benefits who are living away from home and studying outside London. The equivalent loan rate for students who are eligible for benefits who are living away from home and studying in London will be £13,098; for those living in the parental home during their studies, £9,140; and for those studying overseas as part of their UK course, £11,732.

Loans for living costs for new full-time students and continuing full-time students starting their courses on or after 1 August 2016 who are aged 60 or over on the first day of the first academic year of their course.

The maximum loan for living costs in 2020-21 for new full-time students and eligible continuing full-time students starting their courses on or after 1 August 2016 who are aged 60 or over on the first day of the first academic year of their course, will be increased by forecast inflation (2.9%) to £3,893.

Maintenance grants and special support grants for full-time students who started their courses before 1 August 2016.

The maximum maintenance grant and special support grant for eligible full-time students who started their courses on or after 1 September 2012 but before 1 August 2016, will be increased by forecast inflation (2.9%) to £3,801 in 2020-21.

The maximum maintenance grant and special support grant for eligible full-time students who started their courses before 1 September 2012 will be increased by forecast inflation (2.9%) to £3,489 in 2020-21.

Loans for living costs for full-time students who started their courses before 1 August 2016.

Maximum loans for living costs for eligible students who started their courses on or after 1 September 2012 but before 1 August 2016, will be increased by forecast inflation (2.9%) in 2020-21.

The maximum loan for living costs will be £6,597 for students who are living away from home and studying outside London. The equivalent loan rate for students

living away from home and studying in London will be £9,205; for those living in the parental home during their studies, £5,247; and for those studying overseas as part of their UK course, £7,837.

Loans for living costs for eligible students who started their courses before 1 September 2012.

Maximum loans for living costs for eligible students who started their courses before 1 September 2012 will be increased by forecast inflation (2.9%) in 2020-21.

The maximum loan for living costs will be £5,938 for students who are living away from home and studying outside London. The equivalent loan rate for students living away from home and studying in London will be £8,309; for those living in the parental home during their studies, £4,604; and for those studying overseas as part of their UK course, £7,068.

Long courses loans.

Maximum long courses (living costs) loans for new and continuing students who are attending full-time courses that are longer than 30 weeks and three days during the academic year will be increased by forecast inflation (2.9%) in 2020-21.

Targeted support for undergraduate students with dependants and undergraduate students with disabilities.

Dependants' grants.

Maximum dependants' grants (adult dependants' grant, childcare grant and parents' learning allowance) will be increased by forecast inflation (2.9%) in 2020-21 for all new and continuing fulltime undergraduate students.

The maximum adult dependants' grant will be increased to £3,094 in 2020-21.

The maximum childcare grant payable in 2020-21, which covers 85% of actual childcare costs up to a specified limit, will be increased to £174.22 per week for one child only and £298.69 per week for two or more children.

The maximum parents' learning allowance payable in 2020-21 will be increased to £1,766.

Disabled students' allowances.

Maximum grants for undergraduate students with disabilities will be increased by forecast inflation (2.9%) in 2020-21.

For a full-time course: to £23,258 for a non-medical personal helper, £5,849 for major items of specialist equipment and £1,954 for other disability related expenditure.

For a part-time course: to £17,443 for a non-medical personal helper, £5,849 for major items of specialist equipment and £1,465 for other disability related expenditure.

Support for part-time undergraduate students.

Fee and course grants for students who started part-time courses before 1 September 2012.

Maximum fee and course grants for students who started part-time courses before 1 September 2012 will be increased by forecast inflation (2.9%) in 2020-21. Maximum fee grants will be increased to £959, £1,150 or £1,442, depending on the intensity of study of the course. The maximum course grant will be increased to £314.

Loans for living costs for new part-time students and continuing part-time students starting degree level courses on or after 1 August 2018.

Maximum loans for living costs for new part-time students and continuing part-time students who started degree level courses on or after 1 August 2018 will be increased by forecast inflation (2.9%) in 2020-21.

The maximum loan for living costs for 2020-21 will be £9,203 for students living away from home and studying outside London. The equivalent loan rate for students living away from home and studying in London will be £12,010; for those living in the parental home during their studies, £7,747; and for those studying overseas as part of their UK course, £10,539.

Part-time students qualify for a proportion of the full-time loan for living costs depending on their intensity of study compared with a full-time course.

Support for postgraduate students.

Loans for students undertaking postgraduate master's degree courses.

Maximum loans for new students starting postgraduate master's degree courses in 2020-21 will be increased by forecast inflation (2.9%) to £11,222.

Loans for students undertaking postgraduate doctoral degree courses.

Maximum loans for new students starting postgraduate doctoral degree courses in 2020-21 will be increased by forecast inflation (2.9%) to £26,445.

Disabled students' allowance.

The maximum grant for postgraduate students with disabilities will be increased by forecast inflation (2.9%) to £20,580 in 2020-21.

More details of higher education student finance arrangements for the 2020-21 academic year will be published on Government websites in due course.

[HCWS1793]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Advancing Our Health: Prevention in the 2020s

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Seema Kennedy): Further to the prevention vision published on 5 November 2018, I wish to inform the House of the publication of the Green Paper, "Advancing our Health: Prevention in the 2020s". The consultation will launch today and will run for 12 weeks.

For the first 70 years of the NHS, we have been successful in helping people live longer. Life expectancy has increased by almost 30 years over the past century. Cancer survival rates are up, mortality rates from heart disease and stroke are down.

Despite this progress, over 20% of our lives are spent in poor health. On average, men born today can expect to live 16 years in poor health and women 19 years. There is also a clear social gradient, with people in deprived areas living shorter lives in poorer health. Now we must move from thinking about life span to health span: the number of years we can expect to live healthy, independent lives.

The NHS is already making good progress, placing prevention at the heart of its long-term plan and supported by our record £20.5 billion additional investment. In the years ahead, the challenge is to deliver on these commitments, to move from a national treatment service, focused on illness, to a national wellness service, focused on good health, and to work even more closely with local authorities who have specific responsibilities around prevention and influence many of the determinants of good health.

As well as modernising prevention services, we also need to lay the foundations for good health across society and make healthy choices easier. This is because less than a quarter of our health is shaped by the services we receive.

Our health is our greatest asset. Just as we save for our retirement, we should be investing in our health throughout life. We know that some people find this easier than others, not because of innate differences in their values or beliefs, but because of differences in their experiences and circumstances. We believe that everybody has the right to a solid foundation on which to build their health. This means giving our children a good start and growing the conditions for good health throughout life.

When it comes to living a healthy life, the modern world presents many challenges. It can feel like the odds are stacked against us. This Green Paper is not about nannying but making healthier choices easier for people, so they are empowered to make decisions that are right for them and their families. To live a healthy, happier life, evidence suggests our focus should be on: eating a healthy diet, being physically active, being smoke-free and taking care of our mental health.

The commitments in the Green Paper help us towards our mission of healthy, happier lives. We aim to publish a Government response by Spring 2020, setting out our proposals in more detail.

Health is a shared responsibility. Only by working together can we achieve our vision of healthier, happier lives for everyone.

[HCWS1795]

Pensions: NHS Clinicians

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): The NHS pension scheme is a generous and valuable part of the package of pay, terms and conditions for NHS staff, which continues to compare favourably with schemes in other sectors. However, the interaction between the NHS pension scheme and the tapered annual allowance means some clinicians are facing unintended consequences. The tapered allowance rightly aims to see more higher earners contributing towards the public purse by reducing the amount they can save into their pensions tax-free.

The Government have been listening to concerns about the impact on patient care as clinicians decline to take on additional work or seek early retirement in response to the prospect of incurring pension tax charges, and evidence that some NHS clinicians are changing their working patterns due to this issue. The Government are determined to find a solution that provides the right balance of incentives for clinicians to provide the services

that patients need. Retaining and maximising the contribution of our highly skilled clinical workforce is crucial to delivery of the ambitions for patient care set out in the long-term plan for the NHS.

The Government have therefore launched a full public consultation setting out proposals to make the NHS pension scheme more flexible for clinicians, to give them more control over their pension growth and tax liabilities. Greater pension flexibility will help clinicians avoid cutting their hours allow them to undertake additional shifts to reduce waiting lists, or take on further supervisory responsibilities.

The consultation proposes a 50:50 flexibility, which lets clinicians halve their pension contributions in exchange for halving the rate of pension growth, balancing simplicity with the need to offer flexibility. Following discussions with clinicians and employers, the consultation goes further and invites views on other measures that Government should consider.

For NHS pension scheme members who do incur annual allowance tax charges, the “scheme pays” facility offers an alternative to finding funds up front to meet any tax charges for saving into their pension while they work. Instead they can choose for the pension scheme to pay the tax charge. The pension scheme will then recoup the tax paid plus interest by deducting it from the value of their pension at retirement. The consultation proposes a potential improvement to the calculation of “scheme pays” deductions so that it is more transparent and staff can better assess the effect on their pension.

The consultation will listen to feedback on all potential ideas on pension flexibility before making changes in time for the new tax year.

[HCWS1799]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Firearms Licensing: Statutory Guidance

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): Today, I am publishing a public consultation on the introduction of statutory guidance to the police on firearms licensing. The proposed guidance aims to ensure that the highest standards of public safety are maintained in the firearms licensing process, improving consistency between police forces and in court when licensing decisions are appealed. It is being introduced following a recommendation made by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services in September 2015, which found that police forces were not always following the Home Office firearms guidance, resulting in inconsistent application of the law.

We have acted on this recommendation and the Policing and Crime Act 2017 made provision for the Home Secretary to issue statutory guidance to the police on their firearms licensing functions. The police will have a duty to have regard to the guidance, which will include existing safeguards relating to firearms ownership, such as police background checks or the criteria around applicants with a history of domestic violence.

The draft guidance in the consultation also contains new proposals on the arrangements for assessing the medical suitability of firearms applicants, following consideration of how the system is currently operating, and concerns raised about the variation in practice across the country. It is important that the arrangements

support doctors in providing the necessary medical information to the police who have responsibility for firearms licensing, and that the police are able to require sight of the medical information before they proceed to grant the firearm certificate. I am seeking views on these arrangements from all those with an interest so that we can ensure the system operates as effectively as possible. It is vitally important to ensure that those in possession of firearms are medically fit, to safeguard the public and the firearm certificate holder themselves.

The consultation is seeking views from police forces, firearms owners and other interested parties and the wider public on the contents of the proposed statutory guidance. I am also consulting the National Police Chiefs' Council and the Chief Constable of Police Scotland, as required by the legislation. I will consider very carefully the views which are put forward during the consultation, which will last for a period of eight weeks, following which the Home Office will publish the new statutory guidance. I am committed to efficient and effective operation of the firearms licensing system, and once the statutory guidance has been in place for a suitable period, I intend to review the operation of the new medical arrangements to ensure they are working effectively.

Copies of the consultation along with the draft guidance and impact assessment will be made available on gov.uk and will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS1792]

Immigration

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): I am today making an announcement on a number of issues related to immigration. These include an expansion of the shortage occupation list (SOL) in line with the recommendations of the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) and a planned future amendment in the Immigration Rules to Section 67 leave. I am also providing an update on the Home Office's response to cheating in English language tests and the Border, Immigration and Citizenship System (BICS) independent review.

Migration Advisory Committee review of the shortage occupation list

On 29 May, the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) published the outcome of its full review of the shortage occupation list (SOL). I am very grateful to the MAC for a very thorough and comprehensive piece of work. The MAC recommended a number of changes to the main UK-wide SOL, expanding the list to cover a range of high-skilled occupations, including a number of health and social care, engineering and digital technology occupations.

The Government are happy to accept all of the MAC's recommendations on the composition of the SOL and the necessary amendments will be made in the autumn immigration rules changes.

The MAC also suggested that, in order to combat the particular challenges faced by some remote communities, the Government should pilot a scheme that facilitated migration to these areas. The Government accept that this is an idea worth pursuing. Further details will be given in due course.

Section 67 leave

In June 2018, we introduced section 67 leave to fulfil our legal obligation to those children transferred to the UK under section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016. This ensures that those unaccompanied children transferred to the United Kingdom under section 67, and who do not qualify for refugee status or humanitarian protection, are able to remain in this country and build a life here. This form of leave allows them to study, work, access public funds and healthcare, and is a route to settlement which they would not ordinarily have had.

Currently, the immigration rules only provide for section 67 leave to be granted to those who have already had an application for refugee status or humanitarian protection refused. This means that upon arrival in the United Kingdom, the child is required to go through the process of claiming asylum, including providing an account of why they fled their country of origin.

We intend to amend the existing rules to allow those transferring under section 67 to receive this form of leave immediately, as soon as they arrive. This will provide the children, and the local authorities who will care for them, with additional reassurance and guarantee their status in the UK at the earliest opportunity.

Children who have already been transferred to the UK under section 67 and are currently having their asylum claims assessed will also be entitled to section 67 leave automatically once this amendment has been made. Children granted section 67 leave on arrival will still have the opportunity to claim asylum. Should they be successful in an asylum claim, those who qualify will receive refugee or humanitarian protection status.

The Government are absolutely committed to transferring the specified number of 480 unaccompanied children under section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 as soon as possible.

The Home Office's response to cheating in English language tests

Five years ago, the scale of this issue was uncovered by Panorama. Their footage revealed systematic cheating in test centres run on behalf of the company ETS. Further investigation showed just how widespread this fraud was. Twenty-five people who were involved have been convicted and sentenced to over 70 years in prison. Further criminal investigations are ongoing, with a further 14 due in court next month.

Our approach to taking action on students has been endorsed by the courts, who have consistently found the evidence the Home Office had was enough to prompt the action that was taken at the time.

Despite this, there have remained concerns that some people who did not cheat may have been caught up and I am aware that some people found it hard to challenge the accusations against them. So earlier this year, I commissioned officials for advice.

This is a complex matter given that we need to work within existing legal frameworks relating to appeal rights, judicial review and administrative review.

I have therefore asked officials to review our guidance to ensure that we are taking the right decisions on these cases to ensure we are properly balancing a belief that deception was committed some years ago against other factors that would normally lead to leave being granted, especially where children are involved. We will update

operational guidance to ensure no further action is taken in cases where there is no evidence an ETS certificate was used in an immigration application.

We continue to look at other options, including whether there is a need for those who feel they have been wronged to be able to ask for their case to be reviewed. We intend to make further announcements about this and will update the House in due course.

Review of the border, immigration and citizenship system

In October 2018, I committed to conducting a review of the Border, Immigration and Citizenship System (BICS). The purpose of this review will be to ensure the BICS is ready and able to deliver a world class immigration system.

The review will focus on whether the BICS has in place the right systems, structures, accountability and working practices to deliver against its goals. It will be forward looking in its nature. It will not consider individual policies or goals, but rather whether the system has the right capabilities to deliver against those stated objectives.

I am pleased to announce today that I have appointed Kate Lampard CBE to lead the review.

Kate has previously held senior non-executive roles in the NHS, chaired the Financial Ombudsman Service, and has undertaken important reviews for Government. She has a wealth of skills and experience to bring to this critically important task.

I will place a copy of the terms of reference for the review in the Libraries of both Houses. The review will aim to complete by early 2020.

[HCWS1803]

Police and Criminal Evidence Act Codes of Practice

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): I am today laying before the House an order under section 67(7A) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 ('PACE') to amend PACE Codes C and H, which govern the detention, treatment and questioning of suspects by the police. Copies of the revised Codes C and H will also be laid.

These revisions, which will come into operation on 21 August 2019, are being introduced to ensure that the menstrual needs of female and transgender detainees, and the health, hygiene and welfare needs of all individuals in police custody are protected. The new codes include the following revisions:

Each female detainee must be asked if they require or are likely to require any menstrual products while they are in custody. They must be told that they will be provided free of charge and that replacement products are available.

Custody officers must ask all detainees if they wish to speak in private with a member of custody staff about any matter concerning their personal needs relating to health, hygiene and welfare: if the detainee wishes, this member of staff may be of the same sex. These changes provide an opportunity for female detainees to raise issues about their menstrual needs and also for all detainees to raise issues relating to other health and hygiene needs such as products that may be required for incontinence. If detainees wish to take this opportunity to raise health and hygiene needs, necessary arrangements should be provided/made as soon as practicable.

The changes highlight that the clothing and personal effects that detainees may retain include menstrual and other health, hygiene and welfare products. A decision to withhold any such products must be subject to a further specific risk assessment.

Access to toilet and washing facilities must now also take account of the detainee's dignity. For example, in cells subject to CCTV monitoring, privacy in the toilet area should be ensured by any appropriate means and detainees should be made aware of this when they are placed in the cell.

The changes make it explicit that strip searches and intimate searches of detainees must take due regard of their dignity. This includes the detainee's health, hygiene and welfare needs including menstruation.

The above provisions around health, hygiene and welfare products take into account the possible needs of transgender individuals.

These revisions were prompted by concerns raised by the Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA) that in some cases women were being left without basic menstrual products in police cells.

They received overwhelming support following a public consultation last year, and we have subsequently sought and secured the agreement of the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), in her role as Chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee, that these straightforward revisions to the codes can be brought into force as soon as possible, as per the commitments made by the then Government during the introduction of section 67(7A) of PACE in 2003, without the approval of a resolution by each House.

I am grateful for the work and support of partners across the policing system, ICVA, and dedicated custody staff across the country. We all share a commitment to ensuring the dignity of detainees, and these changes will to help ensure the needs of individuals are met across the board.

[HCWS1796]

Terrorism Threat Level System

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): I am today announcing changes to the terrorism threat level system. As recommended in the operational improvement review, the joint terrorism analysis centre have taken an increased role in assessing all form of terrorism, irrespective of the ideology that inspires them.

The national threat level system will now take account of the assessments from all forms of terrorism, including Islamist, Northern Ireland, and extreme right-wing. The threat from Northern Ireland-related terrorism in Northern Ireland will remain separate from the national threat level.

Also, to ensure clarity in the threat level system, I am also announcing the change in definition of the LOW, SUBSTANTIAL and CRITICAL threat levels. The threat levels will now be defined as below:

CRITICAL meaning an attack is highly likely in the near future

SEVERE meaning an attack is highly likely

SUBSTANTIAL meaning an attack is likely

MODERATE meaning an attack is possible but not likely

LOW meaning an attack is highly unlikely

The changes made today do not affect the current threat level. The threat level to the UK from terrorism remains at SEVERE, and the threat level to Northern Ireland from Northern Ireland-related terrorism also remains at SEVERE, meaning that an attack is highly likely.

Threat levels are designed to give a broad indication of the likelihood of a terrorist attack. They are a tool for security practitioners working across different sectors and the police to use in determining what protective security response may be required. They also keep the public informed and give context to the protective security measures which we all encounter in our daily lives.

There remains a real and serious threat against the United Kingdom from terrorism and I would ask the public to remain vigilant and to report any suspicious activity to the police regardless of the threat level.

The decision to change the terrorism threat levels are taken by the independent from Ministers. The joint terrorism analysis centre set the national threat level and the security service set the Northern Ireland-related terrorism in Northern Ireland threat level. These are based on the very latest intelligence, considering factors such as capability, intent and timescale. Threat levels are kept under constant review.

[HCWS1797]

JUSTICE

Prison Service Pay Review Body

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Robert Buckland): I am pleased to announce that the Prime Minister has appointed Tim Flesher CB as chair of the Prison Service Pay Review Body. This appointment is for three years, with Mr Flesher's term commencing on 1 August 2019 and ending on 31 July 2022. This appointment has been made in accordance with the Governance Code on Public Appointments.

[HCWS1800]

TRANSPORT

Crossrail

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): It has been a challenging year for the Crossrail project. Since August 2018 when Crossrail Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of Transport for London (TfL), announced that the opening of the Elizabeth line through central London would be delayed, the project has been fully reviewed and reset.

Crossrail Ltd, TfL and the Department for Transport (DfT) have taken significant action in response to issues raised in the independent reviews by KPMG, as well as the reports from the National Audit Office, the Public Accounts Committee and the London Assembly's Transport Committee. Lessons have been learned and Crossrail Ltd and both project sponsors, DfT and TfL, remain

fully committed to the completion of the project which will transform London rail transport, and carry around 200 million passengers per year.

Actions taken this year have included:

The commissioning and completion of two wide-ranging and detailed independent reviews into the project's governance, and commercial and financial agreements, with all recommendations acted upon by June 2019.

The agreement in December 2018 to an additional £2.15 billion financing package to deliver the final stages of the project in a way that is fair to the UK taxpayer.

The appointment of a new executive leadership team within Crossrail Ltd, a review of the organisational structure to ensure maximum efficiency, and the strengthening of the Crossrail board to ensure the right skills are in place right across the organisation and its board.

The announcement in April 2019 of a revised schedule which confirmed a six month window for delivery of the central tunnel section between Abbey Wood and Paddington, not including Bond Street, with a mid-point in December 2020, with more certainty to follow as testing progresses.

The publication in April 2019 of a joint report by the Department for Transport and the infrastructure projects authority (IPA) on lessons learned from the sponsorship of major projects including Crossrail.

Despite the challenges, the project has seen some key achievements during this year. Main dynamic testing of the trains commenced in January, and Crossrail Ltd recently achieved a further milestone with the commencement of close-headway testing of multiple trains in June.

Fifteen new Class 345 trains are in operation on the eastern and western parts of the route, building reliability and achieving a high standard of performance. Testing of the trains in the Heathrow tunnels is continuing and a TfL Rail service between Paddington and Reading is planned to commence in December of this year. This will be another important stepping stone to the opening of the full railway as soon as possible after the central section is completed.

The Network Rail (NR) On Network works on the eastern and western sections of the Crossrail route are well advanced. Over the past year, work completed has included the installation of the steelwork for new accessible footbridges, stairs and lift shafts at Ealing Broadway, West Ealing and Acton Main Line. The contracts to build and upgrade six ticket halls between Acton Main Line and West Drayton have been awarded, and the new ticket halls at Forest Gate and Gidea Park have now opened to the public.

Updated costings for Network Rail's programme show that the costs are now forecast at around £2.8 billion. The additional costs are the result of some work taking longer than planned and have been managed by Network Rail from within its own internal budgets. No further funding has been provided from Government, and this has not had an impact on any other programmes.

Further details on Crossrail Limited's funding and finances in the period to 29 May 2019 are set out in the table below.

The coming months will be critical for the project as Crossrail Ltd work to complete the installation and integration of the tunnel, stations and signalling systems, and Network Rail continue their works on surface sections of the route. It remains a hugely complex project and uncertainty and risk remains across the programme, with significant testing and integration work remaining. The new leadership team has committed to being fully open and transparent as it works through the final stages of the project, which is supported by the Department and TfL. However, it is positive that Crossrail Ltd now has a new plan in place to complete the outstanding works and bring the Elizabeth line into passenger service at the earliest possible date. When complete, the Elizabeth line will transform the rail network in London, reducing overcrowding and increasing central London rail capacity by 10%.

During the passage of the Crossrail Bill through Parliament, a commitment was given that an annual statement would be published until the completion of the construction of Crossrail, setting out information about the project's funding and finances. The relevant information is as follows:

Total funding amounts provided to Crossrail Limited by the Department for Transport and TfL in relation to the construction of Crossrail to the end of the period, (22 July 2008 to 29 May 2019)	£13,165,913,790
--	-----------------

Expenditure incurred (including committed land and property spend not yet paid out) by Crossrail Limited in relation to the construction of Crossrail in the period (30 May 2018 to 29 May 2019) (excluding recoverable VAT on Land and Property purchases)	£1,481,243,170
Total expenditure incurred (including committed land and property spend not yet paid out) by Crossrail Limited in relation to the construction of Crossrail to the end of the period (22 July 2008 to 29 May 2019) (excluding recoverable VAT on Land and Property purchases)	£13,958,459,007
The amounts realised by the disposal of any land or property for the purposes of the construction of Crossrail by the Secretary of State, TfL or Crossrail Limited in the period covered by the statement.	£143,778,674

The numbers above are drawn from Crossrail Limited's books of account and have been prepared on a consistent basis with the update provided last year. The figure for expenditure incurred includes moneys already paid out in relevant period, including committed land and property expenditure where this has not yet been paid. It does not include future expenditure on contracts that have been awarded.

[HCWS1802]

Petitions

Tuesday 23 July 2019

OBSERVATIONS

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Lloyds Bank, Yateley branch

The Humble Petition of residents of the United Kingdom, Sheweth,

That Lloyds Bank have proposals to close their Yateley branch on 29 August 2019; further that this high street branch is particularly highly valued, especially by older residents and small business owners who often pop in to manage their finances; further that there has been an increase of branch usage in the last year by businesses, proving the demand for a high street branch; and further that if accounts are moved to Camberley or Fleet, this becomes between a one-and two-hour journey by public transport, which is clearly not in the best interests of our community.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable house urges HM Government to take all possible steps to urge Lloyds Bank to reconsider this decision and to make sure that the banking industry considers the social implications of their actions.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.—[Presented by Mr Ranil Jayawardena, Official Report, 3 July 2019; Vol. 662, c. 1311.]

[P002485]

Observations from The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen):

The Government thank the hon. Member for North East Hampshire (Ranil Jayawardena) for submitting the petition on behalf of his constituents about the planned closure of the Yateley branch of Lloyds bank.

The Government are sorry to hear about residents' disappointment at the planned closure of this bank branch.

Lloyds Banking Group, like all banking providers, needs to balance customer interests, market competition, and other commercial factors when considering their branch strategies. Decisions on opening and closing branches are taken by the management team of each bank on a commercial basis, and the Government do not intervene in those decisions.

However, the Government do believe that banks should act in the best interests of their customers and are committed to increasing competition and encouraging innovation to ensure all bank customers can benefit from better products and services. The Government continue to engage actively with the banking industry and consumer groups on these issues on an ongoing basis.

In May 2017, the major high street banks signed up to the access to banking standard, committing to work with customers and communities to minimise the impact of branch closures and put in place alternative banking

services. The standard commits banks to ensure customers are well informed about branch closures, the bank's reasons for closure and options for continued access to banking services. These options should include specialist assistance for customers who need more help. The operation of the standard is monitored and enforced by the independent lending standards board, ensuring that banks are held accountable for the way they treat their customers when a branch closes.

In addition, since January 2017, the Post Office has had an agreement with the high street banks that allows more banking customers to access a wider range of services at the Post Office than ever before. The arrangement allows 99% of personal and 95% of small business customers to carry out their everyday banking at more than 11,500 Post Office branches in the UK. While the range of services offered by the Post Office may be more limited than that offered in a traditional bank branch, the services provided through the Post Office's extensive network ensures that essential banking facilities remain available in as many communities as possible. Since 2010, Post Office branch numbers have been at their most stable for decades and 99.7% of the national population now lives within three miles of a branch. Furthermore, 92.9% of the national population live within one mile of their nearest post office branch. Almost 98.7% of the rural population lives within three miles of a post office.

Both initiatives have the Government's full support, and banks are aware that the Government expect their involvement to be genuine and unqualified.

The Government cannot reverse the changes in the market and in customer behaviour; nor should they determine firms' commercial strategies in response to those changes. However, the Government will continue to take positive action to maintain access to vital banking services and ensure banks support communities across the UK when their local branches close.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Treating epilepsy/multiple sclerosis with cannabis oil

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the petitioners are disturbed by the Home Office ban on doctors prescribing cannabis oil and THCA to those with epilepsy or multiple sclerosis, especially the two children Billy Caldwell who needs a prescription urgently, and Alfie Dingley; further that this is very urgent as the Sunday Times on May 20th stated that Mrs Caldwell only has enough medication to last until June and her son's epileptic fits were very serious and life threatening and he needed oxygen before he had the treatment, first in Holland and then in County Tyrone in Northern Ireland, whereas with the treatment he can lead a normal life; further that a few weeks ago his doctor, Doctor Brendan O'Hare, was warned not to write any more prescriptions for Billy, and further that cannabis can be dangerous in the wrong amounts, but in the correct dosage, prescribed by a doctor it can be very beneficial.

The petitioners therefore requests that the House of Commons urges the Government to urge the Home Office and the Department for Health and Social Care

as a matter of urgency to inform Dr O'Hare, that he can resume his prescriptions for the child Billy, although they include THCA; further that we urge the Government to inform Mrs Dingley that her doctor can prescribe medicines containing cannabis to her son Alfie whose epileptic seizures were reduced by 60 to 70% in Holland with cannabis oil but are much worse now, without it; further to urge the Government to write to the Multiple Sclerosis Society to say that doctors may now prescribe cannabis; further to urge the Government to allow doctors to prescribe cannabis oil (cannabidiol) which is supposed to be legal in the UK, and THCA, which is a Class A drug, to patients and to provide doctors with an easy-to-fill-in 2-page form to get a licence to do so, instead of ordering them to stop the treatment as they did to Billy's doctor, and further to urge the Government to announce that it will allow doctors to prescribe treatments derived from cannabis whenever the patients need it, such as those with severe epilepsy and multiple sclerosis, to prevent desperate patients having to go to illegal drug dealers.

And the petitioners remain, etc. —[Presented by Caroline Lucas, *Official Report*, 25 June 2019; Vol. 662, c. 5P .]

[P002480]

Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Seema Kennedy):

The law was changed on 1 November 2018 to allow clinicians on the General Medical Council's Specialist Register to prescribe cannabis-based products for medicinal use (CBPM), where it is clinically appropriate and in the best interest of patients. No licences are required to prescribe.

While cannabis and cannabis-based products remain a Class B drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, there is now a legitimate route to access these products for medicinal use. Patients will not be able to obtain these products from their GPs but will require a referral to a specialist who can prescribe on the basis of clinical need. The supply of cannabis-based medicines to patients will be discussed at the stage in their treatment when the specialist doctor has considered and discounted all licensed interventions. Cannabis-based medicines may therefore only be suitable for a small number of patients with severe, treatment-resistant conditions.

While the law does not restrict the conditions for which these products may be prescribed, interim clinical guidance has been issued by the Royal College of Physicians, British Paediatric Neurology Association and Association of British Neurologists. The interim guidance focuses only on areas where the evidence base is most developed, namely chronic pain, intractable nausea and vomiting, spasticity (including multiple sclerosis) and severe, treatment-resistant epilepsy.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has been commissioned to develop updated clinical guidelines on the prescribing of CBPM, the scope of which is limited to the management of the conditions covered in the interim guidance. The guidelines will be published by October 2019. It will be based on the best available international evidence and will have

been produced using NICE'S world-renowned process for identifying and assessing relevant studies and delivering such guidance. NICE is expected to consult on the draft guidance between 23 July-20 August 2019.

It is clear that we do not yet know enough about the benefits and potential harms of using cannabis-based products as medicines. Apart from those products that have market authorisations (including Sativex and Nabilone), and are being prescribed on the NHS, other cannabis-based products are unlicensed medicines that have not had their quality, safety or efficacy assured by the medicine regulators nor, their cost-effectiveness determined by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. This is the foundation of NHS decisions about routine funding for medicines.

In the meantime, the normal NHS medicines governance systems apply, as they do to all locally funded unlicensed treatments, and are being used to support good clinical practice and safe and effective prescribing. Decisions will be taken, at NHS Trust level on a case-by-case basis, based on the needs of the individual patient and the evidence of efficacy and cost-effectiveness available.

The NHS does not have unlimited resources. NHS Trusts and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) have to make difficult decisions about commissioning care, but they do this based on patient needs, clinical evidence and cost-effectiveness. CCGs are statutorily obliged to provide the best possible care, balancing demand with supply for the benefit of all their patients and local populations. Access to cannabis-based products for medicinal use will be considered as part of this.

Cannabis-based medicines are no different from any other drug in that they have effects and side-effects. This is why it is so important to develop our knowledge about the safety and efficacy of cannabis-based products when they are used as medicines. To further the evidence-base, the National Institute for Health Research has issued two calls for research in this area and is working with the industry and researchers to ensure that the evidence is developed in a way that will inform decisions on public funding. This research call is open to all good quality proposals covering any indication and disorders unresponsive to existing treatments. Ministers have called on the industry to take part in clinical trials and be transparent in sharing the results of this research.

The Department cannot comment on or intervene in the cases of individual patients. However, ministers are determined that, where it is the clinically right thing to do, patients should receive cannabis-based products for medicinal use. Decisions relating to the prescribing of cannabis-based medicines need to be made on a case-by-case basis, and whether or not to treat must remain a clinical decision.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has initiated a review to the barriers being faced by patients seeking access to cannabis-based medicines. The review is now complete, and the Government are carefully considering NHS England-Improvement's report (to be published shortly) alongside the recent Health and Social Care Select Committee's Inquiry Report on medicinal cannabis which was published on 3 July 2019.

Ministerial Correction

Tuesday 23 July 2019

EDUCATION

Murders in Northamptonshire: Serious Case Reviews

The following is an extract from the response to an Urgent Question on Monday 10 June 2019.

Nadhim Zahawi: There has been and continues to be a great deal of debate about the transparency of the child protection system in England, but there is a presumption that all serious case review reports are published. That is why local safeguarding children boards and the new safeguarding partnerships are required to send copies of all serious case reviews to the panel, the DFE and Ofsted within at least seven days, as I have mentioned. At that point, they would need to provide justification for any decision not to publish the report. The panel has not yet received the draft serious case review in relation to child JL. Once the draft serious case review is received, the panel will consider carefully if there is any justification for not publishing the report. I hope that reassures the hon. Gentleman.

[Official Report, 10 June 2019, Vol. 661, c. 410.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi).

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne).

The correct response should have been:

Nadhim Zahawi: There has been and continues to be a great deal of debate about the transparency of the child protection system in England, but there is a presumption that all serious case review reports are published. That is why local safeguarding children boards and the new safeguarding partnerships are required to send copies of all serious case reviews to the panel, the DFE and Ofsted within at least seven days, as I have mentioned. At that point, they would need to provide justification for any decision not to publish the report. The panel has not yet **considered Northamptonshire's draft** serious case review in relation to child JL **which it received on Friday 7 June**. Once the draft serious case review is **reviewed**, the panel will consider carefully if there is any justification for not publishing the report. I hope that reassures the hon. Gentleman.

ORAL ANSWERS

Tuesday 23 July 2019

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	1191	HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE—continued	
Autism and Learning Disabilities.....	1205	NHS Facilities.....	1201
Cystic Fibrosis Treatment	1194	NHS Workforce Vacancies	1202
Health Inequalities.....	1203	Rural Areas: Access to Health Care	1193
Healthcare Staffing Levels	1196	Rural Areas: Health Service Funding.....	1192
King George Hospital A&E Department.....	1205	Social Care Services: Accessibility.....	1198
Leaving the EU: Access to Drugs.....	1191	Strategy and Action Plan: Improving Lives.....	1207
Mental Health: Young People.....	1200	Topical Questions	1208
Missed GP Appointments.....	1206	Vulnerable Older People.....	1203

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Tuesday 23 July 2019

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL		HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE—continued	
STRATEGY	107WS	Pensions: NHS Clinicians	115WS
Consumer Update.....	107WS	HOME DEPARTMENT	116WS
Government Chemist Review	108WS	Firearms Licensing: Statutory Guidance.....	116WS
DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	109WS	Immigration	117WS
News UK: Sharing Journalistic Resources	109WS	Police and Criminal Evidence Act Codes of Practice	119WS
EDUCATION	110WS	Terrorism Threat Level System	120WS
Higher Education Student Finance.....	110WS	JUSTICE	121WS
Parliamentary Question: Correction	110WS	Prison Service Pay Review Body	121WS
HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	114WS	TRANSPORT	121WS
Advancing Our Health: Prevention in the 2020s	114WS	Crossrail.....	121WS

PETITIONS

Tuesday 23 July 2019

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL		HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	10P
STRATEGY	9P	Treating epilepsy/multiple sclerosis with cannabis oil.....	10P
Lloyds Bank, Yateley branch	9P		

MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Tuesday 23 July 2019

	<i>Col. No.</i>
EDUCATION	13MC
Murders in Northamptonshire: Serious Case Reviews.....	13MC

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons*,

**not later than
Tuesday 30 July 2019**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Tuesday 23 July 2019

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 1191] [see index inside back page]

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Personal Independence Payments: Supreme Court Ruling [Col. 1215]

Answer to urgent question—(Justin Tomlinson)

Decriminalisation of Abortion [Col. 1222]

Answer to urgent question—(Jackie Doyle-Price)

Low Carbon Domestic Heating [Col. 1228]

Bill presented, and read the First time

Asylum Seekers (Accommodation Eviction Procedures) [Col. 1228]

Bill presented, and read the First time

Tibet (Reciprocal Access) [Col. 1229]

*Motion for leave to bring in Bill—(Tim Loughton)—agreed to
Bill presented, and read the First time*

Exiting the European Union (Transport) [Col. 1233]

Motion—(Michael Ellis)—agreed to

Electoral Commission [Col. 1239]

Motion—(Mel Stride)—agreed to

Nationality [Col. 1242]

Motion—(Caroline Nokes)—agreed to

Body Image and Mental Health [Col. 1247]

General debate

Petitions [Col. 1272]

Lower Limb Wound Care [Col. 1274]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

UK Trade and Investment Strategy [Col. 497WH]

Roadside Recovery Vehicles: Red Lights [Col. 523WH]

Child Maintenance Service [Col. 532WH]

Vanessa George: Early Release from Prison [Col. 556WH]

Transport Links: Nottinghamshire [Col. 564WH]

General Debates

Written Statements [Col. 107WS]

Petitions [Col. 9P]

Observations

Ministerial Correction [Col. 13MC]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
