

Monday
30 September 2019

Volume 664
No. 344



HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES

(HANSARD)

Monday 30 September 2019

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

No-deal Brexit: Short Positions against the Pound

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on short positions being taken against the pound in the lead-up to a possible no-deal Brexit.

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Mr Simon Clarke): It is not appropriate for the Government to comment on specific currency market movements, or on market positioning—

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. We cannot hear what is being said.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. My advice to the Minister is simply to project. I know he will do so unfailingly.

Mr Clarke: I will do my best, Mr Speaker. One would not want to be accused of being unduly meek in the circumstances.

We accept the market-based price of sterling and do not have a view on what level this should be. Were the Government to speculate on the value of sterling, it could hurt confidence in our macroeconomic framework. However, as the price of sterling fluctuates in the normal way, Her Majesty's Treasury believes that investors should be entitled to hedge, including by short selling. The foreign exchange market is a global market, and it is essential that we work with other jurisdictions to ensure a consistent international approach to the oversight of these markets. That is why the UK has supported the work of the Bank for International Settlements to create a single global foreign exchange code, and work is ongoing to ensure that it embeds common standards of good practice in this area.

The United Kingdom will be leaving the European Union on 31 October, whatever the circumstances. We must respect the referendum result. We would prefer to leave with a deal, and we will work in an energetic and determined way to get that better deal done.

John McDonnell: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his post and congratulate him on his promotion.

The threats by the Prime Minister of taking our country over a no-deal cliff edge have created inevitable uncertainty in the markets, reflected in the varying position of the pound. Uncertainty, as we know, is the breeding ground for speculation. Evidence has mounted of sizeable sums being mobilised to short the pound,

betting on sterling falling in the case of a no-deal Brexit. We have heard nothing from the Government until this morning. On the other hand, the former Chancellor has expressed his concern, saying that the Prime Minister

“is backed by speculators who have bet billions on a hard Brexit—and there is only one outcome that works for them: a crash-out no-deal Brexit that sends the currency tumbling and inflation soaring.”

The former permanent secretary to the Treasury, Nick Macpherson, said yesterday,

“Mr Hammond is right to question the political connections of some of the hedge funds with a financial interest in no deal. They are shorting the £ and the country, with the British people the main loser.”

Others will consider that what makes the situation so much worse is not just that we have speculators gambling on our country's failure and at our country's expense, but that the Conservative party has been willing to accept donations from those speculators. We are not talking about trivial sums: in this year alone, the Prime Minister and the Conservative party have received £726,000 from individuals who back a no-deal Brexit, many of them involved in hedge funds.

There are questions to be answered. Can the Minister confirm the Government's estimate of the scale of speculation on the economic outcome of Brexit—placing bets on risks to our economy? Is there not a danger that the promotion of a no-deal scare by the Prime Minister, resulting in profiteering by his friends and donors, could be seen as a conflict of interest by any standard, and contrary to the ministerial code, which says that Members

“must avoid real or apparent conflicts of interest”?

Should not the Minister who is responsible for overseeing the risks to our economy stand up to the Minister and tell him how inappropriate it is for any candidate for prime ministerial office, or any party, to accept funds from individuals who are speculating on the potentially enormous risks to our economy from no-deal Brexit? Will the Government now support Labour's proposals for an inquiry into the finance sector, including the regulation of hedge funds and short selling?

Mr Clarke: The right hon. Gentleman talks about uncertainty, but the only people generating uncertainty in this place are the Opposition. It is they who are selling this country short. They will not vote for a deal, they will not vote for no deal, and they will not vote for a general election. As anyone who talks to British business knows, the main threat to our economy would come from the economic policies we heard set out in Brighton last week.

As I set out in my remarks, the Government's central position is that we are working to secure a good deal, and the focus of that will be at the summit on 17 and 18 October. That remains our overwhelming focus and our best hope. Clearly, it does not help when the Opposition come together to remove our negotiating leverage in those vital talks.

The right hon. Gentleman referenced the former Chancellor of the Exchequer. I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond) for all the work he did as Chancellor to help prepare for no deal. We have been able to build on that over the last few weeks. I would note, however,

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when it comes to some of the more outlandish speculation in this area, that Frances Coppola in the *Financial Times*, in an article entitled, “The Mythical Bets On No-Deal Brexit”, wrote yesterday that this was yet another “tin-foil hat conspiracy theory”. That is about the sum of the merit of this debate.

The Government will not comment on individual positions—no one would expect us to—or the actions of individuals. We do not accept that there is any prospect of a conflict of interest. Insofar as anyone needs standing up to, it is not my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister; it is the right hon. Gentleman, who is making a political and, dare I say it, speculative attempt to throw mud around the House. I did not hear anything in his statement or questions that amounted to a substantive point; they amounted to trying to propagate myths and to smear. In a week when we are trying to lower the temperature in the House, the Opposition seem intent on stoking it. I have nothing further to add.

Amber Rudd (Hastings and Rye) (Ind): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his elevation to this important role. While many of us on the Government Benches, and in fact across the House, are concerned about the impact on currency markets of the obvious contradiction between the Benn Act and the Government’s consistent position that we are leaving on 31 October, everybody on the Government Benches is united in the knowledge that the real damage to this country would be done by the Labour party getting any place in government. Every time it makes an announcement, it affects the markets, and that is what gives further uncertainty to this country and that is what would truly damage our economy.

Mr Clarke: Of course, I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. We heard the danger set out last week. I thought that the prospect of a three-day week was bad; well, the Opposition have decided to split the difference and have a four-day week. Much of what we heard in Brighton was a recipe for business disaster and the very damage that we need to avoid and which we have spent the last nine years trying to put right.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The pound was shorting at a two-year high in August. The Prime Minister’s sister, Rachel Johnson, has said that people “have invested billions in shorting the pound or shorting the country in the expectation of a no-deal Brexit.”

The former Chancellor has said that

“there is only one outcome that works for them: a crash-out no-deal Brexit that sends the currency tumbling and inflation soaring.”

Frances Coppola, who the Minister was keen to quote earlier, said that at the very least there was a conflict of interest. The Prime Minister received at least £375,000 from donors associated with hedge funds during his leadership campaign, and we already know from the Jennifer Arcuri case that he is no stranger to conflicts of interest. Will the Minister launch an investigation into this whole affair, because the public need to know what is going on behind the scenes? Will he also accept that those who are already wealthy seem to have everything to gain from a no-deal Brexit but that my constituents and

thousands and thousands of others across these islands are still struggling to make ends meet after a decade of austerity and it is they who have everything to lose?

Mr Clarke: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. We served together on the Treasury Select Committee. She speaks about her constituents. My constituents in Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland could not by any metric be described as wealthy and they enthusiastically support the idea of our delivering on our manifesto commitment—and indeed on the referendum result—to leave the European Union. The Government’s position on no deal is very clear: we want a good deal, a fair deal, that does not leave this country as a rule taker in perpetuity. If we secure a deal, my point, very simply, to the Scottish National party would be: if they want to avoid no deal, they should vote for the deal we bring back.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his appearance at the Dispatch Box. Does not that limp excuse for an urgent question reveal the contempt the Opposition have for financial markets, which contribute 11% of tax revenue to the Exchequer? Does he agree that the fact that, of the \$6.6 trillion of currency dealing done globally, 43% is now done in the City of London—a record high—is a vote of confidence in the City and the way the Government are handling it, and how far does he think the pound would fall if that lot on the Opposition Benches ever got into power?

Mr Clarke: The pound would need a good head for heights in that scenario. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The City of London is, of course, one of the great assets of this country and something we should celebrate rather than castigate. It is a source of enormous tax revenue, which underpins our vital public services, and there is no doubt that it is one of the key cards in our hand when it comes to the Brexit negotiations and securing a good deal. So I absolutely agree with him. We sometimes need to do more to talk it up, rather than talking it down.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): Is not the implication of the Minister’s first answer that the authorities would allow the currency to fall indefinitely, without intervention, if that is where the market leads?

Mr Clarke: The Government’s position is that we do not adopt a fixed target for sterling, as clearly we believe that it is sensible for the currency to find its own level in various circumstances. Obviously that freedom for the currency to float is important. Look, all of us in this House believe that the country will succeed in a whole variety of different scenarios. I believe that sterling will find an appropriate level in any scenario, and clearly there are aspects of a fall in sterling that would make it easier to export, so it is not a zero-sum game. We have to trust the market to find its own level.

Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): There is one obvious point, even for people, like me, who are not economists: if we talk down the country and the economy, that is where the economy will go. Thank goodness the Labour party is not in power, because it would destroy the economy.

Mr Clarke: That is exactly the point I was making, because we need a bit of self-belief in our country. Here we are in the world's fifth largest economy, and in a country that is widely regarded around the world as a bastion of strength, and we will absolutely succeed in all scenarios. When it comes to Brexit, the Government's strong preference is to get a deal, but the overwhelming point that people need to hear from this Dispatch Box is that we are leaving the European Union on 31 October, delivering what the people asked us to do, and indeed what most of us in this House were elected specifically on manifestos to deliver.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): *The Guardian* is today reporting that Crispin Odey is shorting house builders and shopping centres, which means that in the event of a no-deal Brexit, when they cannot build homes and more shops close, he will make a packet. Surely the Minister can see that there is a massive conflict of interest, particularly for the Leader of the House, who has been financed by that man for years.

Mr Clarke: The passion that the hon. Lady shows is certainly a match for what I heard when I was in Bishop Auckland recently to address some of her constituents, because they were very clear that we should be leaving the European Union. I have already said that I do not propose to comment on the actions of individuals, because clearly it is for them to account for their actions. The Government do not take a position on the actions of individuals. We do not take a position on the issue of short selling.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): May I welcome the Minister to his post? Does he agree that a sure-fire way of stopping speculators benefiting from a no-deal Brexit would be for the shadow Chancellor and his comrades to vote for the Prime Minister's deal when he brings it back and to stop no deal in the first place?

Mr Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend. Clearly, if we can secure a good deal that is fair to this country, which is our central aim, that is what everyone in the House should get behind, because that will take our country out of the European Union on the smoothest basis—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) says “Fantasy” from a sedentary position, but what I think is fantasy is the idea that our chances of securing a good deal are improved by continuing to propagate a surrender Act. That is the problem, I am afraid to say, that lies at the heart of this debate. The Opposition are, in essence, trying to take power without responsibility, and it is highly unfortunate and detrimental to this country's interests if we do not all work together as a nation to deliver on what we, as a country, decided was our future course of action.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Can the Minister confirm that the Government's own economic assessment shows that a no-deal Brexit would have the most damaging consequences for the British economy, investment, jobs and businesses? As that is the case—[*Interruption.*] Well, we have all read the assessment produced by the Government. As that is the case, can he explain to the House why he is prepared to contemplate that outcome, given the impact it would have on British business?

Mr Clarke: The right hon. Gentleman makes a point that we have often debated in the House. We believe on the Government Benches in delivering on the referendum mandate, which was to trigger article 50 and leave the European Union. The operation of article 50 is clear—we leave with a deal if we can secure it, but without a deal if we cannot. The Government have invested billions of pounds in no-deal preparation. Much of that money has been invested subsequent to the November 2018 report, which did not touch on dynamic policy options open to the Government after we leave the European Union. I think in my own region, for example, of free ports. The modelling is not perfect, and does not encompass all the options that are open to us. None the less, as I say, the base case—the Government's working assumption—is that we will leave the European Union with a deal.

That is what we are working towards. The crucial summit is only three weeks away, and it would help if the House got behind the Government's efforts to try to secure a sensible deal, take us out and move the country forward. This is the umpteenth debate that we have had in the House on this issue. We go round in circles and do not make progress, because one side of the House refuses to contemplate any sensible way out of this impasse.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: I gently remind the House that the thrust of the urgent question relates to short positions being taken against the pound. This is not a general, Second Reading-style debate on the merits or demerits of a no-deal Brexit, of which the House has treated before and doubtless will do so again. It is on the specific matter to which I have just referred, and I feel sure that our hon. Friend from the west country is a noted authority on this matter, on which he is about to expatiate.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Thank you Mr Speaker, you are very kind. It is wonderful to see the Minister in his place, oozing calm and authority, in sharp contrast to the stoking of fears and division on the Opposition Benches. We have just heard about the risk to the economy, but the real risk to the economy is not Brexit nor yet a no-deal Brexit. The real risk is letting the shadow Chancellor anywhere near No. 11 or the Treasury.

Mr Clarke: I thank my hon. Friend for those kind remarks. It is clear that that would be the ultimate vote of no confidence in the British economy.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Does the Minister not find it ironic that the shadow Chancellor should be concerned about the future value of the pound and the impact on speculation, given that he and his party have spread economic gloom and doom, have talked the economy down, and have proposed lunatic economic policies if ever he should get his hands on the levers of power in this country? Does the Minister agree that the real honeypot for speculators is not our leaving the EU but the prospect of a Labour Government?

Mr Clarke: I could not agree more strongly with the right hon. Gentleman. Yes, the danger is less our leaving the European Union—it is more the Opposition entering Downing Street.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his appointment. He is doing brilliantly in his first appearance at the Dispatch Box. He discussed bringing certainty to the markets by delivering Brexit. The main message that I hear from constituents in Harrogate and Knaresborough is that after three and a half years of talking there has been enough talking—why do we not just get on with it? Does he agree with them?

Mr Clarke: I thank my hon. Friend, who has been a distinguished holder of this office. He is absolutely right. There is in all walks of life a demerit to uncertainty. There is a real problem whereby we marched the country up to the top of the hill in the run-up to 29 March, then had to march down again. We are close to our projected exit date of 31 October. It would be really, really problematic for all those businesses that are making preparations, and in some cases stockpiling provisions as well, to keep going backwards and forwards on this question. The country voted to leave in 2016. It reaffirmed that by voting by over 80% for the two main parties that were committed to delivering on that result in 2017. We need to get on with the job. There would not be anything for people to speculate on if we could achieve certainty in the House.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): Over the weekend, I watched “The Big Short”, and I would encourage everyone to watch that film about sub-prime mortgages. In it, there were several hedge funders who made billions from the collapse of the market. They did not care that honest, ordinary Americans lost their homes and jobs. When that happens, when we have a no-deal Brexit and hedge-fund managers make billions, how will the Minister support my constituents, who will be impoverished, and will perhaps lose their jobs and homes? What is he going to do to level the playing field? Actually, it is a question of morality.

Mr Clarke: I am an historian rather than an economist, but I certainly do not take my lessons on hedge fund activity from Hollywood. We need to be very clear about the fact that there is a real need to provide certainty, and that certainty is hugely important.

Let me say gently—and it is gently—that I did not vote for the deal on the first two occasions when it came forward, for the very reasons that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister did not do so, namely the concerns about the backstop provisions. Those provisions need to be addressed, and we are working to address them. Fundamentally, we did vote to leave, on a deal or no-deal basis. The hon. Lady’s constituents voted to leave the European Union. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) says, from a sedentary position, “Not on a no-deal basis.” I find that my constituents are very clear about the fact that they voted to leave, deal or no deal, and that was very clear at the time.

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his new position. He is truly doing sterling work this afternoon. It will come as no surprise

to him to learn that I am fully in favour of well-run and smooth capital markets, from which London is reaping an international reward. Would he care to speculate on what sort of short-selling and sterling damage would be done under the Labour party—given their unfunded tax proposals and their potential sequestration of public assets—and what the market would think of them if they were anywhere close to power, which I pray that they will not be?

Mr Clarke: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am afraid we cannot get around the fact that we are now dealing with something very dangerous in terms of the division between the two parties: the division between economic rationality and a programme that would well-nigh destroy the free-market economy in this country. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members scoff and sneer, but the reality is that anyone looking at the prognosis from the Labour party conference last week—let alone the trillions of pounds of commitments that Labour is now adding up—will see that it would not only destroy our public finances, but would do massive damage to the competitiveness of British business, on which jobs and homes and mortgages depend.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (IGC): Does the Minister accept the specific conclusions in the Office for Budget Responsibility’s fiscal risks report? In July, the OBR ran a stress test on a no-deal scenario, on the model of the International Monetary Fund. It predicted that sterling could depreciate by 10% immediately, because “market participants judge that a fall in the pound is needed to compensate for the reduced competitiveness with the EU... inflation is initially higher, due to the weaker pound”, which contributes to the UK’s entering “a year-long recession”. Does the Minister accept the OBR’s analysis, or does he believe that this is “a price worth paying”?

Mr Clarke: What I will say is that I believe we can avoid that scenario entirely if we get a good deal and leave the European Union according to plan, on 31 October. We are very clear about the fact that, in a scenario whereby we cannot get a deal through the House, we will deliver on the referendum mandate and leave the European Union. That is uncontested Government policy. We will ensure that we make the dynamic policy choices that will enable our economy to remain strong, robust and full of opportunity.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): Would my hon. Friend care to comment on this splendid irony? Mr George Soros, who in 1992 made a fortune in short positions against the pound, is now one of the bankrollers of the Continuity Remain campaign.

Mr Clarke: Tempting as it is to follow the trail laid down by my hon. Friend, I will content myself with saying that, just as I would not comment on the actions of individuals in my reply to an Opposition Member, I will not comment on the actions of individuals now. However, the idea that there are vested interests on only one side of the debate could clearly be contested.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): One of the areas of the economy that the casino-style hedge funds will be betting against is the housing market. What assessment has the Treasury made of how many

fewer homes will be built, and which section of the house building economy will be worst affected: renters, first-time buyers or pensioners?

Mr Clarke: To the best of my knowledge, we have not commissioned specialist advice on the housing market. If I am incorrect, I will ensure that that is set out in writing to the hon. Lady. It is very clear that the UK housing market is in its most robust condition for many years. Indeed, we are now building many multiples of the situation we inherited in 2009, when house building had well nigh stagnated. Of course, many of the problems faced in our housing market stem from the disastrous failure of the last Labour Government to build enough homes in the first place.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): Uncertainty hits not only the London markets but the markets in Edinburgh and elsewhere across the United Kingdom. Does my hon. Friend agree that the best way to end this uncertainty is to vote for a deal, as he did back in March?

Mr Clarke: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. Yes, I did vote for a deal on 29 March, and I did so because I feared losing Brexit altogether. I think that was a real risk at that point, and it remains a real risk now, thanks to the antics of the Opposition. If only all of Scotland was as well represented as those areas represented by the Scottish Conservatives, who of course have adopted a totally sensible and unifying position, which is that we should get on and deliver, as one country, what our one country voted for.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): The economies of the UK were damaged almost irreparably by spivs and speculators in 2008. Have the Government and the Prime Minister learned nothing from that experience, which hit the poorest in our society the worst? This is not about whose policy position is best or worst; this is about transparency, honesty and the Prime Minister's relationships with these short-changers to society. Will the Minister acknowledge the seriousness of the matter and call an independent investigation into the Prime Minister's conduct?

Mr Clarke: Actually, this is about democracy and whether we implement the result of a national referendum in which more than 34 million of our fellow citizens expressed their view. For my part, I intend to honour what they voted for. That is the position of this Government, and I think that view is shared by anybody who understands the damage that preventing our leaving the European Union would do to faith in democracy.

Adam Afriyie (Windsor) (Con): My hon. Friend is doing a great job on the Front Bench, to which we welcome him. This urgent question is deeply partisan and political—we all know that—but it strikes me that our economic growth looks pretty good this year. PwC also predicts pretty good economic growth. Just to negate the nonsense coming from the Opposition, can my hon. Friend tell me how well preparations are going for a no-deal exit?

Mr Clarke: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: the third quarter figures for the UK economy look very robust. Clearly, there is a lot to be said about the

ongoing work to make sure that we are ready for a deal or no-deal scenario. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor delivered the spending review earlier this month and today he will give an excellent speech in Manchester, no thanks to the Opposition, setting out our plans for how we move forward. Clearly, we are deploying billions of pounds and the most robust plans available to make sure that we are ready to thrive in all scenarios.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): When the last Conservative Chancellor, a former permanent secretary to the Treasury and the Prime Minister's own sister blow the whistle, the Minister simply cannot brush aside these most serious claims of a conflict of interest. Some of the Prime Minister's biggest donors are clearly betting against Britain, and, intentionally or not, the Prime Minister is aiding and abetting them by pursuing a no-deal Brexit. I therefore ask again: will the Government set up an urgent independent investigation?

Mr Clarke: No.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that speculation in the future movements of markets or currencies—some people think they will go up, others that they will go down—is a sign of a healthy free market economy, and that there is no speculation in the direction of travel of the shadow Chancellor's favoured economic model in Venezuela, where the bolivar continues to crash, which is hardly surprising because inflation there is running at about 1 million per cent. this year?

Mr Clarke: My hon. Friend puts it with his customary robustness, but he is absolutely right that the real threat to the economy, to the strength of sterling, to our competitiveness and to jobs and living standards across the country would be a series of bad decisions made by a reckless, hard-left Labour Government.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): My constituents and the Minister's constituents are working multiple jobs and long hours to keep themselves afloat. Does he understand at all just how distasteful it is for them to see people making millions betting against our country?

Mr Clarke: I yield to nobody in my appreciation of how hard people work in the Tees valley and, indeed, how passionate they are about our area, but there is absolutely no doubt in my mind that democracy needs to be honoured. We need to deliver on the referendum result and to get this done. There will no actions for the City to take if we get a good deal across the line and the hon. Lady votes for it.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): In June, the Bank of England reported that, thanks to the mitigation and preparation put in place by the Government, any hit to GDP in the event of a no-deal Brexit would be reduced by two and a half percentage points. Will the Minister, whom I welcome to his position, confirm that we have had more preparation since then? That means we should be further protected, meaning these individuals will not make their money.

Mr Clarke: My hon. Friend is, of course, absolutely right that we are stepping up our preparations to cover all eventualities. That is why we made provision in the spending review, which was designed to ensure that we

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go into this autumn with the options open to us kept as wide as possible. Of course, it is also why the provisions of the surrender Act, which the Opposition brought forward against the will of this Government, are so unwise.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): Does the Minister not understand that my constituents in Bristol West are smart enough to spot the hypocrisy of Members on the Treasury Bench telling us that we should vote for a deal when, first, none exists and, secondly, they did not vote for it last time? Does he not understand that my constituents can also spot the other hypocrisy of criticising people for making uncosted spending assessments mere hours after the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care said he does not know how he will pay for all these hospitals he has promised us? Does the Minister not understand that my constituents can spot all of this?

Mr Clarke: I struggle to see what all that necessarily has to do with the question before the House, but what is very clear is that most people in Bristol are also smart enough to spot that it would be thoroughly unwise to ignore the result of a democratic referendum.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): The best way to stop the speculation and the uncertainty is for the Government to accept there is a majority in this House that will not let a no deal happen and, therefore, if the House does not agree a deal, we will not, in fact, be leaving on 31 October.

Mr Clarke: What I would say to the hon. Gentleman is, “Watch this space.”

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): In response to an earlier question the Minister said he is more of a historian than an economist, so he might remember that hedge funds were also reported to have taken short positions against the pound during the 2016 referendum. Is he satisfied that the regulation of short selling and hedge funds is adequate?

Mr Clarke: As I said in my opening statement, the Treasury keeps these issues under review and is always working to ensure that we regulate this area in a way that is appropriate and proportionate.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): In the interest of transparency, will the Minister agree to publish details of all call logs and meetings between every Minister and Crispin Odey?

Mr Clarke: The Government do not comment on meetings with individuals, and the hon. Gentleman would not expect me to do so now.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Ind): Is not the shadow Chancellor peddling conspiracy theories about shadowy figures working with the Government to manipulate the economy for personal gain because he is a self-proclaimed Marxist who wants to undermine trust and confidence in how our economy and our country work? [Interruption.] It is no laughing matter, as that is what he is trying to

do. There have, in fact, already been two investigations into these wild claims. One, as we heard earlier, by the *Financial Times* that said this is

“firmly in the realm of conspiracy theories.”

The second investigation was by the independent fact-checking organisation Full Fact, which demolished this crazed nonsense in an article headlined, “We think there’s a big error in that viral article about hedge funds and Brexit”.

Mr Clarke: Would that all parts of our country were as well served as Dudley is by the hon. Gentleman, who is absolutely right: it is genuinely dispiriting that in the mother of Parliaments we find ourselves debating material that is more fit for the tinfoil hat brigade than for Parliament at a crucial time in our country’s history.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): As deputy general secretary of the old Transport and General Workers Union and then Unite, I led the battle against the Kraft takeover of Cadbury. A successful and profitable British icon was taken over by a debt-laden American multinational because the hedge funds bought 31% of the shares and sold Cadbury short. Does the Minister not recognise that there is a potential conflict of interest when we have a Prime Minister prepared to sell Britain short by way of a no-deal Brexit, backed by those who make billions daily out of selling our nation short?

Mr Clarke: The short selling regulations cover the sale of shares, so that falls within the remit of the existing legislation. Clearly, we all want to see our country thrive and move forward towards a better future. That will be best done by voting for a deal, as of course many of the members of the hon. Gentleman’s former trade union will have done.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I hope the Minister recognises that we are talking not about companies protecting themselves in good faith from the devastating impact of a no-deal Brexit, but about large-scale—industrial—shorting of the pound, that that can drive extreme behaviours, as well as market crashes, and that, at the very least, this needs to be investigated by the Electoral Commission, in order to see what the influence is. But my question to the Minister is simple: does he know the level of exposure to the shorting of the pound?

Mr Clarke: The Government do not take a view on this issue. [Interruption.] But what is clear is that the hon. Lady can avoid the outcome that she so wants to avoid, by voting for a deal when one is brought forward—that is, and always remains, the case. So we now need to move forward with some purpose, rather than with wild speculation, trying to smear the Government as somehow being in hock to these interests—it is not working. Any rational observer will see that this is not an argument that sustains itself.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The Minister keeps trying to make this about leaving the EU on 31 October or not, but it is all about transparency and conflict of interest. We are talking about hedge fund managers who previously backed the leave campaign and in 2016, after the referendum, made some £350 million

overnight. Therefore, £375,000 of backing to the Prime Minister is nothing compared with the billions of pounds these people might make if there is a no-deal crash out. Surely the Minister understands that this is about a conflict of interest and transparency. If he is so confident about the Government's behaviour, why does he not authorise an investigation?

Mr Clarke: The hon. Gentleman needs to recognise that our country is absolutely determined to leave the European Union on 31 October. Rather than trying to prevent that, and, in so doing, making no deal more likely, he should get behind the Government's efforts to secure a good deal.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Let me give the figures some context. Correct me if I am wrong, but I believe that back in 2016 Odey fund management made £300 million on shorting sterling. By contrast, the UK automotive industry has spent £350 million ensuring that it is protected against a no-deal Brexit. Does the Minister not recognise that we are vulnerable in our manufacturing sector—in our heartland communities—to losing jobs and businesses because of the practices of these short sellers? Lord Macpherson, the former permanent secretary to the Treasury, has tweeted:

“Mr Hammond is right to question the political connections of some of the hedge funds with a financial interest in no deal. They are shorting the £ and the country, with the British people the main loser”.

What does the Minister say?

Mr Clarke: I point to the wise words of the Opposition Deputy Chief Whip in the House of Lords last November, who said that short selling

“is not necessarily the evil practice that the popular press held it to be...It had a role.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 28 November 2018; Vol. 794, c. 706.]

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Short selling may have a role, but not when Government policy deliberately manipulates the currency to provide a big pay-out to individuals who have paid huge amounts of money either to the Conservative party or to individual right hon. Members. That is the problem. Does the Minister not understand that this is not about the Government's taking a position on currencies? It is about the stink of something that does not seem quite right.

Mr Clarke: That is such an unworthy question that I do not intend to dignify it with an answer.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): The Minister quotes Frances Coppola, but she also said:

“Many hedge-fund managers see Brexit...as an opportunity from which they obviously hope to profit, and they are positioning their portfolios accordingly”.

She fears that that creates “psychological pressure” on the Prime Minister

“to deliver what his backers want rather than what is in the best interests of the country”.

How can the Minister convince the people of the UK that the Prime Minister has the moral courage to resist that psychological pressure?

Mr Clarke: The Prime Minister has the moral courage to deliver on the referendum result, take our country forward, deliver what millions of people voted for and make our country a better place to live. If we are going to exchange quotes, let me quote a bit more from the article:

“In short, there is no evidence that the hedge funds that have backed Johnson's election campaign have ‘millions of pounds’ of speculative bets on no-deal Brexit. They have millions of pounds of speculative bets on UK companies, yes, but that is simply business as usual.”

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): The reason why this is not business as usual is that we are faced with Government Ministers who have close connections with and financial interest in some of the speculative funds and who are making a decision that would have catastrophic consequences for my constituents and for businesses in my constituency, and there is no transparency as to the closeness of that relationship. It cannot be divorced from what is going on in this place, which is why the Minister needs to agree to the requests for an inquiry. We need to get to the bottom of this.

Mr Clarke: The Government are doing what they are doing because we believe it is right to leave the European Union on 31 October, as we all promised that we would. That is absolutely what animates our actions; any suggestion to the contrary is not just wrong but offensive.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): How does the Minister defend a situation in which anyone who is caught insider gambling deliberately to fix the result of a game of cricket goes to jail, but anyone who is insider gambling deliberately to crash the economy is likely to end up in the House of Lords?

Mr Clarke: That is a very serious suggestion. I would not recommend that the hon. Gentleman repeat it outside the Chamber.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): I welcome the new Minister to his place. Will he clarify the statement he made earlier that the former Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond), is part of the tinfoil hat brigade perpetuating a conspiracy theory in regard to this serious matter?

Mr Clarke: I have a great deal of admiration for the former Chancellor, but I am clear that in this case he is wrong.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): A number of hedge funds expect to benefit as a result of their short positions on a number of sectors in the economy, including construction and shopping centres. It cannot be right that as a deliberate result of Government policy those hedge funds are going to cash in at the expense not only of those sectors but of the constituents of every single Member of this House.

Mr Clarke: Government policy is to leave the European Union with a deal, if at all possible, and that remains our central case. The hon. Gentleman's question in many ways summarises the past few minutes, in so far as it does not get to the substantive point, which is that the

[Mr Simon Clarke]

only reason we are at risk of a no-deal exit is that we have not managed to persuade the Opposition that they should get behind our attempts to secure a better deal rather than seek constantly to undermine them.

Sir Mike Penning: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Points of order come later. We look forward to them with eager anticipation from the lips of the right hon. Gentleman.

Wrightbus (Ballymena)

3.18 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the situation at Wrightbus in Ballymena in County Antrim.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Julian Smith): I am deeply disappointed by the news that Wrightbus has had to enter administration. This is a real blow for the people of Ballymena. A number of redundancies have been announced. This clearly creates an extremely difficult situation for all those who have lost their jobs and for their families. Support will be provided to those affected via the Northern Ireland civil service, and I—along with my hon. Friends—will continue to do everything that I can, as I have been doing over the weekend and in previous weeks, to work with Invest Northern Ireland and Government colleagues to support any potential purchaser of the business or assets who may be identified during the process of administration.

Ian Paisley: I thank the Secretary of State for what he has said. To put this matter in perspective, the loss of those jobs is the equivalent of about 30,000 to 40,000 jobs being lost on mainland UK, so it is devastating to the Northern Ireland economy—it is a huge blow to our economy.

I thank the Government, first of all, for what they have done, and what they have indicated behind the scenes that they intend to do, for any purchaser. The Secretary of State, the Prime Minister and the Business Secretary have all made that very, very clear. However, let me ask the Secretary of State the following questions. Will he spell out to any investor what Government support would actually look like in terms of research and development, soft loans or grants? Can he assure me that the party currently at the table is fully aware of the extent of the promised support and what it would actually look like to assist it in this process? Will he ensure that public transport, by way of hydro and other electric power, will receive special support to make sure that Northern Ireland and the UK's public transport sector provides the greenest technology possible, and present itself as a huge selling point around the world? Will he recognise that arm's-length bodies such as Translink and FirstGroup and other bus buyers need to be encouraged directly with economic assistance to buy more British-made buses? Will he ensure that in future all bus orders go through British companies, therefore supporting British jobs and British investment?

On a practical level, will the right hon. Gentleman ensure, and spell this out to the workers—our heart has to go out to the 1,200 or so workers who have lost so much and who are devastated at the present time—that practical support will be given to them. I know that about £14 million of redundancy has been paid out, but practical support is also needed, such as issuing the P45s quickly, and making sure that workers in Malaysia and here on mainland GB are brought home to Northern Ireland as quickly and expeditiously as possible.

Julian Smith: My hon. Friend shares my desire to ensure that we get into a better place on this issue. Let me answer his questions in turn. On R&D and Government support more generally, the Government are making

any potential bidders aware of what could be available, but, as he knows, this is a commercial process. It is being managed by an administrator, and many of the actions need to take place at a devolved level. None the less, we will continue—and I do continue—to speak actively to all stakeholders involved, and I am conducting meetings during the course of this week.

On buses more generally, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of Exchequer has made an announcement today to commit £220 million to buses in Great Britain, and there will be additional money for Northern Ireland coming out of that pot. We are also developing the national bus strategy, and I hope that both of those initiatives will mean that the market for buses and the opportunity for the excellent product produced in Ballymena by Wrightbus will be strong and will encourage investors to take the risk to develop the business further.

On the matter of the P45s, my understanding is that the administrator has now written to all employees to communicate the process going forward on redundancies and on the P45s. For the six workers who are currently in Malaysia, the administrator has now taken steps to get those workers home, and I stand ready to address and to help in any way any problems or issues on either of those matters.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): Is my right hon. Friend able to make any comment on what seems to be an absurdly large religious donation made by the owners of Wrightbus in recent years? Although the donation was made when the company was profitable, reports cite a figure in the region of £15 million, which seems grossly excessive. Given that these are jobs that Northern Ireland can ill afford to lose, will my right hon. Friend also give some thought to how we can ensure that this matter does not fall between the two stools of its being a devolved matter and there being no devolved Assembly to pick up the reins and run with it?

Julian Smith: I do not think it would be appropriate for me to comment on the loan. On the question of how the absence of Stormont affects these jobs, yes, not having a devolved Executive is making a big difference, but between Invest NI, the Government, the Northern Ireland civil service and a campaigning and dedicated local MP, we are showing that we can get things done. I hope that we can get some positive news out of what is currently a very difficult situation.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): May I join the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) in underlining the importance of this issue? For Ballymena, the loss of 1,200 high-paid, high-skilled jobs is enormous; these jobs matter enormously.

There are a number of questions that arise. First, we need to examine the role of the administrator. In the context of British Steel, the then Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the then Chancellor arranged that the official receiver would take responsibility. This had the effect of keeping British Steel as a going concern. Could we take the same kind of approach to Wrightbus to ensure that there is a possibility that it can be moved on as a going concern, with the existing skilled workforce?

My second question relates to the land. As I understand it, when Japan Tobacco International Gallaher vacated the site, the land was gifted across. I also understand that one

of the current drawbacks to a sale of Wrightbus is the possibility that the land will be seen as an asset by those who would make profit from it. It would therefore seem reasonable for the land to be transferred into the public domain so that there is no question of people profiteering from what was a gift from Japan Tobacco International.

Thirdly, I emphasise the question of the hon. Member for North Antrim regarding investment in the technologies of the future—battery technologies and green technologies—so that Wrightbus can join the other bus manufacturers in the UK that can tour the world selling world-class products.

Having seen the situations at Bombardier, Harland and Wolff, and now at Wrightbus, one thing that is obvious is that three of the marquee names in Northern Ireland manufacturing are under pressure. We need to see an industrial strategy for Northern Ireland now, particularly given the possibility that Brexit will have a dramatic impact, especially if it is a Brexit that sees a border down the Irish sea or across the island of Ireland. We need a strategic view of the long-term future of manufacturing in Northern Ireland.

Julian Smith: My experience in Northern Ireland from the two major issues I have been working on recently with regard to the economy—Harland and Wolff, and Wrightbus—is that the administration companies have been working very well with all stakeholders.

As with the Church loan, I do not think it is appropriate for me to comment on the matter of the land, other than to say that I urge anyone who can do anything to unlock the process of making a successful sale to a successful bidder and preserving jobs to do everything they can to be as flexible as possible.

On the matter of low emission buses and bus technology, Wrightbus is second to none in leading-edge bus technology, which is why I remain confident that we can get to a better position than we are currently in and we can protect jobs.

On the interrelationship between Brexit, Wrightbus, Harland and Wolff and Bombardier, I have made it clear since taking this role that it is in the best interests of Northern Ireland that we get a deal. That is what I am doing, and that is what the Prime Minister is doing.

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Ind): We know that Wrightbus plays a crucial role in manufacturing in Northern Ireland. Once major industrial facilities are lost, they are very difficult to restore. In my experience, a combination of ministerial activism and the strong support of local constituency Members can make a difference, so I commend my right hon. Friend and the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) for the efforts they have been making. I invite them to continue, with all the other things on their plates, to be absolutely tenacious in finding a buyer, and to know that they can count on my support and that of Members across the House in finding the best solution for what can be, in future, a very successful company.

Julian Smith: I thank my right hon. Friend for that contribution and take this opportunity to pay tribute to his activist approach. It was not always of benefit to me as Government Chief Whip, but many, many companies benefited from it across the United Kingdom.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I concur with the many points made about what brilliant products Wrightbus makes and what a tragedy we are faced with. I commend the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) for securing this urgent question.

Surely the issue is that Ministers, or BEIS, must have been aware that there was a cash-flow issue within this company a year or so ago. Charitable donations were being made that far exceeded the £1.7 million loss that the company was facing. At what point were Ministers or BEIS aware of that, and what does it mean for the industrial strategy?

Julian Smith: The important thing now is to protect jobs and to ensure that we get a successful buyer. There will be time enough to look back on what could have been done differently and what things need to improve.

Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): As I drove through London to the House today lots of Wrightbus buses were to be seen, bought by the excellent previous Conservative Mayor. One intervention that could go ahead and make the company viable to be sold is the London Mayor buying the right bus for London, which is Wrightbus.

Julian Smith: I do not think it would be appropriate for me to make bus-buying recommendations, but I say again that the technology of Wrightbus and the energy at Wrightbus mean that there is a good future for it if we can get a successful buyer.

Mr Speaker: Whether that is because the right hon. Gentleman does not judge himself to be a particular authority on bus-buying or because he regards reference to the matter as beneath the dignity of his undoubtedly high office—whichever it is—he has made his choice.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): My friend the Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) and I were in discussions over the summer about how we could promote the manufacturing sector in buses and low-emission buses. That is his commitment to his constituency. What specific conversations has the Secretary of State had with the company, or perhaps with the family, about removing the block on the sale of the land and possibly even taking it into a trust so that manufacturing can continue there?

Julian Smith: As I said in my statement, it is really important that everybody who thinks they could help to unlock this process does what is in the best interests of the people of Ballymena and the employees of the company.

Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): It seems ironic on the day that announcements are made about money for new buses—I hope a significant amount of that money goes to my constituents in Staffordshire Moorlands—that we are here debating a bus manufacturer in Northern Ireland going into administration. Will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to Sue Gray, the permanent secretary at the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland, who has worked tirelessly and I know will continue to do so to do all she can for the employees?

Julian Smith: I am very happy to pay tribute to Sue. As colleagues from across the House know, she played a very important role in the civil service here and continues to do so in Northern Ireland.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): One of the best things that the Secretary of State and the Government could do would be to encourage and fund Translink to the tune of £40 million, to enable it to buy the new buses it needs, which would enable Wrightbus to survive, thrive and retain jobs. Will the Secretary of State consider that?

Julian Smith: The £220 million announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer a few hours ago will be of benefit to all bus companies and will ensure that the market for buses in both GB and NI will continue to thrive.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): May I urge the Secretary of State to ensure that the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is working with not only Wrightbus but the Department for International Trade? As a trade envoy, I can testify to the fact that there is considerable interest in this bus in some of the high-density markets, particularly in Latin America, and with support from Government we might be able to get some of those deals over the line.

Julian Smith: Through this process, I have become aware of the huge market for buses in South America. My hon. Friend is an exceptionally dynamic trade envoy, and I look forward to meeting him to discuss opportunities for Wrightbus buses if we can get a new buyer for them in the coming weeks.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): It might be mismanagement or coincidence, but it looks like the collapse of the PM's favourite bus builder—apart from himself, with the wine crates—is part of the pattern of his reverse Midas touch in London, with the ticket offices, the water cannon, the tube and the garden bridge. Will the Secretary of State confirm that, as I heard today, the overheating, three-door design of the Boris bus is unusable anywhere else in the world? How much public money was committed to the debacle that contributed to its decline, which, along with Harland and Wolff, spells grave consequences for Northern Ireland's economy post Brexit, when a majority of people there wanted to remain?

Julian Smith: The important message is to ensure that we get the best buyers for Wrightbus and Harland and Wolff. I do not have details on the technical aspects of the bus the hon. Lady mentions, but I think we should focus now on protecting jobs and supporting the local economy.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): Like the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley), I was very disappointed at this news from Wrightbus, as it is a manufacturer of quality products that I have driven and use daily—upon which you regularly comment, Mr Speaker. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that he will do everything he can to work with the Northern Irish civil service in the coming days to find a successful bidder, to ensure that the company can continue to manufacture quality products?

Julian Smith: I thank my hon. Friend for his question and for all his work as a Transport Minister. The civil service in Northern Ireland is working very hard, Invest NI is working very hard and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is working very hard, as is the local MP, and they will continue to do that over the coming days and weeks.

Mr Speaker: We daily learn more and more about the daring and distinguished exploits of the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones). I have regularly informed the House and those observing our proceedings that, when serving as Under-Secretary of State for buses, he was given to traveling to work by bus, to the obvious delight of his fellow passengers. What I did not know was that he was also in the business of driving buses. Is there any limit to the talents of the hon. Gentleman?

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): In addition to the tragic loss of 1,200 jobs, this announcement puts at risk more than 1,700 jobs in the supply chain. It has come to our attention that £2 million was paid out to shareholders, and only £1.7 million could save this company. What steps is the Secretary of State taking to recover that money and save these jobs?

Julian Smith: The administrator is responsible for the sales process. As I mentioned earlier, there may be a number of things that the administrator and others will want to look at in the coming months, but the immediate task in hand is to find a buyer and to ensure that the Government, Invest NI and all other interested parties support that process.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): Given the extent of the job losses in Ballymena and the fact that this company had orders in May for 20 hydrogen-powered buses for TfL, each worth £500,000, does the Secretary of State agree that this is a viable business, if the issue of the donations is set to one side, and that the cash-flow issue around donations to Church charities needs investigating?

Julian Smith: The technology and the opportunity for Wrightbus, with a successful buyer and with a vision for the future, are very strong. I think we have addressed the issue of loans and other matters that are for the future.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): May I first say to the Secretary of State that this is a terrible blow for workers across North Antrim, South Antrim, East Antrim and a number of other constituencies? Will he join me in congratulating Mid and East Antrim Borough Council on quickly holding a jobs fair that has identified many job opportunities for those who have been made redundant? May I also thank the Government for the announcement that has been made on spending money for public transport?

This company has a skilled workforce, it is a good product—despite the remarks of the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq)—and if there is

demand created through public finance, I believe there is a market for these buses. Does the Secretary of State agree that the opportunities presented when we leave the EU on 31 October and no longer have to abide by EU directives on public procurement give the Government an opportunity to make sure that that money is spent on buying British products?

Julian Smith: I agree with my right hon. Friend about the opportunity for Wrightbus and the technology it has. I think we are both agreed that the best resolution for Brexit is a deal at the end of October.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Is it not the case that this company, with the 1,700-job loss, is a victim twice over: first, because of Brexit, the general uncertainty and the lack of infrastructure investment; and, secondly, because of the dreadful decisions taken since 2010 about the bus industry, with this Government failing to invest in regional buses? Those are the real reasons why 1,700 people have lost their jobs in Northern Ireland today.

Julian Smith: It would be wrong to attribute this matter to Brexit, bus strategy or other issues. Very often, one of the issues in a capitalist economy is that companies do run into trouble. It is our job now to do everything we can to get this company out of that trouble.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): May I thank the Secretary of State for the personal commitment he has shown to the workers of Wrightbus and, indeed, to Harland and Wolff in my constituency, which he has referred to? The last number of weeks have been a baptism of fire for him, and he will recognise the strong community support for Harland and Wolff in my constituency and for Wrightbus in Ballymena. Having engaged with Invest Northern Ireland and the Departments for the Economy and of Finance, as he has, will he confirm that the exercise of functions and the restoration of the Executive legislation permits civil servants, in the public interest, to take action that is necessary to secure these vibrant jobs and industries in Belfast?

Julian Smith: My hon. Friend is right that there are certain powers that can be executed by the Department for the Economy, but the main powers reside with the Executive, which is why we want to get Stormont up and running. I pay tribute to the work he has done, working with the unions, potential investors and the administrator at Harland and Wolff, and I hope we will have some positive news during the course of this week.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Points of order would ordinarily arise at the end of the statement. [*Interruption.*] Yes, there is a statement to come. The hon. Lady is ahead of herself, which is not a novel phenomenon in the House of Commons. If she can contain her impatience for a matter of minutes, we will hear the product of her lucubrations before very long.

Health Infrastructure Plan

3.43 pm

The Minister for Health (Edward Argar): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the health infrastructure plan announcement.

Our health is the nation's biggest asset, and the NHS is the Government's top domestic priority. We are backing our commitment to our NHS with record levels of funding. As part of this, today I am pleased to update the House on the biggest, boldest hospital-building programme in a generation. Through our new health infrastructure plan we are supporting more than 40 hospital-building projects across the country, with six getting the go-ahead immediately—HIP 1. That includes £2.7 billion of investment that gives those six hospitals the funding to press ahead with their plans now, alongside last Friday's investment in technology to ensure that no CT scanner is more than 10 years old.

The six hospital trusts are Barts Health NHS Trust, Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust, West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust, Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust, University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust and Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust. Under HIP 2, a further 21 schemes have been given the go-ahead with £100 million seed funding to go to the next stage of developing their plans, subject to business case development. This £2.8 billion capital investment follows on from August's £850 million for new upgrades, which included, for example, a £72.3 million investment in the Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust. All of this, of course, comes on top of the £33.9 billion cash increase in funding for the day-to-day running of our NHS.

This announcement represents another part of our long-term, strategic investment in the future of the NHS, properly funded and properly planned, to ensure our world-class healthcare staff have world-class facilities to deliver cutting-edge care and to meet the changing needs and rising demand that the NHS will face in the 2020s and beyond. Capital spend on NHS infrastructure is fundamental to high-quality patient care, from well-designed facilities that promote quicker recovery to staff being better able to care for patients using the equipment and technology that they need. It is also essential to the long-term sustainability of the NHS's ability to meet healthcare need, unlocking efficiencies and helping to manage demand. The investment we are making in our buildings, our technology and our equipment is vitally important in itself, but it is most important because it gives our fantastic NHS staff the tools they need to do the job.

Our staff are at the heart of the NHS, which is why we have invested in the NHS's workforce. Our interim NHS people plan has set out immediate actions that we will take to reduce vacancies and secure the staff we need for the future—including addressing pensions tax concerns, increasing university clinical placements by over 5,000 more and bolstering the workforce. But it is only right that we invest in the buildings they work in, and in which they provide first-class care for patients. For too long, Governments of all parties have taken a piecemeal and unco-ordinated approach to NHS buildings and infrastructure.

The health infrastructure plan will change that. In the future, every new hospital built or upgraded must deliver our priorities for the NHS, and happen on time and in a planned way, not the current stop-start that we see.

But NHS infrastructure is more than just large hospitals. Pivotal to the delivery of more personalised, preventive healthcare in the NHS long-term plan is more community and primary care away from hospitals. That requires investment in the right buildings and facilities across the board, where staff can utilise technology such as genomics and artificial intelligence to deliver better care and empower people better to manage their own health.

This is only the beginning. The full shape of the investment programme, including wider NHS infrastructure, digital infrastructure, and wider capital investments that support the economy and health system will be confirmed when the Department receives a multi-year capital settlement at the next capital review.

This is a long-term, strategic investment in the future of our NHS, properly funded and properly planned, to ensure that our world-class healthcare staff have world-class facilities to deliver care and meet changing needs and rising demand, so that the NHS can face the 2020s and beyond with confidence.

3.49 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Minister to his place and thank him for advance sight of his statement. I know him to be a decent man—we have worked together on many joint Leicester and Leicestershire campaigns—and I consider him a friend, but I am afraid that we have to hold him and his Government robustly to account. What was announced yesterday was not in fact 40 guaranteed new hospitals but six hospital reconfigurations. It was also not the biggest hospital rebuilding programme in history, because that happened under the last Labour Government.

Of course, I welcome investment in Leicester Royal Infirmary—it is a big investment and to have won it shows what an effective Member of Parliament I am—but will the Minister be clear that that also means a downgrade of Leicester General Hospital, with services closing, including maternity services, and a loss of beds? Will he also tell us what happened with the Epsom and St Helier reconfiguration? Will he confirm that that means moving from two acute services to one in a part of London where accident and emergency pressures are increasing? Will he tell us today whether, across these reconfigurations, the end result will be more beds or fewer?

We know that the NHS is facing a repair bill of £6 billion after years of capital cuts under this Conservative Government, but the Government have so far refused to publish the capital allowances for between next year and 2025. Will the Minister guarantee that the £2.7 billion allocated will be additional to the capital baseline, and will he undertake to publish the NHS departmental expenditure limits on capital spending so that we can be reassured, rather than our assuming that this is all smoke and mirrors?

The Minister has also invited 21 other trusts to make use of a £100 million fund to prepare plans for future upgrades, yet he has just admitted that that will be subject to "business case review". Is not the truth that the Minister and the Secretary of State cannot give any

cast-iron guarantee that each and every one of these hospitals will be upgraded between 2025 and 2030, because not a penny piece of extra investment has been allocated to the programme for 2025 to 2030?

Finally, how were the 21 trusts chosen? In our mental health hospitals, 1,000 patients are forced to stay in quite dire old-style dormitory wards—the Minister might have seen the ones at the Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust, for example—yet not a single mental health trust is on the list of 21 produced yesterday. Does that not show yet again that this Government neglect mental health services and some of the most vulnerable patients in the land?

What is on this list, Mr Speaker? I will tell you. We have: Hastings and Eastbourne—marginal constituencies; Winchester—a marginal constituency; Plymouth—a marginal constituency; Reading—a marginal constituency; Truro—a marginal constituency; Torbay—a marginal constituency; Barrow—a marginal constituency; and Uxbridge—a marginal constituency. What a spooky coincidence it is that all these marginal constituencies are on the list. This is not a serious plan. It is a wing and a prayer ahead of a general election. The Prime Minister over-spins, under-delivers and is not straight with people—the truth is that you cannot trust the Tories with the NHS.

Edward Argar: I will at least start by expressing gratitude to the hon. Gentleman for his kind words at the beginning of his remarks. As he says, we work closely together in our city and county, although I suspect that that spirit of co-operation might not extend across these Dispatch Boxes. None the less, it is a pleasure to stand opposite him. Although I would not agree with his characterisation of where the money has gone, is he, on the basis of that characterisation, suggesting that his own seat is a marginal constituency?

I find it extraordinary that the shadow Secretary of State takes opposition to a new level by opposing investment in our NHS, trying to cavil and challenge it. He will forgive me if I do not take his specific questions in the same order as he asked them, but I will run through as many of them as I can recall or as I noted down.

On mental health, I have to say that I find it very difficult to take lessons from the hon. Gentleman when this Government have invested huge additional sums in mental health care. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, we have allocated capital for Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust—the announcement was made earlier this summer—and for Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust, so I think the hon. Gentleman is perhaps being a little unfair in suggesting there is no investment in mental health from this Government.

This is an ambitious programme, but unlike the last Labour Government, we will not leave hospitals saddled with masses of private finance initiative debt. That programme was massively expanded under the Labour Government he served as a special adviser. Perhaps he should welcome this Government's approach, which is to give hospitals the funding they need to deliver without saddling them with debt.

We have made it clear that the hospitals named in HIP 1 have the funding to go ahead, including the hospitals that serve his constituency and mine. I am a

little surprised to hear the hon. Gentleman challenge the notion that anyone bidding for huge sums of public money should have to go through a business case. Surely when we are spending public money, it is reasonable of us to make sure it delivers value for money and better outcomes for patients. I know the Labour party does not pay much attention to value for money, but my party and this Government do. We are focused on patient outcomes and delivering investment in our NHS. We can say proudly that, with this raft of announcements, the extra £33 billion and the announcements made already, we truly are the party of the NHS.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): I very much welcome the allocation of £450 million to Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust. We are keen to work with the Department. Local NHS leaders are eager to work on producing a good business plan that meets the needs of patients and staff in Cornwall. When will the seed funding enabling them to develop those plans be available? If all goes as well, as I am sure it will, we will be able to start building those new facilities in 2025.

Edward Argar: I know that my hon. Friend's local hospital trust and her constituents have no greater champion in this place than her. She is right to highlight the allocation to Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust. The seed funding was announced yesterday and is there now, so we hope that the trust will get to work using that money to develop plans to improve services at local hospitals.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): I am grateful to the Minister for advance sight of his statement.

UK Government decisions on pension costs and funding already result in a shortfall of £48.4 million for the NHS in Scotland, which comes on top of the UK Government making wider budget reductions in health funding for Scotland of £42 million compared with their previously claimed level of consequential. Scotland now faces a shortfall of £90 million for its health services as a result of UK Government decisions. Now that the UK Government have apparently opened the spending taps, will they pay back the moneys due to Scotland, or will we continue to be short-changed? When will the full Barnett consequential of this new investment be published?

In total, the Tories' decade of austerity has cumulatively cut the Scottish block grant by more than £12 billion in real terms. With the economy already faltering, the Chancellor's predecessor warned that a destructive no-deal Brexit could inflict a £90 billion hit on the Exchequer and suggested that no new money would be available. How then can the Minister guarantee that this money will come to the NHS?

Edward Argar: I will not stray into the politics of the NHS in Scotland. The hon. Gentleman asks specifically about Barnett consequential. I can confirm that they will apply, and if it would be helpful I will write to him with details.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): As my hon. Friend might guess, I am delighted by the announcement about Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS

[Sir Paul Beresford]

Trust, which will find favour with hon. Members on both sides of the House. We have been talking about it for a long time, and this is the first genuine movement.

I have a tiny, slightly off-the-wall additional request. As my hon. Friend is aware, I have a declared interest in dentistry, which means that every time the word “health” comes up, I get prodded in the back by my colleagues. In most western nations, 60%, 70% or 80% of the public water supply is fluoridated. It is a proven caries prevention. Would he include in his plans the infrastructure to greatly expand the fluoridation of our water supply? It would bring benefits in terms of prevention and, in due course, cost.

Edward Argar: As he said, my hon. Friend showed some dexterity in asking that question, but I am happy to reassure him. The Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), is looking at this matter, and I am sure that she will be happy to discuss it with him further.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): I would always welcome more money for our NHS, but as always the devil is in the detail. The “Shaping a healthier future” programme proposed the closure of four A&Es in north-west London, at a cost of £76 million, but just six months ago the Health Secretary stood at that Dispatch Box to declare the scheme scrapped. The author of that scheme, Daniel Elkeles, is now the chief executive at St Helier, where he is plotting to use these latest funds to reduce two A&Es to one—away from those most in need—which would place intolerable pressure on nearby St George’s. Does the Minister not see a pattern here?

Edward Argar: I always think it a little unfair in this House to name or attack individuals where they do not have the ability to answer back. The Government have made it clear that the announcement today and yesterday is about putting more money into our NHS, which will improve services for the hon. Lady’s constituents and for those across the capital and indeed the country.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): Northern Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Foundation Trust faces some particular challenges in delivering across two district hospitals and the community hospital to a relatively small population but one that has a big and complicated geography. Goole Hospital, for example, is still operating on a coal-fired boiler. I will write to the Minister following this, of course, but can he look at the particular requests we have with regard to the backlog of works at the trust?

Edward Argar: My hon. Friend is quite right to highlight that in certain parts of the country, including his constituency, geography can present a challenge for the delivery of services. I look forward to his letter and will be very happy to respond and to look into the matter with him.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): With a £1.3 billion maintenance backlog, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, which includes St Mary’s, which

serves my constituency, faces the largest challenges in the country and has been waiting for years for the approval to go ahead with the St Mary’s development. In recent years, we have seen the Grafton ward closed because of significant structural concerns, with the loss of 32 beds; a ceiling collapse in Thistlewayte ward; the Paterson centre flooded; and floods, electrical issues and drainage issues commonplace across the whole estate. Can the Minister guarantee me that today’s announcement will mean no repeat of these sorts of problems in St Mary’s in the coming months, and how does he feel it will be better served by the £200 million deficit the trust has and the £120 million deficit in our local clinical commissioning groups?

Edward Argar: As the hon. Lady will recall, many years ago, when I had more hair and it was not so grey, I sat on Westminster City Council, and St Mary’s was an issue back then that we discussed on various occasions. She is right to highlight it, but I would have expected her to very much welcome the inclusion of Imperial and St Mary’s in the announcement of seed funding to develop their proposals and get the investment they need.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Ind): We are rather pleased in Winchester at today’s announcement and with our place within it. My constituents do not care about the political knockabout in this House. They love their hospital and are really pleased that it is going to be invested in. Will the Minister confirm how the seed funding process will work in the immediate term—we are in wave 2, but we are keen to get cracking so that we are ready—and will he also confirm that this is a huge vote of confidence in the Royal Hampshire County Hospital in Winchester, not just from the Government, but from the NHS as well?

Edward Argar: I know that, since my hon. Friend was first elected to this House, he has made health and the NHS his No. 1 priority. He served with distinction as a Minister in the Department and continues to champion his constituents’ interests in this respect. On the seed funding, we have made the announcement and are keen to get the money to those trusts as swiftly as possible so they can work with us to develop their plans. I agree entirely that its inclusion in this list is a vote of confidence from us and the NHS in the work his local hospital is doing.

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his statement. He said that the Government would focus on outcomes, and he mentioned £200 million for new CT scanners for diagnosis, but *The Times* recently published the details of answers to freedom of information requests indicating that half of NHS trusts are treating cancer patients with out-of-date radiotherapy machines. The UK will remain at the bottom of the cancer survival league until we dramatically improve our radiotherapy services, so what steps is he taking to implement the “Manifesto For Radiotherapy”, invest in modern radiotherapy equipment and train personnel in IT networks, to provide modern radiotherapy services to cancer patients in every region of the UK, not just those in London and the south-east?

Edward Argar: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that question and for the tone in which he asks it; it is an extremely important point and he makes it well. The investment in CT scanners and X-ray machines is an important start. It means that none of them will be over 10 years old, which is hugely important. He is absolutely right to talk about treatment, the workforce and the many parts of the system that provide effective cancer care. Although it is a specialist hospital, I recently visited the Royal Marsden Hospital in London to see the amazing research and work being done there. He is absolutely right that we must continue to promote that specialism and expertise right across the country to ensure that everyone gets the diagnosis, treatment and cancer care that they deserve. I would be happy to meet him subsequently to discuss the manifesto he highlighted.

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): I welcome this fantastic announcement. Our fantastic NHS staff are expected to deliver modern NHS services in buildings that were designed for a completely different era. Therefore, when considering the proposals that will come forward from Cornwall, will he pay particular attention to those that involve modern technology, so that people do not have to travel to the centre to receive diagnosis and treatment?

Edward Argar: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Local NHS trusts will be developing their plans and proposals on how they wish to see services modernised, but he is absolutely right and I am sure that they will have heard him, just as I have.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): In 2003, the Labour Government opened Hull's women and children's hospital, which is where I had the "pleasure" of giving birth to my two children. However, the main Hull Royal Infirmary site is a 50-year-old tower block that is in need of serious investment, so it is a shame that the Government have not even attempted to match the previous Labour Government's NHS investment in Hull. Can the Minister at least explain how he will fund the existing maintenance backlog?

Edward Argar: The hon. Lady makes a good point. This Government will invest in our NHS without leaving it saddled with private finance initiative debt for many decades to come. However, she is absolutely right to highlight the need to manage a backlog of works, because many of the buildings are old and not entirely fit for purpose. This announcement represents a huge step forward in that, alongside the work that has already been set in train through the Naylor review of the management of NHS capital and property maintenance. I believe that we are making significant strides forward in that. If she wished to write to me about the specific issues with her hospital trust, I would be happy to respond to her on those as well.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I, alongside my wonderful right hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Dame Eleanor Laing) and my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr Prisk), have been campaigning hard for a new hospital in Harlow, and we are delighted by the Minister's announcement that we will now be getting it. Will he send us the full details about the process? We are delighted that we are in the first wave of six. I ask him not only to visit the hospital, but to pay

special tribute to the incredible domestic and support staff, the nurses, doctors and consultants, and the management team, led by the chief executive Lance McCarthy, because for years they have done an incredible job, against the odds, in a building that was not fit for purpose. Will he pay tribute to those wonderful NHS staff?

Edward Argar: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who is right to highlight the work for his local hospital by our hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr Prisk) and by the right hon. Member for Epping Forest (Dame Eleanor Laing) who, given the nature of her office, may not speak but works incredibly hard for her constituents on this. My right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) has a strong track record of campaigning successfully on a range of issues, so I suppose he will be pleased that yet again he has secured a victory for his constituents and his area. I join him in paying tribute to Lance McCarthy and the entire team at the hospital and the trust.

Every day, our NHS staff go above and beyond everyone's expectations in whatever buildings, to make sure that they deliver first-class care for all our constituents and, indeed, for us all. I will happily write to my right hon. Friend setting out the process in more detail. I believe that my predecessor in this role was due to visit on the day on which he was reshuffled, so I very much look forward to taking up that invitation if it is extended and coming to see my right hon. Friend.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): It is said in the House that the vote follows the voice. On NHS infrastructure, it seems that the cash follows the camera. On that basis, may I ask the hon. Gentleman to pop round to Ealing Hospital, where he will be welcome? In his statement, he referred to staffing as well as infrastructure, so is he prepared to be asked about the current situation on nursing bursaries? Would he care to share his thoughts with the House?

Edward Argar: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question, asked in his inimitable style.

Stephen Pound: It wasn't that bad, was it?

Edward Argar: It was one of his better ones. I will happily take up the hon. Gentleman's invitation to visit his local hospital, which, as I recall, he told me was opened by Lord Patrick Jenkin. I am always happy to visit hospitals with colleagues, and when I do so I am always happy to talk to any staff members who want to talk to me about anything that is of concern to them. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to highlight the importance of adequate supplies of nurses for our NHS, both in the recruitment and training of new nurses. We also need to focus on returnees, whatever the reason they left the profession, and tempt them back. He is absolutely right, and I look forward to seeing him in his hospital.

Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con): I thank the Minister and the Health Secretary for the announcement that North Devon is one of the areas that will benefit from investment. I thank the Minister and his predecessors for listening to all the lobbying and campaigning, which proves the truth, Mr Speaker, of your oft-repeated

[Peter Heaton-Jones]

mantra that persistence pays. Will he accept an invitation to come and visit North Devon with me, to work with the trust to get these plans going, particularly in a place such as North Devon, to ensure that we can deliver these services sustainably, including to areas that are more rural and isolated?

Edward Argar: My hon. Friend is right that persistence does pay off, and it certainly has done so in his case on behalf of his constituents. He is right to highlight the importance of the sustainability of services, which is what we are seeking to do with the investment, and also ensuring that services are designed to reflect the geography and needs of the local population, to ensure that they have access to the healthcare that they need when they need it. He kindly invited me to visit. I suspect that it is a little easier to visit Ealing than Devon, but I shall endeavour to do so.

Stephen Pound: I asked first.

Mr Speaker: Order. The words “cheeky chappy” could have been invented to describe the hon. Gentleman, and I am sure that that is something in which he takes great pride, among many other things.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): As a Mancunian MP, I am absolutely sickened to see Members on the Government Benches today. If you will forgive the personal pronoun, you should be in Manchester spending your hard-earned wages on our economy. [Interruption.] I was just trying to take the toxicity out of the place.

The NHS is a devolved matter in Greater Manchester, but NHS financial technicalities are holding back the redevelopment of the wonderful Wythenshawe Hospital in my constituency. Will the Minister meet me to discuss those technicalities?

Edward Argar: If it is any reassurance to the hon. Gentleman, I can say that I was enjoying Manchester yesterday and this morning, and then came down here to enjoy being at the Dispatch Box. Let me also say that if he wanted to see fewer of us here and rather more in Manchester, perhaps he should have voted in favour of a small recess to allow us to go and support the economy of his city. As for his question about the hospital trust, of course I should be very happy to meet him.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): We had some bad news in Banbury last week about our obstetric unit, but partly as a consequence, two positive steps have been taken. I have met the Secretary of State twice in the past week, and I have managed to get the clinical commissioning group and the head of the trust on the same page, and we were able to apply for some seed funding. Can the Minister assure me that he will look on that application favourably and that we will make Horton General Hospital fit for the future?

Edward Argar: I know the Horton well from my time as the parliamentary candidate for Oxford East, which I fought in 2010 and which, sadly, fought back. I also know of the work that my hon. Friend has done since before her time in the House in campaigning in the

hospital’s interests. I will certainly look carefully at any application that is made, and I will judge it swiftly and fairly, as will the Secretary of State.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): I warmly welcome the investment in Whipps Cross University Hospital, which is one of the six projects that have actually been committed to, as opposed to the 40-odd that have been promised. However, as the Prime Minister found during his recent visit to the hospital, when he met my constituent Omar Salem, all is not well in respect of the consistency of the care provided there—not because of a lack of dedication on the part of the staff, but because the hospital and, indeed, the wider Barts Health NHS Trust do not receive the funding that they need to cater for such a large population across the whole of east London. I welcome the investment in the fabric of the hospital, but what will the Minister do to ensure that my constituents receive a consistently excellent quality of care when they visit the hospital?

Edward Argar: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman both for his question and for the reasonable tone in which he pitched it. [Interruption.] Indeed, he is always reasonable. As he knows, the capital investment will allow for investment in a new hospital, providing a range of services across emergency, maternity and specific out-patient and other diagnostic services. As for consistency of care and the experience of patients, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to pay tribute to the fantastic work done day in, day out by the NHS workforce, and that is why we have seen that workforce grow under this Government. Equally, however, when I visit hospitals, as I have done since I was appointed, I observe that the infrastructure and the buildings in which they operate can play a huge part in delivering not only consistency of care, but speed of care and speed of access. That capital investment in the hon. Gentleman’s local hospital will play a huge part in giving its excellent staff the tools with which to do their job and the environment in which to do it, and he will see that delivering better and more consistent care to patients.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): During the summer, we welcomed the £30.6 million investment in a new urgent care centre at Stepping Hill Hospital. Does the Minister agree, however, that support will be needed for infrastructure, particularly for adequate car parking? That is a big issue for local residents, who regularly experience problems parking.

Edward Argar: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Capital improvements in hospitals are hugely important, but it is also important for them to be set within the broader context of car parking and other facilities to ensure that those hospitals can run smoothly.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): Now that the Government are no longer using the private finance initiative, what are the terms and conditions for Treasury funding of capital investment in hospitals? Is this all grant, or is it a new kind of loan?

Edward Argar: The right hon. Gentleman will know from his time in government that the approvals process conducted by the Treasury and, indeed, the NHS is not always the simplest. We are looking into what we can do

to ensure that it is better streamlined, while also delivering value for money for taxpayers and the assurance that is required. However, it is important that this money—while not tied to the same conditions as the ruinous PFI deals entered into by the previous Labour Government—does deliver value, and we know that it is delivering on outcomes for patients.

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): I thank the Minister for the decision, principally in listening to the outstanding campaign led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), which will benefit east Herts, Harlow and, indeed, the Epping Forest area. May I also say that the Minister need not be defensive, because we have not forgotten that when Labour was in government, it chose not to build a new hospital in our area but to scrap those proposals? We need take no lessons from the Opposition.

Edward Argar: I am pleased that two of the trio who have fought so hard for my hon. Friend's local hospitals and services have had the opportunity to contribute. He is absolutely right to say that while the Labour party talks the talk, when we look at its track record in government, we see that all too often it absolutely failed to deliver by scrapping services or saddling trusts with debt.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): The finances at King's College Hospital were destabilised in 2011, when the Lib Dem-Tory coalition forced King's to take on two additional hospitals following the failure of another hospital trust. King's is now struggling with the greatest financial challenge of any hospital trust in the UK. It is desperately in need of capital investment to enable it to meet local needs. Will the Minister explain to this House and, more importantly, to the hard-working staff at King's—whose life-saving and life-enhancing work every single day is so important in our area and across London, where their work was critical in responding to the Grenfell Tower tragedy and to the Westminster bridge and London bridge terror attacks—why there is not a single penny for King's College Hospital in today's announcement?

Edward Argar: While I recognise and pay tribute to the hon. Lady for her championing, as one would expect, of her constituents and local hospital, I am sure she will none the less welcome this Government's massive investment in our NHS. I hear what she says about her own local hospital, and she is right to highlight the work done by the staff, who do amazing work day in, day out, particularly in the aftermath of some incredibly challenging disasters. I would be very happy to meet and talk to her in more detail about the finances of her hospital and trust since 2011, if she feels that would be useful.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Ind): I welcome my hon. Friend to his role and wish him every success. I also welcome this Government's continuing investment in the NHS, particularly that in the Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust. Does he agree that it will provide high-quality A&E services for my residents, maintain key services at the St Helier site and confound those naysayers who said that this Government were going to shut that hospital?

Edward Argar: My hon. Friend was a distinguished predecessor of mine in this post. He is very much missed by the Department and, I am sure, by all those working in the NHS who came into contact with him. He rightly highlights the positive news in this announcement, including for his hospital trust. This money will allow it to invest and for the hospitals to continue providing first-class services to his constituents.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): The £100 million seed funding needs to be put in context, which for Oldham is a £95 million capital requirement just for basic maintenance and upgrading, so it is not really a significant investment at all. More importantly, I am here to call and collect. Two years ago, the Government promised £80 million for Greater Manchester as part of the Healthier Together proposals, but they still have not written the cheque. So, fewer announcements, more cash, please.

Edward Argar: The hon. Gentleman makes his point forcefully but courteously. I will take away what he said and I will write to him.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): May I welcome my hon. Friend's announcement that the Government are backing Basingstoke's plan for a new hospital to serve not just north Hampshire but across mid-Hampshire? It has the support of our local council and local residents. However, the 1970s buildings in which my incredible doctors and nurses and chief executive Alex Whitfield work are already creaking at the seams and are very expensive to maintain. What can my hon. Friend do to support the hospital's bid and to ensure that a new hospital is in place as swiftly as possible, so that the money is not patching up the old but building the new?

Edward Argar: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. This money will be hugely important to doing exactly what she says: investing in our NHS buildings for the long term, so reducing the reliance on expensive capital repairs.

With this plan, we are also looking to deliver a step change in how we deal with capital in the NHS, which is also hugely important. Instead of stop-start investment, we are looking for a rolling programme of investment to make sure we get those facilities up to standard in order to reduce the day-to-day spend on repairs. I will happily talk to my right hon. Friend about what we can do to ensure that we go through due process as swiftly as possible so that her hospital trust can get on with it.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): I worked on many business cases for capital projects during my long NHS career. These projects are important to local people, but local people across the country were misled over the weekend. This is a proposal to give permission to think about building a hospital; they are not new hospitals. The Government's own response to the Naylor report said that sustainability and transformation partnerships are the chosen means of planning and delivering capital projects, so how were STPs consulted about which projects to progress?

Edward Argar: The hon. Lady, as she says, comes to this with a wealth of experience. The bids were put forward by individual trusts working with their STPs,

[Edward Argar]

and in the context of the STPs that have been developed. There is a synthesis and a read across to ensure that, in this announcement, we have picked the trusts that put together the most compelling bids in order to deliver value for money and improvements where they are needed.

Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con): I welcome my hon. Friend to his new post and, of course, I welcome the investment he has announced, but he will recognise that, however new the hospital, being an in-patient can be a profoundly distressing experience for someone with dementia. Good design can help tremendously, so will he do all he can to ensure that the best possible design standards are used when building these hospitals, with the interests of people with dementia in mind?

Edward Argar: My right hon. and learned Friend makes an important point that is close to my heart, as a former co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on dementia. I recently, or relatively recently, had the opportunity to visit Leicester Royal Infirmary, which has done exactly that and worked with the Alzheimer's Society and others to create a dementia-friendly ward. He is right that that sort of thing should be hardwired into our designs as we upgrade hospitals.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Had the Minister conducted an appraisal of the full NHS estate, he would have realised that mental health hospitals are not on his list. In the light of the urgent need for a new child and adolescent mental health services unit in York, how did he miss CAMHS from his list? This will have a real impact on clinical services.

Edward Argar: The hon. Lady makes an important point about mental health and the services for those with mental health needs. This announcement is very much focused on acute hospitals, and investment was recently announced for mental health services in, for example, Mersey Care and Manchester. Indeed, my own county recently invested in a new unit.

The hon. Lady raises a specific point, and it would be wrong to suggest that this Government are not investing in mental health services. However, if she wishes to discuss the specifics of her constituency and of the needs in Yorkshire, I would be happy to meet her.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): I wholeheartedly and unreservedly welcome the massive £450 million investment in the University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust. It is every penny that management and clinicians said they need to ensure that we have world-class healthcare facilities for the people of Leicester and Leicestershire. Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the fact that this Government abandoned the discredited Labour funding mechanism of PFI? PFI stood for "private finance initiative," but it should have stood for "pay for indefinitely".

Edward Argar: My hon. Friend and constituency neighbour makes a positive point, perhaps in contrast with some of the points made by Opposition Members, in welcoming the huge investment that we will see in the

University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust. Although the hospitals are in the constituency of the shadow Secretary of State, the work to campaign for this money has been a team effort, across all parties and all constituencies, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) and for Harborough (Neil O'Brien) in that context. My hon. Friend the Member for North West Leicestershire (Andrew Bridgen) is right to highlight PFI again. It was massively expanded under the previous Labour Government, who ran it so badly that it left trusts saddled with debt.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spennings) (Lab/Co-op): On Friday, I had a meeting with Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust, whose chief executive said to me:

"The impact of low levels of funding over seven years has been longer and more impactful than when funding was squeezed by the Mrs Thatcher Government. More investment is required to increase staff training and in turn employ more qualified health staff."

We know that hospitals in towns are often not funded to the same level as hospitals in cities, so could the Minister give me the number of hospitals in towns that are not in marginal seats which are having extra hospitals and funding? Will he meet me to discuss extra funding for Dewsbury's hospital?

Edward Argar: The hon. Lady makes a powerful point. I am sure she would therefore welcome what we are doing, which is addressing capital funding needs with a long-term, rolling programme of capital investment to address both the immediate need and the shortfalls from the previous Labour Government's landing trusts with PFI debt. On her local hospital, and the need to invest in cottage hospitals, community hospitals and town hospitals, I will of course meet her.

Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): I realised from the earlier exchanges how lucky I was, because my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) did visit my local hospital, Leek Moorlands Hospital, but please do not let that stop the incumbent from adding it to his address book, because he would be very welcome any time he feels like a visit to north Staffordshire. Can the Minister confirm that this investment is possible because of this Government's careful stewardship of the economy and that these hospitals will not be saddled with debt, as the ones built on PFI were?

Edward Argar: My right hon. Friend is right. In my previous role, I enjoyed a visit to her constituency to visit a prison with her and I am more than happy, although I am sure my officials will wince at the diary management involved, to take her up on her offer of a visit as well. She is exactly right: we are able to make this investment because, unlike the previous Labour Government, who left that note saying, "Sorry, there is no money", we have stewarded the national finances well and we now have the money to invest.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): There was nothing in the announcement about Southport and Formby District General Hospital, which desperately needs a new walk-in centre to relieve the pressure on the accident and emergency department, and nothing about the

much-needed health centres in Maghull and Formby, also in my constituency. Given the cancellation and delay in previous projects, and the growing repairs backlog, why should anyone think that these projects will go ahead in the way the Minister has announced any more than previous projects that have not?

Edward Argar: The hon. Gentleman is understandably and rightly fighting the corner for his local trust and local hospitals, but I am sure he would none the less welcome the huge investment by this Government in our NHS that this announcement amounts to. On delivering on these commitments, we are clear: we want to see these hospitals built as swiftly as possible. Unlike the Labour party, when we say we will do it, we get on with doing it.

Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): As the Minister knows, in his short time in office I have been pinging his ear, as I did his predecessor's, over the investment we need in west Hertfordshire. The Secretary of State kindly took a call from me at the weekend. Now £400 million is welcome, but not if we are going to chuck it into Watford Hospital, which is a Victorian hospital that took all the work from Hemel Hempstead Hospital when Labour closed our acute hospital. Hemel Hempstead is the largest town in Hertfordshire. We welcome the money, but we would like a new hospital where we could look after St Albans, Hitchin and Harpenden, Watford and Hemel Hempstead in the 21st century—we do not want to plough this into a Victorian hospital.

Edward Argar: My right hon. Friend rightly campaigns vociferously for his constituents in Hemel Hempstead, and I know he has spoken to the Secretary of State about this issue on several occasions. No formal decision has been made on the detail. He will know that his hospital trust has a view. I hope he will continue to engage with the trust and with us Ministers, and that he will put the points that he just put to the House to us in a meeting.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Around 15 years ago, when there was a Labour Government, we had a new hospital in Bishop Auckland. My constituents want to know why it is not used properly. In particular, will the Minister look at the latest proposal to close the stroke rehabilitation ward—ward 3—and reverse it?

Edward Argar: The hon. Lady highlights an issue of great importance to her constituents and her local hospital. As she will be aware, decisions on changes to services are made by local NHS trusts and clinicians, to reflect their assessment of the best way to deliver care and meet clinical need in a particular locality. If she wishes to write to me about the details of her local hospital and the issue she just highlighted, I would be happy to respond as swiftly as possible.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): The delivery of healthcare in rural settings presents some complex challenges, so I was delighted to hear what my hon. Friend said in his statement about the importance of community hospitals. Dorset is in phase 2, for want of a better phrase; will the Minister flesh out, to the best of his knowledge, how that will come about, the timeframe and what my residents should expect?

Edward Argar: I notice that my hon. Friend did not invite me to visit Dorset, although I visit him fairly regularly anyway so may well take advantage of such an occasion. The seed funding in the HIP 2 for Dorset is for the trust to develop its proposals for 12 community hospitals. That is an improvement. He is absolutely right to highlight the importance of community hospitals in a large rural county with transport challenges, given its rurality, and often an older population in some villages. As I said to my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), if it is helpful, I will be happy to write to my hon. Friend to set out the process by which his local trust will work with the seed funding.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I spoke to Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust earlier and asked what there might be from this announcement for our local hospitals; I was referred to the Conservative party press release, which is the only information that the trust has so far received. If I divide up the seed money between the three major hospitals that will get some money, I see that we could get as much as £9 million for planning for currently unfunded work that could happen in six to 10 years. That can be compared with £76 million wasted on consultants; £170 million, which is the current-year deficit for north-west London; and £1.3 billion, which is the Imperial maintenance backlog. We need that money now. When are we going to see it?

Edward Argar: The hon. Gentleman made several points. I am pleased that he has been enjoying improving reading of Conservative party press releases. On his serious point about the Imperial trust, the seed funding will be for the trust to develop its plans as a trust and to put forward its proposals. I am happy, as I am in respect of other colleagues, to write to the hon. Gentleman to set out the process, how the money will be spent and how swiftly it can be allocated. There is always a need for the development of a business case when large sums of public money are involved, and I am sure he would expect one for any major investment in his trust. The seed funding will enable the trust to get going quickly and put together its case.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): I welcome the excellent announcement of the seed money for Royal Preston Hospital. This is indeed a great day for healthcare in Lancashire. Will the Minister assure us that he will work with right hon. and hon. Members to shape the health vision for this part of our county?

Edward Argar: Again, I am happy to welcome the positivity from my hon. Friend and the welcome for this money; the welcome for this massive additional investment into our NHS has been clear on the Conservative Benches. I am, of course, happy to give him the commitment that he wishes, which is to work with him and his colleagues to make sure that his constituents continue to get the healthcare that they need.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): The King's Fund has commented on the recent announcements: "these piecemeal announcements are not the same as having a proper, multi-year capital funding plan."

So could the Minister clarify by what criteria these schemes have been selected, and what are his spending plans for the long term to repair our crumbling NHS?

Edward Argar: The hon. Lady refers to piecemeal announcements. I have to say that the reason we are now coming up with an approach—a new approach—that delivers rolling capital investment to a strategic vision linked to investment elsewhere in the health service is that, singularly, the previous Government utterly failed to do that. On criteria and process, as I mentioned, the bids considered were put forward by individual NHS trusts and we have considered them against the usual bidding process value-for-money criteria. If it is helpful to her, as with other colleagues to whom I have committed to write, I will be happy to write to her about process rather than the specifics of individual hospitals. If there is a particular trust that she wishes to highlight to me, if she writes to me, I will include the response on that in the letter.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): May I congratulate my hon. Friend on his statement, which is so encouraging because it demonstrates our long-term ambitious plans for the NHS? I was particularly pleased to see the investment in CT scanners as technology and medicine are moving so fast. Does he agree that the screening programmes in the NHS, supported by the capital budget that he is announcing today, are helping to save lives and that we must do all we can to encourage these programmes?

Edward Argar: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are investing to make sure that, when people need care, that care is there for them, but he is absolutely right to highlight that prevention is always better than cure. The investment that we are making in these CT scanners and X-ray machines and, indeed, the steps forward that we are seeing in the research and development of new technologies, all contribute to improving our ability to prevent illnesses.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): May I express to the Minister my disappointment that, in the list of hospitals, there is not one in the whole of the west midlands? I say that in particular because when, in January 2018, Carillion went bust, a major casualty was the half-completed, but much-needed, Midland Metropolitan Hospital. After long representations to his negotiations, the new contract with Balfour Beatty has now been sent to both his Department and the Treasury. It just needs ministerial sign-off, so will he go back to his Department, get out the file and get this project moving?

Edward Argar: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. He is absolutely right to highlight the challenges about Midland Metropolitan Hospital. I know, in the spirit of bipartisan sentiment, how hard he has been working on that issue on behalf of his constituents, and I also know how hard Toby Lewis has been working on this as well in running that hospital trust. I have looked into the matter recently. I am very happy to meet him to talk through with him where we are and what the next steps are because, like him, I am keen that we get things moving.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Record numbers of patients are being treated at Kettering General Hospital with increasingly world-class treatments. The difficulty that we have at Kettering General Hospital is the A&E department, which, when it was constructed 25 years

ago, was designed to cope with 45,000 visitors and is expected to go through 100,000 attendances this year. The solution is an urgent care hub. There is already a fully worked-up business plan in place. May I welcome the addition of Kettering General Hospital on the list of future projects and ask: when can the hospital expect the money and when can it expect to start to build the new urgent care hub?

Edward Argar: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. He is right to highlight the importance of design, particularly in A&E and emergency departments, for the ability of staff to manage increasing demand and increasingly complex cases. As he highlights, Kettering General Hospital NHS Foundation Trust is included in HIP 2 for the seed funding to develop that business case and its proposal. I am happy to work with him and I hope that he will work with the trust to develop the business case in accordance with the criteria for bidding against future funds.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): A couple of years ago, my constituents and I led a spirited and successful campaign to maintain A&E and maternity services at Darlington Memorial Hospital, but our attention now turns to the state of mental health services in Darlington. I know these problems are not unique to my constituency, but they are dire. There are young people and children in Darlington who have been waiting for 18 months for an autism diagnosis. The situation needs urgent attention. Will the Minister please meet me to discuss how we can improve the situation?

Edward Argar: As the hon. Lady will know, improving mental health services for those with mental health needs is at the heart of this Government's agenda. The Government have already announced investments of over £400 million in improving the mental health estate since July 2017, but she highlights a specific point and has a specific request—that I meet her. Given the number of meetings and visit requests I have had today, there may be a slight wait, but I would be very happy to meet her.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): On Friday, I had the pleasure of visiting the Conquest Hospital in Hastings with my amazing neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd). The hospital was delighted with the £14 million that has just been allocated to its sister hospital in Eastbourne to help to develop wards there, and the trust would be absolutely delighted if it were able to deliver a new hospital. May I ask my right hon. Friend—he will soon be right hon. if he is not already—what more the Conservative MP team in East Sussex, one of whom, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), is sitting right in front of me, can do to get a new hospital delivered to our constituents on the East Sussex coast?

Edward Argar: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend and to my right hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd) for their campaigning work on behalf of their local hospital trust, East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust, and their two local hospitals, the Conquest and Eastbourne. The investment that we envisage flowing from this seed funding will lead to current district

general hospital services being provided from a significantly enhanced environment at both Eastbourne and the Conquest—something that my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) has campaigned for very actively. I encourage him to continue doing so and to continue working very closely with his local trust to ensure that it continues to develop those services.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I have with me a letter from the chief executive of North Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Foundation Trust, which identifies a capital gap in excess of £247.36 million as of July 2019. Will the Minister meet local MPs to discuss how the Government can work with the trust to address this capital need?

Edward Argar: At the risk of being a little brief at this point—yes.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): Many of my constituents have a two-hour round trip to access an acute general hospital, so they are jumping for joy at the opportunity of getting more money for the cottage hospitals or for a new general hospital in Cornwall, but what reassurances can the Minister give my constituents that this is more than just an aspiration for the people of Cornwall?

Edward Argar: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the need for access to facilities in his county, given its geography. I have been clear today, the Secretary of State has been clear and the Prime Minister has been clear in our commitment to the list of schemes that we have said will get the HIP 2 funding. I know that officials in my hon. Friend's trust will be looking forward to working with him to develop their proposals.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I am pleased that my persistent and passionate campaigning for the University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust must have been heard by those on the Government Benches; I am sure it has nothing to do with the two marginal constituencies of Morecambe and Lunesdale, and Barrow and Furness, which fall into the trust's footprint.

When constituents get in touch with me frustrated with NHS wait times, it is invariably about the wait for mental health services, and some of the most difficult conversations I have had to have as a constituency MP have been with parents who have lost children to suicide or eating disorders, so why is the Government's announcement today so silent on mental health issues, particularly regarding CAMHS?

Edward Argar: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, who I know has campaigned on this. My hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris) has taken a real lead in fighting for improvements and investment in this area, so I pay tribute to him as well. The hon. Lady raises a point that other hon. Members have rightly raised about mental health services, particularly for children. She will know that before I was a Minister I campaigned in this House on eating disorder support services with the charity Beat. She is absolutely right to highlight the importance of early and appropriate intervention in those areas. That is why improving mental health is at the heart of our agenda and why, alongside these announcements, since July 2017 we have, for example, announced investments of over

£400 million in improving mental health services. Yesterday's and today's announcements are another part of our overall strategic vision for investing in and improving our NHS, and they should be read in the round with all the other announcements.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I warmly welcome the Minister's statement demonstrating, yet again, our commitment to the NHS. I particularly welcome the commitment to community care. In that regard, will he meet me to discuss Wareham Community Hospital and the proposal for a hub, perhaps in addition to going to Ealing, North Devon and Staffordshire? He is officially welcome in Dorset. Perhaps he could even stop off in North Dorset on his way back home.

Edward Argar: What is one more invitation to a meeting and a visit? I am of course very happy to accept my hon. Friend's hospitality in his constituency and to meet him. He makes a very important point, which my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) alluded to, about the importance of community hospitals and community health facilities. That is exactly what is at the heart of the proposals that his county and his trust are developing, and that is exactly the right thing for them to be doing.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I am sure the Minister will agree that Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is an outstanding trust. It always comes in within budget and regularly has good or outstanding ratings for care, as I have experienced personally over the past two years. Disappointingly, Sheffield is not mentioned in this announcement. However, rather than my simply complaining, will he agree to meet me, the chair of the hospitals trust, Tony Pedder, and officials to discuss their very ambitious plans to renovate Weston Park Hospital in Sheffield, which already provides a top centre for cancer treatment and could be even better with the Minister's help and the necessary funding?

Edward Argar: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that note of deep positivity, which has not necessarily been universally heard from Opposition Members. Again, I would be happy to meet him.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): As we all recognise, the NHS is coming under increasing pressure to meet people's health needs. Does my hon. Friend agree that the new Bolton College of Medical Sciences will play a key part in delivering the next generation of health professionals to meet those needs?

Edward Argar: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the huge contribution that that new medical school will make to delivering a highly trained, highly motivated local workforce. There is strong evidence that when people graduate from medical school their first post tends to be in the near vicinity of that school. I therefore think that he can look forward to, as I say, a highly motivated, highly trained workforce to continue delivering first-class healthcare to his constituents.

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): I welcome today's statement and the benefit it will bring to Northern Ireland by way of the Barnett consequential. I also

[Emma Little Pengelly]

welcome the reference to NHS workforce investment. The Minister will no doubt be aware that Northern Ireland faces a very particular challenge with the recruitment and retention of consultants. Will he outline when and if the situation will be addressed that currently disincentivises consultants from doing any overtime while attempts are made to fill those vacancies, because that is having a knock-on impact on the waiting lists in Northern Ireland?

Edward Argar: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her comments and for their tone. She is absolutely right to highlight the importance of the workforce. Investment in new, first-class buildings and in equipment is vital because they are the tools that the amazing workforce need to do their job. She highlights a specific point about pensions, particularly consultants' pensions. As she will be aware, we have been looking at this, and the Secretary of State has recently launched a consultation more broadly on proposals to address the challenges on pensions taxation.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Ind): Thanks to the brilliant chief executive, Sarah-Jane Marsh, and the fantastic team of doctors and nurses and all the support staff, the most seriously ill children from Dudley and elsewhere in the west midlands receive the most fantastic care at Birmingham Children's Hospital. But that care is provided in buildings that are 155 years old and, as I understand it, there is no possibility of them being replaced for at least another 15 years. I know that the Minister has had a lot of requests for meetings and visits today, but I would like to ask him to make the short trip to Birmingham and come with me to meet Sarah-Jane Marsh and the staff, see what they are doing and see how much better it could be if he managed to find a way of enabling the hospital to have the new facilities it needs.

Edward Argar: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He is right to highlight the world-leading work of that hospital, carried out by Sarah-Jane Marsh and her team. He is right: it is a team effort. Every single person in the NHS family is vital to delivering those amazing outcomes and he is right to highlight that. I am very happy, as ever, to visit the great city of Birmingham, and even more so to do it in tandem with him.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): I want to push the Minister on the whole issue of the devolution settlement and the Barnett consequentials. Can he confirm when the Welsh Government will receive this additional capital funding, so that we can make decisions in Wales about where our hospitals need investment? He can be reassured that he does not need to visit any Welsh hospitals.

Edward Argar: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He will be aware that I spoke last week with the Welsh Health Minister and may yet be visiting Cardiff to see him anyway. He is right to pick up on the need for the devolved Administrations to understand what the Barnett consequentials are, so that they can start planning. If I may, I will write to him about timescales and so on, but I want to reiterate the reassurance that the Barnett consequentials will be there.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): The two Budgets in 2017 allocated some £3.9 billion for estates planning and also to tackle the huge maintenance backlog that has been allowed to mushroom under the Government. As of now, how much of that allocation from 2017 has been spent, and how much of it has been announced in today's statement?

Edward Argar: I am happy to tell the hon. Gentleman that the announcements we are making today are for new money.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I welcome this statement on the commitment to the selected six hospitals in this year and 34 others over a period. I had occasion on Friday past to visit the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast, which is well aware of the squeeze on staffing, resources and equipment, with theatres lying vacant because there are not the people to be there. The Government have to understand that hospitals in every area need investment, and the NHS needs to be sustained with block funding. Under the Barnett formula, how much will hospitals in Northern Ireland benefit from this money?

Edward Argar: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. As I said to the hon. Members for Ogmore (Chris Elmore) and for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day), I am happy to write detailing the process, and I am happy to include the hon. Gentleman and his hon. and right hon. Friends in that.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I welcome the Minister to his new position and congratulate him. We have a mental health crisis, as everyone is well aware. I want to highlight the predicament in Warwickshire, where the suicide rate is significantly higher—25% higher—than the national average. St Michael's Hospital in Warwick has a fantastic reputation but, despite that, it is losing all its acute mental health beds to Coventry. We need greater capacity, not reduced capacity. The Caludon Centre site in Coventry does not have the capacity and is not fit for purpose. Will the Minister meet me and visit St Michael's Hospital, which is an excellent facility that needs investment?

Edward Argar: The hon. Gentleman rightly highlights the importance of mental health care and services for those with mental health needs. I go back to the point that this Government have placed those needs and that care front and centre of our approach and have put investment in place to back up that commitment. In respect of his specific request for a visit and a meeting, it may take a little time, given the number of colleagues who have asked to see me, but of course I am happy to do so.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I saw the professionalism of NHS staff on one of my recent night shifts at Derriford Hospital. They told me that they need more staff, not necessarily more buildings, but may I ask the Minister about the £600 million commitment to Derriford Hospital? This is welcome but surprising, as we have not asked for a new hospital. May I ask how that figure was arrived at and, if the actual figure is more than £600 million, what will happen—will the Minister fund the difference? Does this mean

that the projects we had asked for, such as the planned care centre and the health hub network, will now be approved quickly, so that we can get on and build those shovel-ready projects?

Edward Argar: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for attempting to pile a number of requests into his question. On where bids have come from for these moneys, they have come from those trusts and been worked up by those local trusts. On the specific requests he has and that he wants to raise with me about particular shovel-ready projects, I am very happy to look at those with him.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): May I welcome the new Minister to his place and give him the opportunity to make his mark? Halton Hospital has been turned down twice for much-needed capital investment. It is desperate for investment. Will he meet me and my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg), and secure the future for Halton Hospital?

Edward Argar: As that is the final request for a meeting, it would be churlish of me to say no to the hon. Gentleman. I am very happy to meet him, as I am happy to meet any Member of this House to discuss this announcement and our commitment to funding the NHS because we are the party of the NHS.

Points of Order

5.1 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Supreme Court ruled that Parliament had not been prorogued, and it was clear that the Prime Minister's intention was to stymie the ability of this House to hold him and his shambolic Government to account and that parliamentary business should be resumed so that we could hold them both to account.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I seek your advice regarding the provision of Opposition days. Standing Order No. 14(2) provides for three allotted Opposition days

"at the disposal of the leader of the second largest opposition party".

That has been the Scottish National party since 2015. This has been the longest Session of Parliament in history, yet in over two years the SNP has been granted only one and a half Opposition days for debate on subjects of our choosing. We have repeatedly asked through the usual channels, and my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) has been asking the Leader of the House at business questions since the summer for an SNP Opposition day. Another attempt at Prorogation and a new Queen's Speech looms, with the prospect of this Session being brought to a close without the third largest party in this House being provided with a type of debate that we are entitled to under Standing Orders.

Can you advise me, Madam Deputy Speaker, on whether my understanding of the Standing Orders is correct, and could you suggest what, if any, remedies are open to us to ensure that we are able to exercise the rights provided to us under Standing Orders? Would the Government's refusal to comply with a legitimate request for Opposition time, when there are still allotted days remaining, be grounds for considering whether the Government were yet again in contempt of the House and its Standing Orders?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order, and for giving me notice of it and highlighting the Standing Order to which he refers. I hope he will appreciate that it is not for the Chair to become involved in the timing and allocation of Opposition days. I would advise him to continue to use the channels that he and his colleagues have been using so far to press his case for the time he is seeking. He may also wish to use other devices for raising the specific issues that he has wanted to raise on any Opposition days. On the issue of contempt, if he believes that there are any grounds for a possible contempt, the course is to write to Mr Speaker about the issue. I do hope that that is helpful.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Earlier this afternoon I raised a conflict of interest that I believed the Leader of the House had. Before I did so, I wrote to him. During the Urgent Question, the Exchequer Secretary revealed that he had visited my constituency without telling me. Furthermore, the Minister without Portfolio, the right hon. Member for Braintree (James Cleverly)

[Helen Goodman]

was in my constituency recently: he did not notify me of that beforehand either. I know we have had some constitutional innovations recently, and I know that the Government are not interested in convention, but has the convention of informing other hon. Members of visits been set to one side, or is there some way we can get members of the governing party to abide by it?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order. I assume that she has notified the Members involved that she intended to raise it, as that is certainly one convention—

Helen Goodman *indicated assent.*

Madam Deputy Speaker: She has stuck to that, so that is good. It is important that right hon. and hon. Members notify each other if they are visiting other constituencies. If that breaks down, it will be difficult for all of us. I urge those on the Treasury Bench and everyone else to try to observe that convention. The hon. Lady has raised the issue and done the right thing by informing the Members involved that she intended to do so.

BILL PRESENTED

JUSTICE (EQUALITY OF ACCESS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Frank Field presented a Bill to place a duty on the Lord Chancellor to ensure equality of access to legal representation and the justice system for people of all socio-economic groups.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): I wanted to call it the “Gina Miller (Poor People’s Access to Courts) Bill” and if you could change the record in that respect, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would be very grateful.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am not sure that that is entirely within my powers. Well done for getting it in there anyway.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 436).

Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 Section 7

5.7 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Julian Smith): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of and approves the Report pursuant to Section 3(14) of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 - Historical Institutional Abuse, which was laid before this House on Wednesday 4 September.

On 4 September, I laid a number of reports before the House in line with my obligations under the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019. Parliamentary business pressures meant that some of those reports were not debated earlier this month, but I am pleased to stand before the House today to underscore my commitment to make progress on these issues.

The reports emphasise what colleagues on both sides of the House have known for some time: the restoration of the Executive and the Assembly is of vital importance to the people of Northern Ireland. That is my top priority and I will continue to work with the Northern Ireland parties to meet that objective.

Without an Executive, the people of Northern Ireland have seen the quality of their public services decline and decisions that affect their day-to-day lives kicked into the long grass.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): Given that the current political situation in Northern Ireland is preventing the children’s funeral fund from being introduced, can I ask that the Secretary of State consider acting directly to allow that to happen, so that bereaved parents there may benefit from the fund like the rest of the United Kingdom?

Julian Smith: My understanding is that a number of councils in Northern Ireland have put in place measures to deal with the issue, but as with many other issues that we are debating today, the absence of an Executive at Stormont is affecting all sorts of decisions, including that one.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): I want to support the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), whose campaign has been hugely encouraging and personal to her. It has had a huge impact across the United Kingdom, and there is the prize of financial assistance for those who have been bereaved of young loved ones, of children in their family. I know that she has engaged with the permanent secretary in the Department for Communities, and rightly so. I know that the response has been positive, but that they look for political agreement through all the parties in Northern Ireland. Perhaps that is something that the Secretary of State could do. As he will outline regarding this historical institutional abuse report, where there is a need for political agreement, the will is there. He could bring the local parties together and indicate to the Department for Communities that there is full support for the roll-out of this much-needed scheme.

Julian Smith: I agree with my hon. Friend’s summary of the work undertaken by the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on this issue. I would be very

happy to meet her and others to discuss it. It is, again, up to the Northern Ireland Assembly, but let us meet and see how we can work further to move things forward.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Normally there is another contingent in this House that is very interested in a one dimensional aspect of things to do with Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State must be aware of the 850 medical practitioners—doctors, nurses and midwives—who have written publicly about their absolute outcry at the failure regarding the decision of this House to impose abortion regulations in Northern Ireland, abortion regulations that cannot be met. That has put undue pressure on GP services, nursing staff and doctors' staff. What is he going to do about that to protect our doctors and nurses in Northern Ireland?

Julian Smith: If I can, I will come to my hon. Friend's point slightly later in my remarks.

Since my appointment in July, I have met public servants from a range of sectors who are doing an incredible job in the absence of support from local political leaders at Stormont, but they cannot of course take the proactive decisions that are needed on public services, the economy or the areas that we have already heard about in today's debate. If we cannot secure the restoration of an Executive, we will pursue the decision-making powers that are needed at the earliest opportunity. In addition to the reporting requirements, the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 requires the UK Parliament to introduce laws on same-sex marriage and opposite-sex civil partnerships, abortion and victims payments. This House has spoken, and the duty to legislate will come into effect if the Executive are not back up and running before 21 October. My Department will shortly begin an awareness campaign to ensure that women and citizens across Northern Ireland are clear as to how we plan to proceed to regulate for these new legal duties.

I recognise that these are sensitive issues, and this Government's preference is that they are taken forward by a restored Assembly and Executive, but to those who now lobby me and others in Government to somehow change the law I say that the only way for these laws to be changed and shaped in the best interests of Northern Ireland is for the Northern Ireland party leaders to form an Executive and get back into government. To that end, following the frustratingly slow pace over the summer caused by a range of factors, I will this week work urgently with the Northern Ireland parties and the Irish Government to do everything I can to break the logjam and to get Stormont up and running. The time for that is now. The party leaders need to show leadership and do the right thing for the people of Northern Ireland.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Already, frustratingly, the Secretary of State has fallen into the trap that so many others have fallen into by spreading the blame for the non-existence of the Executive in Northern Ireland across all the party leaders. Will he accept and publicly state in this House today that the only party leader opposing and stopping the formation of the Executive in Northern Ireland is the leader of Sinn Féin?

Julian Smith: I honestly do not think that it is productive for me to get involved in pointing any fingers. I think I stated earlier in my speech that I view the lack of progress as being down to a variety of factors, and I now want to be as proactive as possible in moving back to getting the Assembly up and running, as do the Irish Government and many parties, including the Democratic Unionist party and others.

Ian Paisley: The Secretary of State must know that his words, as they are spoken from the Dispatch Box today, sound like a punishment to every single party in Northern Ireland except Sinn Féin. That is the only party holding us up in getting back into the Assembly, yet we are all being punished, even by what he says.

Julian Smith: I am happy to restate that I do not think that any one party or any particular issue has held things up, but it is time that we move on. I call on each party to play its part in getting Stormont up and running, and I hope and expect that they will.

On the matter of historical institutional abuse, I want to say first that victims in Northern Ireland have shown incredible courage and dignity through their engagement with the Hart inquiry and their campaign for redress. Without their willingness to speak up about the trauma of what happened to them, we would not have been able to forge a path from the inquiry to the consultation on the draft legislation, and to the present position where there is a commitment to introducing a historical institutional abuse Bill in Westminster by the end of the year in the absence of a Northern Ireland Executive. I know that colleagues will join me in restating today our collective determination to see progress made in delivering redress to the victims as soon as possible.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): Since the Prime Minister has refused to rule out proroguing Parliament again and seems hellbent on a swift general election, it would help the victims of historical institutional abuse in Northern Ireland, who will be particularly interested in this debate, if the Secretary of State were to lay out a realistic timetable for the legislation to go through all stages, so that compensation can be paid to them. They have been enormously patient. They have suffered too long, they have waited too long and they deserve compensation. When will that be?

Julian Smith: I will talk in my speech about how we hope to make progress.

On the Floor of the House in July, the Government made plain their commitment to introducing legislation in the absence of a Northern Ireland Executive. Much progress has been made by my officials, working together with the Northern Ireland civil service to prepare all the necessary materials to do just that. On 4 September, I laid a report that sets out the progress that has been made in implementing the recommendations in the historical institutional abuse inquiry report. The House will have noted in that report that the inquiry published its findings and recommendations in January 2017. The collapse of the Northern Ireland Executive in that month has meant that the implementation of many of the recommendations has been delayed.

We should take a moment to remember that during his work on this very considerable report Sir Anthony Hart, who sadly passed away in July, showed immense

[Julian Smith]

compassion, empathy and determination to make a difference to the lives of victims. The inquiry he led uncovered evidence of systematic physical, sexual and emotional abuse of children in institutional care, as well as neglect and unacceptable practices in children's homes. Thanks to Sir Anthony's commitment, focus and sensitivity, victims finally had a voice after so many years of suffering. As one of the prominent campaigners for redress remarked,

"It was Sir Anthony who believed in victims and it was Sir Anthony who delivered the truth when others failed."

The Executive Office is to be commended for the progress made in the absence of Northern Ireland Ministers. It prepared draft legislation in 2018 and undertook a consultation exercise which concluded in March 2019. It was with the benefit of that progress that the Northern Ireland political parties were able to discuss in detail the implementation proposals for a commissioner for survivors of institutional child abuse and a redress scheme. It is worth noting that all political parties in Northern Ireland have been supportive of the Bill. The discussions between the Northern Ireland parties on the legislation and the policy decisions required to finalise it demonstrate that there is a genuine will to reach agreement. The resulting Bill was provided by the Northern Ireland Office on 18 July and has been the focus of work in my Department to make ready everything necessary to introduce the Bill at Westminster. It is a complex Bill and those documents have required significant input from legal advisers and policy officials.

The UK Government commitment to introducing the Bill by the end of the year in the absence of a restored Northern Ireland Executive remains resolute. To answer directly the question from my hon. Friend the Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), I hope that we will have a resolution in the coming weeks.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): Does the Secretary of State recognise the frustration and distress that victims will feel when they see the Chamber so empty today, given that previous Northern Irish legislation has been rushed through all its stages in one day, and given that the last time the Executive Bill was in this place the House was packed with Members hellbent on using it as a tool for delaying Brexit? Will he commit, when he gets a date for the Bill, to rushing it through in the same manner as other pieces of Northern Irish legislation earlier this year?

Julian Smith: There are some complex issues that need debate. I know that my hon. Friend has stood up steadfastly and consistently for victims of child abuse in Northern Ireland, and I hope that we will be able to introduce the Bill in short order.

Lady Hermon: The Secretary of State has just said that he hopes the Bill will be introduced "in short order". I do not know quite what that translates to. Have he and his very hard-working and diligent officials given any thought to introducing a statutory instrument, rather than going through all the stages of a Bill, to establish an administrative scheme whereby an initial payment of compensation—let us say of £10,000 or £7,000—could be awarded to victims? They cannot be asked to wait any longer. They are dying, they are most unwell, and the anxiety and the waiting are not helping them. Will he commit to that?

Julian Smith: I commit to introducing the Bill in the coming weeks, and I am confident that we can do that. I accept my hon. Friend's point that the age and the wellbeing of many victims means that we also have to consider how we get money to them at the earliest opportunity.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his commitment to trying to move this forward. I entirely agree with what the hon. Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) said about there being no reason why this legislation cannot be passed very quickly, given the way Brexit legislation is now being put through in a matter of hours and given the way abortion law has been changed in a matter of hours without consultation. Why can we not do this Bill in a matter of hours, since there is cross-party support and unanimity across the board? I gently say to him: we have heard a lot about the absence of the Executive, but he knows from conversations he has had with us and other Ministers that the Government are also responsible for the lack of progress. They could have taken action themselves in the House but they refused to do so, for political reasons. They may have been well-intentioned reasons, but a deliberate policy decision was taken to stymie all the things that needed to be done in Northern Ireland. He is perfectly within his rights to share some of the blame among the political parties in Northern Ireland, but he also has to take some responsibility himself for the failure of the Government to take action over two years of doing nothing.

Julian Smith: My right hon. Friend knows that the Government, like the previous Government, view taking more decisions from Westminster with great caution. We respect the Good Friday agreement and want to encourage local institutions to take the decisions required.

Maria Caulfield: Can I gently remind the Secretary of State that periods of this abuse—between 1922 and 1995—were periods of direct rule, when this place was responsible for those children, and so while there is not an Assembly in place, this place also has some responsibility to ensure that those victims get compensation?

Julian Smith: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Again, we need to encourage Stormont to get up and running and we need to deliver on this legislation, and I believe that we can achieve both.

Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way; he is being generous with his time. We want this legislation to progress as quickly as possible, but it has to be watertight and robust, and it has to have proper scrutiny, because otherwise it will be challenged. The quickest way to get redress for the victims is to have proper, robust legislation that has been properly scrutinised.

Julian Smith: I thank my predecessor for those remarks, and I will take this opportunity to pay tribute to her for her relentless work to get the legislation to this stage. I am acutely aware that she has played a really important part in getting us where we are. She is right; we need to move things on, but we need to be as careful as possible in how we do so.

On 23 August I met representatives of victim and survivor groups, and I intend to meet them again later this week. These people's lives have been blighted by unforgivable, horrendous acts, yet they have engaged patiently and respectfully with politicians and with the legislative process. It is imperative that we do all within our power to support the Bill so that they can finally receive a measure of redress.

This House is well aware of the stain of child abuse that shames our country. It took place in every corner and it went unchecked for decades. The Hart report outlines starkly the degrading acts perpetrated by those responsible for caring for vulnerable children at Kincora boys home, Nazareth House and Lissue Hospital. In fact, there were only two institutions across Northern Ireland where evidence of systemic abuse was not found. In most instances it was the poorest and most vulnerable young people who were affected, and in some instances the same vulnerable children were then sent to unsuitable homes in Australia, with their whereabouts unknown to their family members.

Gavin Robinson: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for allowing me to intervene once again. He mentioned Kincora boys home, which is in my constituency. Although the report that he has laid before us today highlights the recommendation that there should be a suitable memorial to those who suffered abuse, Kincora boys home remains a sepulchral reminder of the tragedy that occurred in my constituency and in institutions across Northern Ireland. Five years ago I stood in Kincora boys home with victims, and they have continually called for it to be razed to the ground, yet just last week Belfast City Council felt it appropriate to say that the building should be retained because of its townscape character. Does he understand the anguish of abuse victims? One of the victims I stood with back then has since died. They want to see this tragic reminder of their horrible past razed to the ground once and for all.

Julian Smith: My hon. Friend speaks powerfully of the symbolism of the buildings, and it is important that we recognise that in this debate. I would be interested in discussing his proposals further in due course.

We can ask no more of victims. We can ask no more of the inquiry. The policy officials have prepared the policy and the lawyers have prepared the draft law. Now it is time for us, as political representatives, to act. It is therefore my sincere hope and belief that colleagues across the House will support us as we seek to deliver this legislation in the coming weeks.

I thank all colleagues for the debate that we have had so far, and I look forward to hearing further contributions. Obviously we are debating some of the most sensitive issues that this House can scrutinise. I will do everything I can as Secretary of State to deliver the Bill and address many of the issues that we have heard about today.

5.28 pm

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): May I begin by repeating what the Secretary of State has just said, because we can ask no more of the victims, and obviously we can ask no more of Lord Justice Hart. The report before us includes this telling sentence:

“There is no doubt that victims of abuse have shown incredible dignity throughout the inquiry and that an apology is long overdue.”

In fact, the victims have shown incredible dignity over the many years they have suffered as a result of the abuse and as a result of the delay and obfuscation by the political system, which failed to address the record of the past and the needs of those individuals. I share with the Secretary of State and with his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley), the view that that there is a sense of urgency, as we have heard in the Chamber. The hon. Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) is right, and made the valid point that between 1922 and 1995, the period covered by the Hart inquiry, there were significant amounts of time under direct rule, when the responsibility for the governance of Northern Ireland lay with Whitehall and Westminster. We should bear that in mind, because it gives us all the sense that we need to bring this to a credible conclusion.

The Secretary of State will know that the shock that was experienced when Parliament was prorogued several weeks ago was felt across the whole of Northern Ireland and across the whole nation, and by no one more than the victims of institutional abuse, who thought that that the probability that at last they were seeing some resolution of their suffering was about to be truncated. I hope that today we can give some comfort to those victims that all is now back on track.

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): We are here today because the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament illegally and tampered with our timetable for debates and discussion. Does my hon. Friend, like me, recognise the importance of all the nations—England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and, of course, Wales—that make up our United Kingdom? Does he share my grave concern about the downgrading of the important issues we are discussing that affect people across Northern Ireland? Those issues should not be an afterthought to fill the agenda, but today they very much feel like they are.

Tony Lloyd: That puts into context the unfortunate remarks last week of the Attorney General, who told us that this Parliament had no moral basis. This Parliament has enormous moral compass, no more so than when we examine the kind of issues that we are now examining. This is the message that ought to go out. There can never be a time when the House of Commons is irrelevant, and that is certainly not the case when we are debating the justice and urgency that victims are entitled to have. Members of the House of Commons must be here to do that.

There are things in the report that I strongly welcome. I strongly welcome, for example, the appointment of Brendan McAllister as the interim advocate, as that is an important step forward. From 12 August, I think, Mr McAllister has been engaged in work that he can achieve. In the end, we want a permanent commissioner to be appointed so that they can work across the piece, particularly with victims of abuse.

I do not need to speak for an awful lot longer, as I simply want to make one point. The hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) is absolutely right that we need a firm timeline. I would strongly welcome the return of devolved governance in Stormont. Every Member of the House ought to want that. If it can be done and the legislation can expeditiously be put through that

[Tony Lloyd]

Stormont process, we welcome that. However, in the absence of Stormont we need a definitive view that this can be completed in the House of Commons.

Ian Paisley: I share the absolute commitment of the shadow Secretary of State—let us see the Assembly back up and running. Would he therefore make a request on behalf of Her Majesty's Opposition to the Secretary of State to call a meeting of the Northern Ireland Assembly tomorrow at 10 am, and see who turns up and wants to do business?

Tony Lloyd: I think that, regrettably, things are more complicated than that. I will say to the hon. Gentleman, however, that if the commitment is there to see Stormont back in operation, we will all, like him, do everything we can to support the process. One of the interesting aspects of the report is a recognition that all parties come together in agreement on this important issue. That is a lesson that ought to be taken back: when there is the will to move things on, there is political agreement, even between parties that are otherwise divided.

Lady Hermon: Does the hon. Gentleman share my disappointment at the tone and the content of what the Secretary of State has said this afternoon? He has been, rightly, enormously sympathetic to the victims, and has rightly praised Lord Justice Hart for his report—sadly, Lord Justice Hart died before he could see this legislation on the statute book—but my colleagues and I are unanimous in our disappointment that there is no sense of urgency.

The Secretary of State needs to be aware that, under the European convention on human rights, there must be an effective remedy for any breaches of the human rights guaranteed in that convention, and that includes the guarantee that everyone should be free of degrading treatment. The victims of historical institutional abuse were certainly not free of degrading treatment in those homes as children. Will the Secretary of State, when he winds up the debate, show some sense of urgency about getting this legislation on the statute book? All of us here will support him in that tone and in that effort.

Tony Lloyd: The hon. Lady has made a powerful point. I share her regret—I suppose that that is the right word—that Lord Justice Hart is not around to see the conclusion of his work, but we should nevertheless pay tribute to it.

This matter is urgent—there can be no doubt about that—and we now look to the Secretary of State to map out for us what kind of timetable is possible and practical in the absence of a Stormont Government. Let me say to him, on behalf of the official Opposition, that this is not the kind of legislation that we would seek to delay. It is not the kind of legislation that we would seek to deliberate on to make life difficult for the Government. In the end, this is about justice: it is about justice for people who suffered, and whose suffering was continued by the failure of all our institutions to recognise their plight. In that context, we will work with the Secretary of State, and we will work across the House of Commons

and, no doubt, in the other place, to ensure that if legislation can be introduced at an early stage, it can go through this House.

Let me also say to the Secretary of State that, just as with other legislation that is conditional on the return of Stormont—the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley), for example, referred to legislation on abortion—if it is the appropriate way of moving things forward here, we will of course avail the Secretary of State in taking legislation through this Parliament.

I join Northern Ireland Members, but I also join Members throughout the United Kingdom, because the abuse of our young people—whether it took place in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland—is a stain on our nation. If we can now secure an adequate system of redress that is not simply financial but involves all the other matters in the Hart report, it will serve as a template for the entire United Kingdom. It is something that we should welcome not only across the whole of the House of Commons, but across the whole of this nation of ours.

5.39 pm

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): May I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the tone he adopted in his opening remarks? Like him, I will divide my remarks into two parts. First, I will make a few casual, general observations. I have seen the video clip that the Northern Ireland Office has put on Twitter today, marking nearly 1,000 days since there was last an Executive at Stormont. Clearly, that is a running sore and it just goes on. Although I usually travel in an optimistic frame of mind, Brexit is clearly the elephant in the Chamber and in Northern Ireland. It is hard, if not impossible, to see how Stormont could get up and running prior to 31 October, but I wish the Secretary of State and all parties well.

I say to Opposition Members and, indeed, to all political parties in Northern Ireland that from talking and listening to people and from reading what they say, my hunch is that we seem to have got incredibly hung up on process, whereas real people in the real world who are concerned about the delivery of vital local public services just want to see them delivered. Whether the issue is Brexit or the restoration of Stormont, the public have a limited reservoir of patience. When it is drained, that will be it—there will be no more reservoir on which to draw. That patience is running thin and people are not necessarily interested in the blame game politics of “He said, I said, they said, we would, they might, we didn’t”. The message is clear, just as it is on other things in this topsy-turvy political age: “Either make progress or get out of the way and let those who are interested in making progress have a go.” I think we are close to that point.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): I thank the Chairman of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs for giving way. He makes a valid point. The question is: who do we give way to? As currently constituted, the institutions cannot have a power-sharing Government without their being cross-community and representing a majority of both nationalists and Unionists. That implies that direct rule is the only other option. May I connect Brexit with the absence of Stormont and suggest to the hon. Gentleman that if we leave the

European Union on 31 October, so many decisions will need to be made as a consequence that we will have no alternative but to reintroduce direct rule?

Simon Hoare: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for those observations. I made that point in a radio interview in Northern Ireland last week. He may have heard me take my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to task last week. As we get closer to 31 October, the civil servants in Northern Ireland are clearly doing their best. They are straining every sinew to try to keep the show on the road, but they can only do so, as the right hon. Gentleman well knows, within the confines of public and local policies that enjoy the imprimatur of previous Executives. I thought that the welter of pressing needs told against the early Prorogation. There was plenty that this House could have been getting on with, at least to provide some form of legislative safety net were Stormont not to be up and running by 31 October. There is no point in those on the Treasury Bench waking up on 29 October and saying, “Oh gosh—the 31st looks a bit close. What on earth are we going to do?”

Let us be frank: there could well be, with or without a deal post 31 October, issues that will need to be mitigated. If issues will need to be mitigated on the mainland, by golly they will also need to be mitigated in Northern Ireland, enjoying as it does—although “enjoying” is a pejorative term, I am sure—what will be the only land border with the European Union. We will need to be incredibly fleet of foot. I am not sure whether civil servants in Northern Ireland are currently sufficient in number to be able to deal with the scale of the issue, but they, coupled with local government, will need every tool at their disposal to ensure that normal life can continue for the taxpayers and residents of Northern Ireland. It is not for the lack of chivvying by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, but there seems to be an incredible disconnect between the strategy of No. 10 and the Cabinet Office vis-à-vis Brexit GB and their strategy vis-à-vis Brexit Northern Ireland, which cannot be allowed to stand. Greater urgency is required.

I turn briefly to the subject of the motion and the report tabled by the Secretary of State: historical institutional abuse. I concur with and underscore entirely the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), a fellow member of the Committee, and of the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) and the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds). Had this scale and range of abuse, over such a period of time, happened in North Dorset or anywhere else in England, it would have been rectified and sorted out by now.

I share the concerns expressed specifically, although not exclusively, by the hon. Member for North Down. Opaque language may have been the order of the day in the Secretary of State’s recent job as Government Chief Whip, but a Bill dealing with this issue, this running sore, must be announced in the Queen’s Speech and enacted before Christmas—not introduced before the end of the year but done and dealt with by the end of the year, subject to Stormont not being back up and running.

I make this wager with my right hon. Friend, and luckily it is for somebody else to take cognisance of this point: unless a Bill is announced in the Queen’s Speech,

my hunch is that some of us would find great difficulty in voting for the Gracious Speech when the vote is called. We do not want to add to the catalogue of Government defeats—well, not all of us do—and I am heartened by what the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) said. This is not a contentious piece of legislation.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley) is right that the devil will be in the detail, and that getting the process and the rubric correct and beyond challenge is important, but people should listen, as the Committee has, to Mr Jon McCourt or Margaret McGuckin talk about these issues and the people they represent. I know my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has certainly met Margaret, and I believe she calls him Mr Darcy—I do not know whether that elates him or not, but it is the only light moment in this sad and sorry episode.

In great part, it was organs of the state that put these young children in those institutions where they were abused. Some had mothers who, for a whole variety of reasons—many of which we have heard and which do not need going over again today—put their children and young babies in what they thought was a place of safety that would provide a gateway to a better life. If they had known what we now know, they would not have taken that route.

Officialdom did not know but, beyond the tight kernel of my right hon. and hon. Friends who are Ministers in the Department, I am not certain whether that historical social and special responsibility has been taken into account. I hope that the business managers and others have heard the very strong sense of feeling and the drive for justice. Many of these people are elderly, and many of them are vulnerable. They feel as though they are being slightly brushed under the carpet and ignored, like an eccentric great aunt at a wedding: there but not really engaged, and hoping they will go home before the reception finishes.

These victims of abuse are going nowhere until justice is delivered in full, and neither are their champions in this place, because to do anything other would be a failure in our duty.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Quite a few colleagues want to get in. There is not enormous pressure on time, but if colleagues stick to about eight minutes, we will be able to get everyone in comfortably.

5.50 pm

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): I will endeavour to be as pithy as I can be, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I thank the House for bringing this debate forward today. I expressed my concern just before the break—the adjournment or whatever we are calling it—that the Northern Ireland report debates had been contracted into a short period. It was woefully short, given the important issues we need to raise and discuss, so I welcome the fact that the Government have brought the debates back to the House today.

[*Emma Little Pengelly*]

I am disappointed by the lack of representation across the Chamber, particularly on the Benches in front of me, as many people come to this House to talk about Northern Ireland in relation to Brexit and other matters. These are incredibly important issues, which, as Members from across the House have highlighted, touch on the most vulnerable in our society.

Many years ago, I sat in a room where I first heard the plea from victims and survivors of historical abuse for an investigation and inquiry into what had happened to them. Everybody in that room—there were senior politicians from across the parties, including Martin McGuinness and the right hon. Peter Robinson and officials and politicians—was struck by the pain and anguish of the victims and survivors of that abuse. The thing that stood out most in that discussion was the key line repeated by many victims: “We have not been listened to.” Some of the abuse took place many decades beforehand. They told the politicians and civil servants on that occasion, as they have many times since, that as children and young people they were not believed. They told them that as adults, first when they were struggling through the many challenges of their early adulthood and now, when many of them are older and facing a number of challenges with the ageing they are experiencing, they were not listened to or believed—this happened throughout their lifetime. They told them that they were demeaned, not just as children, but throughout their lives, in terms of the painful stories and experiences they needed to tell.

I knew from that first meeting that the then First Minister and the then Deputy First Minister genuinely felt an empathy with those victims. I was a policy adviser at that time, and they turned to me and the other civil servants and advisers in the room and tasked us with going away to do something to help and support the victims as swiftly as possible. During that period, despite all the other discussions, arguments and differences we may have had, all the political parties worked hard together—quickly—to put in the terms of reference. A lot of work went into that. I was part of the original project board, with civil servants, and we looked at many of the different experiences of inquiries from all over the world.

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to the late Sir Anthony Hart, the first judge I appeared before when he was the recorder of Belfast. He was a fearsome individual with a fearsome reputation, but he was keen on two things—he wanted things to be done effectively and efficiently. He was hard on the young solicitors and barristers who appeared before him, but for good reason, because at the heart of every case that he looked at was a victim who was going through a court system. He hated delay and unnecessary bureaucracy, and he brought those values with him. He was absolutely the right man for that job and I pay tribute to the incredible work he has done. When I have spoken to the many victims and survivors, they have all said the same: “Sir Anthony Hart listened to me. He made me feel valued and vindicated. He genuinely made this a victim-centred process, and that is exactly what we wanted.”

May I also pay tribute to the incredible team of officials, many of whom I worked with throughout that period and many of whom worked on after I left that policy

adviser/special adviser role? They worked incredibly hard to get this inquiry up and going, and it was conducted incredibly efficiently and effectively by all the civil servants involved, led by the chair and the team around that. It will be a model for people to look at internationally.

One thing we did was to introduce, in legislation, a time limit for the inquiry, which is rare in these inquiries. We suggested it should be two and a half years, but with a possible extension of a further 12 months. Sir Anthony Hart said clearly that he was up for that challenge, and he fulfilled it. It was a time-limited inquiry and he produced the report on time, which is incredible.

What happened after that is deeply disappointing. As I have said in this House before, we always knew when the report was due, because of the time-limited nature of the inquiry. Sinn Féin knew when the report was due. We liaised periodically with the chair, who made it clear that there would not be delay and that he would be giving the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister the report. I pleaded with Sinn Féin colleagues. I said, “Look, if you have to collapse the Assembly, we need to do two things before you do that.” They were going to make that decision, with the resignation of the late Martin McGuinness. The first thing was to pass a budget for Northern Ireland. The second thing was to wait two weeks to allow this report to be received and agreed by the Executive, as that would have facilitated the recommendations being brought forward. They were not prepared to wait.

The serious question that needs to be asked is: what was accomplished by pulling down the Assembly two weeks earlier than it could have been brought down? Those two weeks could have transformed many of the issues in Northern Ireland. I say that without going into all the reasons or justifications for bringing the Assembly down, but I firmly believe that bringing it down two weeks before this report was due—Sinn Féin knew from the beginning of this inquiry when it was due—was wrong, and it left victims in a very vulnerable state.

Today, however, I want this contribution to be about the victims: like the inquiry, which was victim-centred, I want this contribution to be about them and not about the other parties and what happened in the past. I respectfully ask the Secretary of State to be brave, make a decision, and go ahead and do this swiftly, because the people who are missing out and suffering are the genuine victims and survivors, who were incredibly brave. They stood up and contributed to the inquiry. They told their stories, despite all the legacy of the decades of hurt from not being believed. We know, from all the evidence and from talking to people, that, for those individuals, telling their stories is incredibly painful, as it brings back everything they have been through. It is so hard for them to go into that institutional setting; despite all the things that the late Sir Anthony Hart did to make them feel comfortable, it must have been a challenging and difficult experience for them, and we must recognise that. After going through that—after their bravery—they have been left out there without the much-needed help and support that they require.

May I say, Secretary of State, that when we think about what happened, we see that these were young children? I listen to many, many of their stories. Many of them came from very challenging backgrounds. When they came into these institutions what they needed was

love, dignity, comfort and support, but instead, as we see when we read that report, they got harshness and pain. They were demeaned and demoralised, starved and beaten.

Who in the House could not feel a genuine empathy for and desire to help those victims and survivors? This House has the power to do that. It has broken the convention in respect of legislating on devolved matters. I respectfully say to the Secretary of State that this is an important issue on which we are all in agreement, so please be brave. Please bring forward the legislation—and do it swiftly, because victims are suffering.

6 pm

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): As we all know, the inquiry looked into the abuse of children in 22 homes and institutions between 1922 and 1995, but abuse happened in around 76 institutions: the inquiry touched on the tip of the iceberg in respect of the children affected.

I agree with the hon. Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly): the poorest of poor children and the most vulnerable children were put in these homes and had no voice to speak out when they faced abuse, sexual abuse, starvation and neglect. I serve on the Select Committee and have heard grown men in tears, recalling what happened to them as children and feeling voiceless and helpless once again. It was bad enough to be a child abandoned in a home with no one to look out for them and to have to face what they faced, but it is heartbreaking for them to reach adulthood and still be in a situation where no one seems to want to listen to what they have been through.

As I have said previously to the Secretary of State, many of the cases of abuse took place during a period of direct rule, when this place was responsible for those children. From an administration point of view, the Assembly should be responsible for a compensation scheme, but this place has a responsibility to look after those adults now and pay them compensation, which will in no way take away the pain they endured but will at least be recognition of what happened to them.

It is heartbreaking that Sir Anthony Hart, who led the inquiry—who was the only voice that many victims had for years—has not lived to see the victims get compensation. Tribute should be paid to the head of the Northern Ireland civil service, David Stirling, who has taken up the mantle, prepared the legislation, put it before the Secretary of State and asked the Secretary of State and his predecessor to bring it forward in this place so that people can get the compensation they deserve.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare): I will be deeply upset—I cannot emphasise enough how upset I will be—if the legislation is not in the Queen's Speech. It is just not good enough to say that it will be passed by the end of the year; it needs to be passed by the end of October. We in this place sat for one day to pass legislation on the renewable heat incentive and the Northern Ireland budget, and to pass the Executive formation Bill. If we can do those measures in a day, why cannot both Houses do this legislation in a day?

When the Executive formation Bill went through the other place in a day, an amendment to bring forward the legislation for institutional abuse victims was dropped.

I do not decry the importance of equal marriage or abortion—I do not want to get into those debates—but the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 allowed the introduction of legislation and gave that legislation a date, but that was not the case for historical institutional abuse. Why? I feel that, under the radar, historical institutional abuse was being used as a tool in the talks about getting the Executive back up and running, such that if other parties came back to the table legislation would be passed pretty quickly. It is outrageous if that was the case.

These victims should be our No. 1 priority—way ahead of the renewable heat incentive, budgets and Executive formation. These people have lived for 70 years with the abuse that they suffered at the hands of institutions. The legislation has cross-party support, both in this place and in Northern Ireland. It is our duty to make sure that legislation happens. Thirty victims have died already. Nearly every day another victim dies.

It is very much welcome that an interim advocate is now in place, but survivor groups have done much of the work on their own for years, without funding and administrative support. Many survivors have travelled to inquiries and had to pay their fares themselves. They have travelled a number of times to Select Committee hearings and paid their air fares. They have supported other victims. Some have never disclosed to family and friends the rape, abuse and torture that they experienced as children. Fellow survivors are the only support they have and we are providing no funds and no administration for people to carry on their essential work. A small amount of funding is provided by the Executive Office, but that runs out in March. Even if we pass the legislation tomorrow, it will take years to compensate all the victims. So far, only 500 victims have come forward as part of the inquiry; it is estimated that there are at least 2,500 victims, and that could be just the start of things. The only support they have is the victims groups. We need to support them properly. It is not fair to ask fellow survivors to be doing the heavy lifting when it comes to getting compensation for all those affected.

I have three asks of the Secretary of State. First, although the interim advocate is welcome, we need to fund the survivor groups properly and give them the support that they need. Secondly, we need a legislation date in the Queen's Speech and, even though it is mentioned in the Queen's Speech, we need legislation delivered by the end of October. There is no rhyme or reason why that cannot happen. If there is a general election in November or December, the legislation will fall. How much longer will these people have to wait? If we are serious and want to work together across party lines, we need the legislation to be delivered by the end of October. If we do not set a date, it will never happen.

Finally, we need to look at the support for all the victims. Many have not come forward, and many who do come forward will relive the horrific experiences that they went through as children. We cannot expect them just to apply to an administration fund and ask for some compensation, and then leave them with the consequences of having to disclose to friends and family what they have been through. We have let these victims down. Even if we act now, there is still a legacy. They will have to live with the incompetence of this place and of the Assembly. We have to take up the mantle. We are all that is blocking people getting their compensation. We need to take that responsibility seriously.

6.7 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Where are they, Madam Deputy Speaker? Why is the House empty? Where are they? Where is the choir of people who are normally so interested in Northern Ireland and who wish to introduce the most damaging legislation in the history of Northern Ireland? Where are they today? They are hardly at the Tory party conference. They tell us that they want the House back and sitting because they need to hold the Government to account. Where are they? Where are their probing questions about the protection of vulnerable lives? They are quick to be here when they want to destroy the unborn life, but they are absent today, when we want to ask questions and scrutinise the Government on the protection of innocent victims in institutional care in Northern Ireland. It is a disgrace that they are not here. Their absence speaks thousands of words to the people of Northern Ireland about how much they really care. Are they even really interested in abortion rights in Northern Ireland and the rights of woman in Northern Ireland? No, they are interested in one thing: pursuing their own agenda. They use this House and abuse this House to get those things done.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware that there has been a lot of discussion about the use of language and the tone that we are setting. I do hope that he will bear that in mind.

Ian Paisley: I will bear it in mind, Madam Deputy Speaker—I will take your ruling—but I think people are right to be angry. People are right to be angry on behalf of the unborn and on behalf of the innocent victims of institutional abuse, whose rights are brushed under the carpet every moment. When someone dares to speak up for them, they are told that they have to calm things down—“Don’t say things about the victims. Don’t upset people who have challenged the lives of innocent victims or the lives of the unborn.” Oh no, we cannot have anything rough said; it might upset their sensitivities. It might be awful for them. No, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is about time that people did speak up for the voiceless and for the abused—for those who see this place, which should be a champion of their rights, being silenced on their rights, because that is effectively what has happened.

I reiterate my challenge to the Secretary of State. He really needs to do more when it comes to the issues that have been brought to the attention of the House. Last week, on 26 September, 815 doctors, nurses, midwives and other health and social care workers felt so deeply concerned about what this House had done in relation to the people of Northern Ireland that they decided to write publicly about that abuse. They said:

“The concept of taking human life at any stage is inimical to us, and the concept of taking a human life in the womb especially so.” They went on to make demands of the Government here, saying:

“Healthcare in Northern Ireland is in such a parlous state, due to chronic underfunding, understaffing, and the lack of a sitting Government. Imposing abortion on our healthcare system risks destabilising our GP service, many of whom are contemplating retiring... It risks burdening our hospitals with unnecessary procedures, extra complications, divisions within departments and lengthening of waiting lists—all of which will likely have a negative effect on the population of Northern Ireland who rely on healthcare services from medical problems.”

That is the problem that is being impacted on Northern Ireland. That is the problem that the Secretary of State needs to address. If he really wants the Assembly back to deal with this issue before 20 October, I reiterate my call to him: call a meeting tomorrow morning of the Northern Ireland Assembly and see how many Members turn up. He will find that the only party that runs away will be Sinn Féin. The Secretary of State has that power in the Belfast agreement—I am not asking him to do anything outwith his powers. There are two people who can call a meeting of the Assembly, and he is one of them. I urge him to do that.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. There is a very specific subject of discussion here, which I am sure the hon. Gentleman will be returning to as quickly as possible—by which I mean now.

Ian Paisley: I understand that we are speaking about the Northern Ireland Executive formation and the reports flowing from that. The Secretary of State introduced his comments tonight by referring to the lack of an Assembly. The Chairman of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee emphasised that issue as well. I am trying to get the Assembly back, and I am outlining the way in which the Secretary of State could take active measures this evening by phoning the 90 Members of the Assembly and getting them back in the Assembly tomorrow morning. That could bring about the changes that the Secretary of State wants to see—that I want to see and that people in this place want to see—but I fear that that call will land on deaf ears. I hope that he decides to do that, and I hope that he takes up that chance.

I welcome what the Secretary of State said in his remarks. I believe that he is passionate and that he does care about the victims of institutional abuse. Indeed, I know, following on from the meetings that he had with them in August, that many of them meet regularly with Government Members, and they reported back to us the enthusiasm and the genuine concern that he has. I happen to think that it is important that we put that on the record, but it is also right and proper that he is pushed on a few areas. I ask him to give us a time, to give us a specific date and to tell us when this will happen. He should not let this slip any further. My hon. Friend the Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) made the point in her excellent speech that we cannot allow this slippage to continue. These people are dying. These victims need immediate help and there is nothing to stop the Secretary of State from providing that.

I wish to leave some very specific questions with the Secretary of State: who is ultimately going to pay the compensation? The hon. Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) made the crucial point that this abuse was carried out vastly during a period of direct rule. Therefore, the responsibility and the onus must fall on this place to come up with the compensation. The Northern Ireland budget could not cope with—probably—the extent of that payment.

Emma Little Pengelly: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way on that important point. It is undoubtedly the case, when one reads that report, that there is a direct rule implication—an implication for this place.

Does he agree that there is also a significant obligation on the institutions, including the Roman Catholic Church? They have contributed to compensation schemes in relation to these inquiries in all other jurisdictions as far as I am aware, so does he agree that the Secretary of State should engage in those early conversations with the institutions to ensure that that contribution is made?

Ian Paisley: I am more than happy with that. Indeed, I have spoken in this House in the past about that very point. One of the ways that this could be addressed expeditiously is by the institutions actually making amends—by way of payment, by way of apology and by way of an actual practical measure. I think that, without doubt, that is the case. There should be something that the Secretary of State can do to facilitate such a process. I know that there are ways that he can facilitate that, and I encourage him to take them up. There is a crucial point here. Ultimately, if the Government pay money in compensation, they may, later on, get that money back through the institutions. They should be pursuing those institutions for the abuse inflicted on those innocent victims.

Professor Patricia Lundy, who gave evidence to our Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on these issues, spelled out what she believed the costs could run to, and they are staggering. It is essential that the Government grapple with this issue immediately. There should be no surprises when they come to legislating. We do not want to have to delay legislation further, because we have now discovered what the costs are. The costs are mammoth. The costs will have to be dealt with.

May I also speak for some of the survivor groups? All of those who have given us evidence and spoken to us directly have said that they run their organisations on a shoestring. Clearly, they will have to keep up the momentum by informing their people, encouraging their people and being a shoulder for their people. Therefore, some sort of assistance in the interim period—until the legislation is actually enacted—would be very beneficial indeed. Finally, it would be brilliant if the Secretary of State published the Bill, put it out there and brought it into this place so that we had the opportunity to enact it without any further delay.

6.16 pm

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I will try to be as brief as possible so that other Members get the opportunity to speak in this debate.

I welcome the fact that we are debating this issue today, although we have grave reservations about the way in which what was to be a fairly narrow and innocuous Bill was hijacked by the Labour party. I know that Labour Members do not like Bills being called by the effect that they have—I am talking about their attitude to the Prime Minister when he refers to the surrender Bill. The anger that there is from these Benches is a good indication of that. If we were to give this Bill a name according to its effect, it would either be the prevention of the formation of the Executive in Northern Ireland Bill, or, as some people in Northern Ireland who have protested in the streets in recent weeks about the most controversial part of this Bill see it, the kill babies in Northern Ireland Bill. That is the kind of anger that the Bill has generated.

I wish to refer to a particular aspect of the motion that we are discussing tonight. My hon. Friend the Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) has given us very detailed background information to this Bill. I can remember, because I was a Member of the Executive at the time, when Martin McGuinness and Peter Robinson came to the Executive after having met the victims and were very passionate that the Executive had to take hold of this issue and drive it through. I was Finance Minister at the time. There were proper reservations within the Government, because we had seen inquiries in Northern Ireland that had gone on for years and that had benefited only lawyers who had run away with hundreds of millions of pounds in fees. The people whom the issue was meant to address found that they were not getting the answers or the outcome that they wanted, so there were reservations. It was agreed that the inquiry should be designed in such a way that it would not be long and protracted, that it would not give opportunities for lawyers to debate it, adjourn it and to rack up huge fees. By and large, as has been described by my hon. Friend, the project board, the inquiry's terms of reference and, indeed, the action of Lord Justice Hart ensured that that did not happen.

We all read the evidence given to the historical institutional abuse inquiry because the newspapers carried it almost daily—harrowing stories and feature articles about what had happened—but there is one memory that burns in my mind. I was walking out the back of Belfast City Hall one afternoon, when a man stopped me. I did not even know him. He was fairly down at heel and everything else, and he said to me, “I know you. You're in Stormont. I was a victim of abuse.” He then told me a story that would have brought tears to anybody's eyes. As a wee boy, without any family—or anyone—to turn to, he was put in a home where he was physically abused, sexually abused and mentally tortured.

The man told me, “Eventually, I came out of the home when I became a teenager but the legacy has lived with me ever since.” I do not know how old he was when he spoke to me, but he looked to be in his 50s. He said, “I have never been able to have proper relationships. I have had to live with all the flashbacks, the memories, the hurt, the anger and the frustration.” I think he was taken to that home as an orphan. As a society, we put people in that position; there was no proper supervision and no opportunities for people to be taken away from the dangerous situation they were put in. We therefore have an obligation to them, and of course there ought to be some recompense as they get older and have to live with the consequences of those experiences.

Two things stand out when I look at the report. The first is that it indicates that the Government have already started working on legislation, and there is a commitment that all the costs will be met by the Northern Ireland block grant. Now, I have to say that given the wealth of some of the institutions that allowed this abuse to go on, this cannot be allowed. Lord Justice Hart said that there should be a public apology, and so there should. There should be some kind of memorial to remind us what happened in those institutions and to ensure that, as a society, we do not allow it to happen again. But there should also be a responsibility on those who put young people and children through that kind of experience—a requirement that they also make a contribution to making good.

Emma Little Pengelly: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that in all the discussions at the time of the inquiry—when we looked at the inquiry in the Republic of Ireland and inquiries elsewhere, where the institutions made a significant contribution—it was the clear understanding of all parties that the institutions would be requested and required to give their contribution as well?

Sammy Wilson: My hon. Friend is quite right. Indeed, that was always the understanding. I note that the report says that research is being undertaken into how the issue has been handled elsewhere. I would like the Secretary of State not just to research, but to tell us what approaches have been made to the bodies at which the finger of blame was pointed for this abuse. Is it simply that there will be an academic study of what is to be done, or have approaches actually been made? If they have, what has the response been?

The report says that there will be a mediation mechanism to decide how much should be paid by the various institutions and that the parties will have to submit themselves to a final arbitration. All that is fine—of course we have to have a mechanism—but there is no indication that civil servants in Northern Ireland are making approaches to the institutions, knowing what the view of the Executive was on this matter; and it is important that that is done.

I have one final point, which has been made time and again today. I do not believe that the Northern Ireland Assembly will be up and running on 21 October because Sinn Féin, which wanted some of the changes that have been put through this House and that have a date attached to them, will not want the institutions back up and running for all that to be taken back into the Assembly and for the debate to be reopened. That was a fatal flaw in the Labour party's decision to interfere with a devolved issue and to dabble in the future of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Labour Members were warned about this, but they ignored that warning, and now they lament that we cannot get this issue dealt with as far as the victims are concerned.

The Assembly will not be up and running because, for those who wanted the changes to abortion and gay marriage legislation, there is every incentive not to have it up and running. They are showing no indication that they will even engage in talks. It is important that the Secretary of State recognises that and ignores any evidence he might be getting from the Northern Ireland Office about what might annoy Sinn Féin. He should be bringing to this House legislation that compensates and gives some redress—as much as money ever can give redress—to that individual who met me in a street in Belfast and told me how, as a boy, he was abandoned, he was not listened to and he was hurt, and how he still carries that hurt today.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. There is pressure on time, and I want the Secretary of State to be able to speak for a couple of minutes towards the end of the debate because certain points have been raised. May I say once again, though, that the use of inflammatory language is absolutely unacceptable? We have had a lot of discussion about this over the past few days, so I urge Members to be very careful about the language they use. I hope that the remaining speakers will stick to that.

6.27 pm

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): I want to speak about this report for several reasons, so I thank you for calling me, Madam Deputy Speaker. The main reason I am here is that I believe in the Union of our United Kingdom. I am fiercely proud of Wales and, of course, Newport West, but I also respect England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In the absence of a devolved Administration in Northern Ireland, I think it is important for all of us in this House to speak up loudly and proudly for all the good people of Northern Ireland.

The lack of a devolved Government in Northern Ireland worries me. It also worries the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) and many other colleagues on the Opposition Benches. Thanks to the strong and active Labour Government in Wales, I see the transformative impact that a devolved Government have on my constituents every day, and it is important that the people of Northern Ireland can share in the same.

The report gives a round-up of progress, but it is very light on next steps. I want to see a timeframe for the legislation, as do the people affected in Northern Ireland—and we all want to see it now. It is frankly disgraceful for the Government to play games with the people of Northern Ireland, and to try to prorogue this Parliament rather than get to grips with such long-standing and important issues. We have so much of the people's business to do, as was evidenced by the urgent question of the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) this afternoon. I would like the Minister to confirm that the legislation in relation to historical institutional abuse will feature in the Queen's Speech; we need to know if it is a priority for this Government. I will leave my remarks there, but I want to place on record how disappointed I am sure that Northern Ireland-related business appears to be an afterthought to this Government. They need to change their approach, and do it fast.

6.28 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): This issue is a difficult one to speak about. It is heartbreaking when we hear of the scale of abuse and the ramifications of that abuse for entire families throughout the Province. However, it is clear that, no matter how difficult it is, we must do more than just speak; we must act. That has been said unanimously in this House today, and the Secretary of State and the Government have to respond accordingly. One constituent put it to me like this:

"You may already be aware of this high-profile issue, which has come to symbolise the pain afflicted onto some of the most vulnerable people in Northern Ireland in the absence of government."

The Secretary of State referred to two places—Kincora and Nazareth House. I would add De La Salle in Kircubbin, where physical and sexual abuse took place of young boys in that establishment. Some of the people who have come to speak to us in the groups and have come to my office to meet me have also addressed the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. We have heard at length their deputations and submissions to that as well.

This is yet another group of people who have been affected by the intransigence of Sinn Féin and its refusal to do its job and take its place—another group of people who have been further traumatised by the stalemate

that has taken place. Can I say very respectfully to the Secretary of State that he cannot ignore the fact that Sinn Féin is the obstacle in this process? This is partly why I have been calling for direct rule in this place: it is time to consider that honestly.

The Bill was hijacked by hon. Members—with respect, again—on the Opposition Benches to introduce legislation that was not discussed, vetted or done by the proper process. Vulnerable groups like this have no showing in the priorities of the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), but it is one of my priorities, and that is why I am speaking on this issue today. I speak for the unborn: those who are alive in the womb. One hundred thousand people live today because of the current abortion legislation we have in Northern Ireland, yet that would change—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Can I just bring the hon. Gentleman back to the issue of historical abuse? I am sure he is returning to it now.

Jim Shannon: I think it is important that we have that issue on record, as that has been abuse as well.

By way of quick summary, the independent inquiry by Sir Anthony Hart that was commissioned by the Northern Ireland Executive in 2013 reported on a series of recommendations in January 2017 that sought to deliver justice to victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse. The delivery of the findings of that inquiry coincided with the collapse of the Assembly and Executive. In the two and a half years since that point, victims and survivors have been left without any of the redress and justice that was promised to them. That is really obvious to every one of us who is aware of the situation. There was a crystal clear need to introduce the legislation required to establish a redress board and commissioner to advocate on behalf of victims and survivors. As my constituent said to me:

“It has not been easy and it has retraumatised many victims”—including himself—

“some of whom have been extraordinarily brave in sharing their story in the media with the public to try and convince those in power to act.”

What we are seeking today is simple. I thank the Secretary of State for what he has done so far, and his team as well. We may have been a bit harsh with him in some of the things we have said today, but he should not take it personally. He has done exceptional work. However, we now need to see the delivery of what he has stated, and then everyone on these Benches, and indeed across the whole House, will rise up and say, “Well done.” In the midst of all the Brexit chaos, we must do right by these people. In the absence of local institutions, the head of the civil service in Northern Ireland has presided over talks on this issue that have seen consensus reached on the contents of the legislation, which has the support of victims and survivors. This is not a political issue. I speak, and we all speak, on behalf of every victim, whether their vote is cast for my party—the DUP—or not, because the people who come to see us are from all political persuasions and all religious persuasions. Today in the press the Churches were united on what they will want to see and on the legislative change on the 21st that they are worried about.

We should know right from wrong. This is our opportunity to set right what has been wrong, and to do so with no further delay—30 of those who came forward

to tell their story at the inquiry have died since the Assembly collapsed in 2017. Now is the time to act. I urge every right-minded person to support these victims and to use this opportunity simply to do right by them. The least that we can do is do right for the victims, and the onus is on the Government to do just that.

6.33 pm

Julian Smith: I thank the House for what has been an exceptionally moving debate. I pay specific tribute to the survivors’ groups—SAVIA, Survivors (North West), the Rosetta Trust and Survivors Together, among others—who will be watching tonight and I think will be clear about the priorities of this House and the people who have attended this debate to move things forward. I have heard the desire to get this Bill introduced at the earliest opportunity. As I have mentioned, I really hope and expect that we can get it into the Queen’s Speech. I really want to get it in as soon as possible. I heard the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) and others about the need for speed in getting this moving as quickly as possible, and I want to ensure that we do that.

The hon. Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) spoke passionately about the role of officials—David Sterling and the civil service—in getting us this far. I again pay tribute to them. The hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) and the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) spoke about getting money from the institutions that have played their part in these horrendous crimes. I would say, go after them and get the money—let us go after them hard.

The hon. Member for North Antrim, among others, spoke about the need to get the Assembly up and running, and expressed his concerns about that. We all have to do everything we can to get things up and running in the coming days and weeks. That is important for the issue of abortion, which I believe is best dealt with by the Executive in Northern Ireland for the people of Northern Ireland, but it is also in the best interests of all citizens across Northern Ireland to get decisions done and political decisions made.

Lady Hermon: Will the Secretary of State reply to one specific question? For the victims of historical institutional abuse, will he give a commitment—a clear guarantee—that the legislation to compensate them for the dreadful abuse that they suffered as children in Northern Ireland will be on the statute book before 31 October? It is a straight question and I would like a straight answer.

Julian Smith: I think I have given an indication on timing. I am no longer a business manager. I am concerned, in this whole debate, to ensure that I do not make commitments that I cannot deliver. The commitment I have made is that I have written to business managers. I hope that this Bill will be in the Queen’s Speech. I do not want to go further than that, but I will continue to do everything I can to push my colleagues to get it introduced in the coming days and weeks.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of and approves the Report pursuant to Section 3(14) of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019—Historical Institutional Abuse, which was laid before this House on Wednesday 4 September.

Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 Section 6

6.37 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr Nick Hurd): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of and approves the Report pursuant to Section 3(13) of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019—Victims' Payments, which was laid before this House on Wednesday 4 September.

We do not seem to agree on much in Parliament these days but, on the subject of this specific debate, I hope and believe that there is enough common ground to move forward on what we should see as a moral imperative to turn words into action, and to turn the idea of a victims payment or pension into a reality that does something powerful in acknowledging the unacceptable harm done to those seriously injured in the troubles and the deep trauma that many still live with, and makes a meaningful difference to the dignity and quality of life of those severely injured through no fault of their own.

Those last six words are important, because it is clear to me from the debate in both Houses of Parliament that consensus in this Parliament exists only if the guiding principle of our work is that this payment is not designed as a pension for terrorists and those injured by their own actions.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): The important words, as the Minister says, are, "Those who have been injured through no fault of their own." I have noticed a discrepancy between the explanatory notes to the Bill and the report that has been presented. The explanatory notes state that that compensation will be paid where injury sustained is through no fault of the individual and whether or not the individual has been convicted of an offence. When it comes to the report, the only exclusion is where the individual has not been convicted of an offence. That is important because with some it is their own fault but they have never been convicted. Can he give us an assurance that anyone who has been engaged in terrorist activity, whether they have been convicted or not, will still be regarded, in any injury, whether mental or physical, as being at fault?

Mr Hurd: I understand the point that the right hon. Gentleman is making. I can assure him that, as we work towards the regulations and consult on their detail, the guiding principle—fundamental to the Government, and which we believe is the basis of consensus on which to proceed—is that we see this as a pension that is not designed for terrorists or those injured at their own hand. We will have to work through the detail of how it works and the burden of proof in those situations, but I am clear—as I am sure he is, because I have heard him speak passionately on this subject before—that I do not believe there is consensus in this place to move forward without that guiding principle. I do not think that this Parliament, under any Government, would seriously propose making payments to terrorists or those injured by their own actions. That principle needs to guide us as we get into the detail.

We are clear that what we are considering is a payment in recognition of the suffering of those severely injured through no fault of their own. The victims' pension is the right thing to do, and I genuinely congratulate those, such as the WAVE Trauma Centre, who have

made the case with such tenacity and resilience over the years. Like many Ministers and shadow Ministers before me—Conservative and Labour—I have listened to and been deeply moved by the stories of those whose lives have been profoundly affected by the terrorist atrocities of the troubles. When we read the stories of people such as Paul Gallagher, Jennifer McNern or Peter Heathwood, it is frankly impossible not to be moved by their courage and resilience. The reality is that there has been widespread criticism of compensation schemes in the past. Many of those who would benefit from the payments feel that they were not treated well or supported in the right way, and it is surely time that we do more to support those individuals.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): On 10 December 1971, Daniel McCormick, a part-time soldier in the Ulster Defence Regiment, was murdered. His wife and three children got compensation of £3,500. Will the Minister give a commitment that that matter will be sorted for that family?

Mr Hurd: I can give the hon. Gentleman a commitment that the Government absolutely accept the case for victims' pensions and payments and recognise, as I just said, that we need to do more to support individuals and families affected in that way. We are determined, as I hope I will persuade him, to move forward, not just through the sense of moral obligation that we feel, but because this Parliament now obliges us to, as a result of legislation passed in the summer.

Jim Shannon: I thank the Minister for what he said, but what I am trying to get to is that £3,500 was paltry compensation for a wife and three children. What we need for that family, going back as far as December '71, is compensation that equates to what would be given today to people who are innocent victims. This was a Roman Catholic part-time soldier who had resigned from the UDR and was murdered because he served his country.

Mr Hurd: We are talking about innocent victims and a victims' payment scheme which is not about restitution or compensation; it is about recognition and acknowledgment and doing more to improve the dignity and quality of life of those who are eligible. As I have acknowledged, there have been criticisms in the past about the effectiveness, fairness and efficiency of compensation processes, and it is, in part, in acceptance of that that the Government, with cross-party support, are extremely committed to moving forward on this matter.

As the House would expect me to point out, this is a devolved matter. It will, of course, always be our strong preference that the establishment of a payment scheme to acknowledge the harm done to victims of the troubles in Northern Ireland be led by Northern Ireland political parties within an established Executive. That is the first priority for us. The Secretary of State has left the Chamber, but I commend him for his active support of that process and hear the observations of the elected representatives of the DUP on that point. One thousand days on, we recognise that, not least due to the advancing years of many of those who could benefit from a victims' pensions scheme, we must draw this matter to an acceptable resolution without delay.

The previous Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley), who was in her place but has left, asked the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Victims and Survivors to provide comprehensive advice on how a scheme of payments to those seriously injured in the troubles could be progressed, so that the issue was not indefinitely stalled in the absence of an Executive. That advice has been received. The UK Government are now committed, under the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019, if there is no Executive in place by 21 October—I have heard some pessimism on that front—to bringing forward regulations before the end of January, to ensure that a victims’ payment scheme can come into force in Northern Ireland by the end of May next year.

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): I thank the Minister for giving way on that point. Although the amendment puts an obligation on the Government to bring forward regulations, I suspect that such a change in the law and such a scheme would benefit hugely from being based in primary legislation, as opposed to regulation. What consideration have the Government given to discharging the duty to make payments to victims by bringing forward primary legislation, rather than regulation?

Mr Hurd: We are 100% genuine in our commitment to deliver on the moral and legal obligation to come forward with those regulations. Our intention at the moment is to come forward with regulations but to do so through a process that genuinely engages stakeholders and gives people the opportunity to express their view on the fairness and practicality of what is being proposed. But I hear what the hon. Lady says, and I am more than happy to follow up with her personally if she is interested.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): I echo the call for this to be done through primary legislation. I think the nervousness on both sides of the House is about the definition of a victim, because there are victims out there who will refuse to take any compensation if they feel that terrorists will benefit from this. Given the lack of clarity from the Victims’ Commissioner, it is incumbent on us to ensure that the definition is watertight in legislation.

Mr Hurd: I understand the point made by both the hon. Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) and my hon. Friend, and I have a feeling—new as I am to this post—about the underlying sensitivity of this issue. I will come on to the definition of victims, which I know is an extremely controversial issue but one which we see as being distinct from eligibility for payments under the scheme that we are working through.

As set out in the update report, to meet this commitment we have been undertaking work to develop the detailed arrangements for the scheme, with factual input from the Northern Ireland civil service. As the House would expect, that has included consideration of other relevant schemes, detailed design work, discussion with certain key stakeholders and making plans for future engagement, and preparing detailed advice on the proposed architecture of the scheme: its purpose and principles, levels and methods of payments, eligibility—critically—and other technical considerations, the assessment process and wider support arrangements for scheme applicants.

During the passage of the 2019 Act through Parliament, Ministers were clear that “through no fault of their own” would be the guiding principle as we develop the regulations required by the Act. The current Administration and I share that conviction, and I have heard the Prime Minister express it from the Dispatch Box. We must ensure that the scheme gets to those who need it most, but not at the expense of paying a pension to terrorists injured by their own hand. We are clear that any legal duty imposed by the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 relates to the appointment and functions of the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland, and not to wider issues such as the provision of a victims’ payment scheme. It is our view that any change to that definition—a hotly contested matter—is a matter for the Northern Ireland parties, and we believe that it is a separate discussion from those about regular payments to victims. We do intend to deliver on our obligations within the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019, and we do propose to engage widely on the details of this scheme ahead of the date by which the regulations must be made. The views received on our proposed approach will help to inform final decisions on how that scheme will be implemented.

In conclusion, more than 20 years on from the Belfast/Good Friday agreement, while Northern Ireland is clearly a different place in many positive ways, the legacy of the troubles—as many in this House know much better than I ever will—casts a long shadow over many aspects of life in the here and now. We must never forget that over 40,000 people were injured during a 30-year period, and those still living carry a significant burden. We know in this House that it is difficult to move on and secure a better future for Northern Ireland without dealing with the past. The Stormont House agreement provides a framework for doing so, with much detail that needs to be worked through and discussed further, but surely we should not let those discussions hold up or divert a pragmatic determination across all parties to deliver, at pace, a fair victims’ payments scheme that those most seriously affected by the troubles need and deserve, and this Government are committed to work with all parties and stakeholders to deliver just that.

6.51 pm

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): Before I respond to the Minister, may I refer to some earlier remarks from the hon. Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) in relation to Justice Hart? I would like to associate myself and all my colleagues with the comments she made. I was interested to hear that she learned much when she appeared before him. I trust it was professionally, rather than as a respondent, but in any case we certainly support her in those comments.

Before turning to the Minister, may I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose), his predecessor? He was a good, decent and committed Minister, who brought a great deal of energy and commitment to his role. We miss him, and we understand that he has gone to better places—who knows?—but I hope that the House can record its appreciation.

May I particularly welcome my parliamentary neighbour, the right hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd)? Many neighbours are divided politically; we are in fact divided by the A40 Western Avenue, and

[Stephen Pound]

no more than that. I do welcome him, and also note that he is a man of such extraordinary qualities that he is not just the Minister for London, but the Minister of State for Northern Ireland. Any man who can actually combine the briefs of London and Londonderry has to be a person of extraordinary qualities, and I have absolutely no doubt that the right hon. Gentleman is that person. I was, however, slightly perturbed to note that as soon as he was appointed, he gave it a great deal of thought and announced that he would not be standing at the next election. I trust that that is completely coincidental.

May I thank the Minister for the work he has already done? His visit to the South East Fermanagh Foundation was widely appreciated. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) has visited it. I think the fact that the Minister is actually taking the time and trouble to visit some of the victims groups is very important.

Throughout everything we have discussed this afternoon, the leitmotif has consisted of two strands. One, quite clearly and obviously, is the absence of the Assembly and Executive, but the other is the sheer, almost unimaginable horror of the situation and circumstances of the innocent victims. The Minister has visited these people; most Augusts, I visit the Omagh Support & Self Help Group, and I pay tribute to Michael Gallagher, his daughter and all those people. It is almost impossible for us to imagine what it must have been like that August day when a bomb just ripped through that city—that peaceful market town—and the repercussions are being felt to this day.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): On the point the hon. Gentleman made a moment ago about the importance of the Minister and others visiting the border and speaking to people who have first-hand knowledge and experience of some of the violence down through the years, does he agree with me that it is absolutely essential that every Minister and every Member of this House who does not have first-hand experience in Northern Ireland should avail themselves of that and that it would make them much better prepared to deal with the matters before us tonight?

Stephen Pound: I do. I think it is quite important to place on record the fact that when I have visited all of the constituencies in Northern Ireland, I have always been welcomed by the Members of Parliament for those areas, whether or not they take their seats here, and have had the opportunity to visit particularly the border areas and the areas that, in all honesty, very few of us on this side of the water can fully understand unless we have actually seen them—unless we have actually walked those roads and those boreens, and seen those fields—and, more importantly, looked into the eyes of the families, because those families will carry that agony, pain and sense of loss with them to their dying day. It is important and it is crucial that we actually do that, and I entirely agree, not for the first time, with the hon. Gentleman.

The problem we have here is one of delay. As we know, the Stormont House agreement was in 2014, which was when the process started. If hon. Members remember, the Stormont House implementation group

was established by all five of the major parties back in 2015, but the work has not been completed. I think it was only this year that the previous Secretary of State for Northern Ireland provided an updated and comprehensive advice note on how the matter can be proceeded with. I really think that we have waited long enough, and we simply must—must—move forward on this.

My questions will therefore be fairly prosaic, relating to the timetable and where we stand at the present time, and I will also have a specific question in a moment. We need to know the current situation on the initial scoping of how best to deliver the regulations—it is as simple as that: we have got to do it—while reviewing the international models where relevant, and perhaps developing engagement and communication plans, ready for implementation when the duty comes into effect. I am sure officials of the Northern Ireland Office have done this, but I think we should hear that this process is in work. We need to know the timeframe—we have to know the timeframe—and, unfortunately, we also need to know how Prorogation will affect this work, as I am sure it will. An update on the initial scoping of how best to deliver the regulations would be extremely helpful.

I would also like to ask a question about overseas nationals. As we know, the Omagh bomb killed two people who were Spanish nationals. A number of overseas nationals have been impacted by the troubles. What is the situation regarding overseas citizens when it comes to payment or pensions—presumably payment, rather than pensions?

Finally, as I appreciate that we have much business to go through, may I welcome the reappointment of Victims' Commissioner Judith Thompson? I had the pleasure of meeting Commissioner Thompson in Northern Ireland, and she is a woman of great integrity, great passion and great commitment. I think the House should place on record our appreciation of the work she has done to date and our anticipation of the work she will do in the future. I offer my congratulations to the Government on reappointing her.

In conclusion, there can be few more pressing, important, emotional and also painful issues than those we have discussed this afternoon, not just under section 7 of the Act but under section 6. We have a duty—a bounden duty, a duty of honour—to those people who have suffered, as the Minister so rightly says, through no fault of their own. I think the hon. Member for Belfast South once said, “We speak for the victims, not for the victim-makers”. That is a very powerful statement, and it must inform all our decisions. Above all, we must think of humanity, justice and some form of compensation. The money will never, ever be enough, but let us show by our words, and most of all by our actions from now on, that we will never, ever forget and fail to support those innocent victims of the troubles. I entirely support the points that were made, and I agree with the Minister when he says that this is not an issue for us to divide on. This, above all, is an issue for us to unite on in the names of the victims.

6.58 pm

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): I will make three very quick points, if I may. First, I underscore the point made, not least by my hon. Friend the Member for

Lewes (Maria Caulfield), that this issue is much better dealt with by legislation, not by regulation. It is absolutely crucial that there is proper debate on and scrutiny of the terminology to ensure that all quarters of the House are happy.

Secondly, the definition of a victim is clearly imperative, and no terrorist should benefit. That would undermine entirely the credibility of the scheme, and doubtless would put off an awful lot of people from applying to it, so distasteful would they find it to be associated in drawing something from a fund from which those not entitled to it, at least in a moral sense, will also seek to draw.

My third and final point is that we always think of victims in the narrow definition of those who live in Northern Ireland itself. It is a point always made to me by the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon): some of the victims of the troubles live on the mainland and we should never forget them in our deliberations. While events were more sporadic and dispelled than the troubles in Northern Ireland, their suffering is none the less serious, and we would dishonour them if we did not include them in our thinking.

7 pm

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I say that with some trepidation because I may have called you Madam Deputy Secretary on the last occasion and now it is constantly in my head whenever I see you in the Chair.

As I did in the previous debate, I welcome the fact that we are now debating this issue in the House of Commons. On the last occasion, I indicated my concern about the lack of debate on these very important matters. I am particularly concerned today because of the confirmation of the Government position that many policy issues arising from this important and detailed measure may be dealt with by regulation. I want to add my strong support to other Members who have said that this issue would be much more appropriately addressed by primary legislation for a range of reasons.

The motion is technical, but the report does not contain a significant amount of detail about what will be done. What is referenced is the basic amount that we would expect to be done in terms of consultation with the stakeholder group—the project group being put together to bring this forward. I shall touch on the context for the motion and then some of the details of the proposal.

First, I have mentioned in the House before that I believe the measure of any process is how it treats our most vulnerable. The measure and test of the peace process in Northern Ireland should always have been how we treated our victims and survivors. It was the innocent victims and survivors of the many decades of the troubles who suffered the most in their loss and pain. They are also suffering today in 2019.

As I said in my maiden speech, I am always conscious when I stand in the Chamber that if I look to my left I can see the coat of arms of Rev. Robert Bradford and others who lost their lives to terrorism. Rev. Robert Bradford was the Member of Parliament for South Belfast. He served the constituency with honour and dedication, and he was cut down for purely sectarian reasons—because he was a Unionist politician. He was

cut down while conducting a constituency surgery in a community hall in Finaghy. The caretaker was also killed. It was an appalling attack by the Irish Republican Army, not just on Rev. Robert Bradford, with the legacy of pain and loss for his family, but on democracy through the killing of a sitting Member of Parliament.

My challenge to this Chamber—albeit a relatively empty one tonight—is how many Members of Parliament remember what happened to Rev. Robert Bradford, or do they think that it is an inconvenient truth? I never walk through the doors without looking over and remembering the service that he gave and the life that he lost for his constituents. Frankly speaking, there is a party in Northern Ireland today that has never issued any statement of remorse, regret or condemnation for his murder. In the last few weeks, we have talked about the hate, bile and abuse that can happen in this Chamber, but we must always remember that that has been the case for some considerable time. Most of all, we must remember the consequences of such hate.

From speaking to many thousands of the victims and survivors of Northern Ireland over the years, I know—as do my colleagues—the pain and anguish that they continue to go through. I pay tribute to the WAVE Injured Group in particular, and to the many victims and survivors who have campaigned for many years on the proposal for a special pension. That proposal came about because many of the severely injured victims and survivors are now reaching pensionable and retirement age, but many of them do not have an employment-related pension because of the scale of their injuries in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The reality of the world at the time was that workplaces were different from today and it was difficult for people with severe disabilities to maintain and retain their employment. As they reach retirement, they therefore have to rely on the state pension, the disability living allowance or some small amounts periodically from the Victims and Survivors Service. The vast majority of those people are in that position through no fault of their own. They wanted to work, and they had had jobs. Some of them were young soldiers, in the Royal Ulster Constabulary or in the Ulster Defence Regiment. Many of them were just innocent victims going about their business, having coffee in a coffee shop or walking down the street. Some were severely injured in attacks targeting someone else; they were innocent bystanders and their lives were changed dramatically.

Those victims and survivors have told me that they suffer incredible and increasing pain, with new challenges as they age, as well as financial hardship. It is a travesty that despite a campaign over many years they have not yet received special support from this proposal being put into action.

Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP): Mention has been made of those with physical injuries that we can actually see, but many have suffered mental trauma and have not been able to work since. I ask that we include the mental trauma that many people have experienced alongside those with physical injuries when trying to address the issue in the future.

Emma Little Pengelly: I thank my hon. Friend for that valuable contribution. One of the interesting aspects of the proposal is that it has been so long in gestation

[*Emma Little Pengelly*]

that the debate, knowledge and evidence of the impact of the psychological injuries has grown. The original proposal was for the severely physically disabled victims, but I welcome the recommendation in the commissioner's report that both physical and psychological injuries should be covered. The key point is the impact on the ability to gain employment and thus an employment-related pension.

On the Victims Commissioners' advice, I was vocal at the time about my deep disappointment that it did not reflect the strong feeling among many thousands of people across Northern Ireland that the pension should not go to victim-makers. Throughout the many years I have been involved in this project it has been clear that that was a significant view among the victims and in the wider population. I have spoken with the commissioner on many occasions and I have huge respect for her. She does many things well, and I know that many victims have respect for her. I met her monthly or bi-monthly over several years and repeatedly raised with her my concerns that if the victims pension included the victim-makers, many people would be deeply hurt by that. What I said was that surely we have a responsibility first of all to do no harm. In this case, the issue is to do no further harm and cause no further hurt to the very genuine victims who are desperately in need of this proposal. I acknowledge that this tricky issue has held up discussions for some time, but the biggest impact on progress has been the lack of a Northern Ireland Assembly. I strongly welcome the Government's commitment to ensure that this pension does not go to those who were victim-makers.

The Commissioner for Victims and Survivors has defended her report and said that she is caught by and operates under the definition of the 2006 order, but I find it unacceptable and I was deeply disappointed that the report made no reference to the existence of those other views. If I were a Minister or the Secretary of State and I was asking for this advice, I would want the advice to be clear: "There are these views on this matter, but also be aware there are that a significant number of other views, and if you progress down this recommended path hurt will be caused, victims will come out and say that they will not receive it, and that they are deeply upset by it." That exists as a view and it should have been reflected in the commissioner's report.

I find the fact that that was missing from the commissioner's report deeply disappointing. I genuinely feel that it has led to her losing the confidence of a huge number of victims across Northern Ireland and that her position is unsustainable. That is the position that I have outlined to the Secretary of State, and I was therefore disappointed to see that the commissioner's term was extended. It is key that any commissioner should have the support and confidence of the people she is supposed to speak about, and in this case what has happened has led to her losing that.

I want to move on to the specifics of the proposal in the report, which is the special pension for victims and survivors, and to touch on a number of very technical issues. As I mentioned, I am concerned about the proposal to introduce this through regulations because there were a number of aspects that need to be debated and aired for potential amendment. The proposal from the

Victims Commissioner deals with the method by which people will be assessed, and she has asked very strongly that this is done in a way that is victim-centred. I asked the Minister and the Secretary of State to look carefully at the Victims and Survivors Service process. I was involved in the setting up of that new institution, and there was a lot of genuine intent about some of the mechanisms to assess the level of need of the victims and survivors, but within a very short period of time it became absolutely clear that victims and survivors were being re-traumatised or troubled by the process of questioning and assessment. They felt that this was a test that they either failed or succeeded at.

In due course, we have to change that process, so I ask the Secretary of State and the Minister to look very carefully at it and to ensure that however people submit their applications and however the assessment is done, it takes account of the types of evidence and documentation already in the system—perhaps with the Victims and Survivors Service—to avoid victims and survivors having to go through the process again. It should be a victim-centred, sympathetic and empathetic environment, not a questioning environment or one in which people feel they are in the witness box giving evidence.

The Minister and the Secretary of State should also ensure that it is done swiftly. One of the big challenges with the Victims and Survivors Service was that the assessments take time, and dealing with hundreds or thousands of applications could risk people waiting six or 12 months before getting their assessment. Perhaps the Secretary of State or the Minister could put their mind to how that can be done in a way that ensures victims and survivors can get financial help quickly while they are going through the process and waiting for it to end.

The Minister referred to the fact that we have had 1,000 days without devolution, and that to me is an absolute travesty. It comes back to the point that I raised in the earlier debate: this House has broken the precedent that it does not legislate on devolved matters. This House has legislated on devolved matters. Victims and survivors of the troubles—and the survivors of historical institutional abuse, those who are sitting on waiting lists, those who are dying on waiting lists, people who are waiting for their child to get an autism assessment, and people who are in desperate need of public services—ask me why those issues were picked for this House to decide to legislate on, despite the convention. Why pick those issues on which to break precedent and the convention of this House by legislating on them, while in this case the victims and survivors are suffering pain every hour of every day, and they have done so since they got their injuries 20 or 30 years ago?

These are victims in pain saying, "Why do we have to wait? Why are we being told, 'No, no, this House doesn't deal with that'?" This House can only do that by regulation. This House does not legislate on that." This House has legislated. It has legislated on cases that are considerably less urgent, where people are not in pain, where people are not in real financial need. As I said about the historical institutional abuse inquiry, I urge the Minister and the Secretary of State to take swift action. This House and its legislative timetable, whatever is announced in the Queen's Speech, could all fall. Who knows what will happen in the next few months? But this is the important point: the Minister can do this. He

can introduce this provision as a piece of legislation. He can get the time to do that and he can do it very quickly. The message needs to go out to people in Northern Ireland—the victims and survivors who are suffering—that this is not a case of can't; it is a case of won't. I ask the Minister to make a promise to this House and those victims and survivors that he will decide to no longer go with “won't” but to move to “I will”. I ask that he introduce it as quickly as possible to ensure that those victims get a special pension by and before 31 October, because he can do that.

Maria Caulfield: May I echo the hon. Lady's point? I think there is a nervousness in the Government caused by a fear that if this place legislates it is offending the nationalist community, but members of the nationalist community were victims of institutional abuse or victims of terrorism and they all want compensation and need pensions and to have justice for what they have suffered. We need to be bold and brave about this. We will do no favours for the nationalist community by not legislating on either historical institutional abuse or victims compensation.

Emma Little Pengelly: I thank the hon. Lady for that very valuable contribution and I absolutely agree. This is so difficult to explain to victims and survivors. I know that the Minister will have found himself in this position as well—it is so difficult to explain to people a point of constitutional theory or purity. Quite frankly, given what has happened in this place over the course of the past few weeks and months, people have no time for that. What people want is action and what victims and survivors need is help to support them in their pain. They need financial security as they get into their older age and they need the Government to act. They can act, and I am asking the Government today to please commit to doing so as quickly as possible.

7.18 pm

Mr Hurd: I am grateful for the opportunity to respond to this very interesting debate, and I thank my friend and parliamentary neighbour, the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound), for a typically generous welcome and a generous tribute to my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose). I know my hon. Friend will appreciate that, and it is typical of the hon. Gentleman to take the time to express his appreciation of my hon. Friend's work.

The hon. Member for Ealing North pressed me on the scope and timing of this, and what I will say is that the work on the architecture is relatively advanced. The debate has also thrown up some extremely complex issues that need to be worked through, not least in an environment where almost anything we do will be subject to quite robust challenge. He will appreciate the need to sweat things through.

The hon. Member for South Antrim (Paul Girvan) pressed me about the scope—physical, psychological and geographical. That work is relatively well advanced, and he will be aware that we have a backstop—if I am allowed to use that word—in the end of January deadline for producing regulation. That focuses minds in the system, as he will appreciate.

One of the most important questions to arise from the debate is that of legislation versus regulation. A powerful coalition has formed, comprising the Chair of

the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, the hon. Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) and my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield). I respect their view. A balance needs to be struck between recognising the need to engage, discuss, debate and build trust in whatever is proposed and the need to get on with things, but given the messages registered in the debate, I undertake to discuss that properly with the Secretary of State.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Belfast South on her truly interesting speech. I thank her for reminding us of the murder of Reverend Robert Bradford and all it represented in terms of affront to our democracy. I thank her also for reminding the House of the genesis of this long-standing campaign and the reality—the uncomfortable truth, as she described it—that we are talking about a period in which attitudes to disability were completely different from attitudes now. Attitudes to disability in the world of work and access to pensions were completely different then, and it is absolutely right that we respond to that change.

I wholly appreciate the hon. Lady's point about the need for a victim-centred approach. One of the things that has struck me most during my engagement with victims—something I find unacceptable and uncomfortable—is how forgotten they feel and how disrespected for all this time. It is incumbent on us to do something about that.

Lady Hermon: (North Down) (Ind): I have listened carefully to the debate. There is one issue that the Minister has not touched on. The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound), referred in fulsome terms to the Northern Ireland Victims Commissioner and paid her a very warm tribute. The hon. Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) was quite different; she was highly critical of the commissioner. I think that the Northern Ireland Office cannot remain silent on this issue. The Minister has the opportunity to state on the record that he and his colleagues in the Northern Ireland Office have full confidence in the Victims Commissioner. They have renewed her appointment for a year, so will the Minister do that?

Mr Hurd: I did not feel it needed to be said, because actions speak louder than words. The commissioner has been confirmed for another period of 12 months. I think the Secretary of State's instinct is to ensure some continuity while making it clear that future decisions must be for the devolved institutions.

Emma Little Pengelly: Will the Minister give way?

Sammy Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hurd: I give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

Sammy Wilson: Does the Minister accept that this is not a question of whether he, the Secretary of State or indeed Members of this House have confidence in the Victims Commissioner? The commissioner, as my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) pointed out, is there to represent victims. If she does not have the confidence of victims, how can she possibly fulfil her role?

Mr Hurd: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's point, and it is possible that the hon. Member for Belfast South intended to make a similar one, but I was

[Mr Hurd]

pressed to clarify the Department's position, which I have done. Let me be candid: in my meetings with victims groups, I have been struck by the strength of the expressions of precisely that lack of trust and confidence. When I meet the commissioner, I will press her to respond to those concerns, because if I were in that position and people were expressing those views, I would be worried. It is incumbent on her to respond appropriately.

Stephen Pound: I sense that the Minister is approaching his coda. May I ask him to say whether overseas nationals will be included in the scope of pensions and payments?

Mr Hurd: To reach the coda will be welcome. I thought I addressed that point when I said that, as we finalise the architecture, a number of big issues—the biggest being eligibility, of course—need to be resolved. No decision on that has been taken and finalised, but as we finalise our proposals, we will go through proper processes of engagement, not least with the Labour party.

Emma Little Pengelly: Regarding the earlier point, I emphasise again that my personal opinion does not matter; I was articulating the opinion of victims and survivors and that is why I said the commissioner's position is unsustainable.

We are talking about overseas nationals, but there is another point on which I have yet to get clarity. It concerns the many soldiers in particular—there are others—from Scotland, Wales and England who served in Northern Ireland and who sustained injuries but are now living in mainland UK who may want to access the pension. Previously, it was thought that this would be funded through the Northern Ireland block grant, but of course there are citizens from outside Northern Ireland and who are currently living outside Northern Ireland who may need to benefit. Has the Minister considered that technical point and how to resolve it?

Mr Hurd: It is more than a technical point; it is a point of fairness. Both of those lines of inquiry reflect the fact that what was discussed through the Stormont House agreement, as I understand it, was relatively narrow in scope. We are discussing widening the scope and thinking through the consequences of doing so. I

would not even be entertaining this conversation if our minds were not open to doing that, but it reinforces the need to think through the consequences, including the financial consequences, and the ability to defend any proposals.

Jim Shannon: My hon. Friend the Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) referred to people from Scotland, Wales and England who served in the Army. The same question applies to those from the Republic of Ireland who served in the British Army, of whom there is quite a number—sometimes, how many is underestimated. Will the same levels of compensation and pension apply to them, too?

Mr Hurd: The word “compensation” has come up several times. I think I should clarify that we are not talking about a compensation scheme. The victims payment scheme was originally crafted and designed to acknowledge the damage, harm and suffering that have occurred, and hopefully through those payments to make a difference to the dignity and quality of people's lives. The hon. Gentleman presses me on the scope of a proposal that is wider than the one considered as part of the Stormont House agreement. We have to think it through and determine the degree to which we can hold a consensus.

To bring this to a close—I sense your approval, Madam Deputy Speaker—I wholly concur with the hon. Member for Belfast South on taking a victim-centred approach. I have been shocked by the way in which victims of the troubles have been left to feel neglected and disrespected. I feel strongly that we need to move forward on this agenda. One of the clear messages from the debate was the support for the guiding principle that we should constitute this scheme only as payments for those injured through no fault of her own. The hon. Lady pressed me for a commitment, and she is right: we can act, because this Parliament has rightly obliged us to so, and we will act, not just because the law requires us to do so if the Assembly is not up and running by 21 October, but because it is so clearly the right thing to do.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of and approves the Report pursuant to Section 3(13) of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019—Victims' Payments, which was laid before this House on Wednesday 4 September.

Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 Section 5

7.29 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Robin Walker): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of and approves the Report pursuant to Section 3(12) of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 - Use of discretionary powers to provide assistance and support under section 18(9) of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015, which was laid before this House on Wednesday 4 September.

It is an honour to speak for the first time as a Northern Ireland Office Minister, though by no means for the first time on Northern Ireland matters.

On 4 September, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State laid before Parliament a report on the use of powers to provide support and assistance under section 18(9) of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015. As Members will know, the policy on modern slavery is a devolved matter in Northern Ireland and is dealt with by the Northern Ireland Department of Justice. I thank officials from the Department for the assistance they have provided in producing this report.

Modern slavery is a truly abhorrent practice that can often have long-lasting physical and psychological effects on its victims. It is unsettling to realise that those who are vulnerable in our society could be subjected to such crimes, but the distressing reality is that callous traffickers and enslavers are operating across the UK, including in Northern Ireland. I recognise and welcome the significant good work that daily continues to be taken forward by partners in Northern Ireland, across Government and by statutory agencies, civil society and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, in seeking to tackle this issue.

We know that modern slavery is happening in Northern Ireland and I am aware that the Department of Justice has recently welcomed a number of convictions under the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act. This is encouraging, as it undermines any low-risk, high-profit perceptions that might have been held by exploiters and traffickers and sends out a strong message that modern slavery will not be tolerated in Northern Ireland. As with the rest of the UK, Northern Ireland has in general seen increasing numbers of referrals to the national referral mechanism over the past five years.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the Minister congratulate the PSNI on what it did today and over the weekend when it caught some of those involved in human trafficking and its after-effects? Does it perhaps show that the PSNI needs this legislative back-up to pursue criminals who do not care about people as individuals but look upon the people they traffic not as people but as commodities? The PSNI can do its job, but the Minister and the Government need to do theirs alongside it.

Mr Walker: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point. I was going to come to the actions of the PSNI in my closing remarks, but let me congratulate it on its work. It is clear that, while the legislative framework is

slightly different in Northern Ireland from that in the UK, it is enforcing the law actively, which sends an important message to the traffickers. He will recognise that the report relates to specific support under the law of Northern Ireland, rather than to the issue of who is arrested and for what, but his point is very valid, and certainly I am unstinting in my praise for the work of the PSNI in protecting the victims of trafficking and indeed protecting the whole of society across Northern Ireland.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): I welcome the Minister to the Northern Ireland Office. He did a superb job in the Brexit Department and I am absolutely delighted, as I am sure is everyone, to have him in the Northern Ireland Office, though we regret that we have to share him with the Scotland Office.

I am grateful to the Minister for his praise for the work of the PSNI—it is right that he praised it—but I am concerned about the aftercare for those trafficked. There is a growing number of particularly women but also men who have been trafficked and rescued—thank goodness—by the PSNI. What happens to them afterwards? Does the Department of Justice in Northern Ireland have a record of those who are deported? More to the point, are they allowed to stay in Northern Ireland and given settled status when they are rescued from the horrible ordeal of being trafficked?

Mr Walker: The hon. Lady makes a powerful point. I want to come to the elements in the report that focus on the support to victims of trafficking—that is what it is really focused on. It is important that we send a message, as we have done in our many discussions in the wider debate about human trafficking in this place—that the victims should be protected and reassured wherever possible that their rights will be respected. I join her in acknowledging that.

The number of referrals has gone up, perhaps as a result of greater awareness of the issue and increased reporting. Tackling modern slavery is a key priority for the Department of Justice in Northern Ireland and, as we have discussed, for the PSNI, and I commend them for the work they have done with other Departments that have significant roles, such as the Department of Health, which is responsible for child protection.

I know that across the statutory agencies and civil society organisations with which the Department is working there is a group of hugely committed and dedicated people who are pursuing offenders, providing essential support to victims so that they can rebuild their lives, and actively raising awareness or trying to reduce demand.

Jim Shannon: There is an organisation in my main town of Newtownards. It is a charity group and probably a church group as well. The hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) referred to aftercare and the follow-on. I think that is what it does. Will there be funding, grant aid and assistance to help those organisations doing such marvellous work, albeit under the radar—they have probably never heard their name mentioned. They are doing the work where it matters and some assistance to help them would be gratefully received if possible.

Mr Walker: I recognise the hon. Gentleman's support for the organisation in his constituency and his bid for assistance. As he will appreciate, the report we are discussing is specifically focused on one element of this, but I will take that away and take it up as something we can discuss as we move forward.

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP) *rose*—

Mr Walker: I will give way to the hon. Lady, but then I will make some progress so that we can get into the meat of the report.

Emma Little Pengelly: I note from the report that the immigration status of those who have been rescued and entered the system is not held. I want to echo the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) about aftercare. If this information is not held, as indicated in the report, how can we be sure that those who have suffered from human trafficking are being looked after on their onward journey and not experiencing problems with settled status and potentially being deported?

Mr Walker: I want to come to the specific point about the information that the report does and does not contain. Clearly, as it sets out, there were concerns, given the small number of individuals involved, that to disclose their immigration status could result in some of them being identified. That was the reason the Northern Ireland civil service did not want to go further in disclosing that information. That said, the hon. Lady raises an important point: the aftercare should be there.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): The paucity of information in the report is staggering and the response about immigration status totally inadequate. It says that the Department of Justice does not hold this information and would have concerns if it did because of the limited number of people involved. The legislation passed by this House does not ask for that information from the Department, as is accepted in the second footnote where it states it would be possible for a competent authority to provide the information. We would understand that to be the Home Office. If there had been any serious intent behind the research for this report to the House, in compliance with the legislation, it would not have been much trouble to ask the Home Office for that relevant information. It is a point of concern. It has been raised by three Members now and it would be appropriate for the Minister to push back and ask for that information.

Mr Walker: I certainly take onboard that feedback from a number of Members, but it is not just that the Department of Justice in Northern Ireland does not hold that information. We recognise that another competent authority could advise on immigration status, but given the small number of victims involved—16 over three years—the concern was that information on their immigration status could make it possible to discern their identity. That is why the view was taken not to include that information in the report, but I recognise the strength of feeling, and I will reflect on it in any follow-up action.

I want to come back to the Department of Justice's role. I have read its 2019-20 modern slavery strategy and I note the priorities of pursuing offenders, protecting

victims and preventing further vulnerability to modern slavery. The nature of Northern Ireland and its structures—one police service, five health and social care trusts—and its relatively small geographical size can only help to support a truly joined-up strategic and operational response. Partnership is key to delivering that strategy, as are training and awareness, together with strong links with colleagues in neighbouring jurisdictions.

The report, which was laid before Parliament on 4 September, contains information specifically on how many times the Department of Justice has considered it necessary to provide ongoing assistance and support for victims of human trafficking for whom there has been a conclusive determination that the person is a victim of trafficking of human beings, under the discretionary power under section 18(9) of the 2015 Act. It also outlines the reasons the Department has decided it is necessary to provide that support. I recognise the importance of the support that is provided to adult potential victims of modern slavery under section 18 to assist them in recovering from their experiences—we should acknowledge that separate arrangements are in place for children.

It was clearly the will of Parliament that the Secretary of State should report on this issue. We have already discussed the caveats for the one area where we have perhaps been unable to report in the detail that the legislation originally specified. I will certainly take away the strength of feeling that we have already heard in the debate, and I look forward to hearing what hon. Members across the House have to say.

7.40 pm

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): I, too, welcome the Minister to his new post. He and I have previously met and talked in our respective roles in the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. He is a great loss to the Brexit team but a great addition to the Northern Ireland Office team, given his knowledge.

This is a cruel subject and there are many victims. I was recently involved in the police parliamentary scheme, as many other hon. Members have been, and I spent a day with the trafficking team here in London before going out on one of their investigations. Anyone who has seen up close the work that they do could only be massively impressed. It is very difficult work, and meeting and talking with victims is hugely emotional. I pay tribute to the work that they are doing here in London and to support teams across the United Kingdom and Europe.

It is very valuable to have this discussion about victims in Northern Ireland. The European Commission's recent report "Together Against Trafficking in Human Beings" highlights that:

"Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom to have a land border and traffickers and enslavers exploit this. We therefore have strong links and effective partnerships in place to ensure that law enforcement organisations from both jurisdictions work together to tackle modern slavery."

That is a core part of the United Kingdom's work in this area. I therefore have a few questions for the Minister. First, in the context of the discussions that are now happening, and not just on the European arrest warrant but in relation to our joint north-south arrangements on human trafficking, which are a core

part of the UK's defence in this area, what discussions are taking place to ensure that traffickers and enslavers are not allowed to exploit the situation at the border.

Secondly, as has been mentioned already, support for victims really does rely on policing. We have heard about some good success this weekend, but the chief constable of the PSNI has said that he will require an extra 800 police officers over the next few months, so resourcing in this area is a massive problem. Having seen up close the level of resource needed by police forces in the rest of the United Kingdom—I have not been to Northern Ireland to see the work being done there—I know that it is a massive problem, and they will have to make decisions about those competing priorities. Again, we need an assurance from the Minister that the Government will be cognisant of those priority decisions that the chief constable is having to make now with regard to policing over the next few months, to ensure that the situation is not further exploited by traffickers.

Thirdly, as has already been said today, these are victims, and even if we find them, which itself is a massive “if”, they require an awful lot of support and resource, particularly in housing and health provision, and especially mental health support and counselling. We know that mental health services in Northern Ireland are already heavily stretched, with high levels of mental health need. It is important, when looking at these reports and the work coming forward, that the Minister and his Department work with colleagues across Northern Ireland to really understand what we mean by aftercare. The fact that it has been raised here shows that people here feel very strongly about that. We know that these public services are already under huge strain and cannot cope with the levels of care needed. I do not have much confidence that they are able to provide that aftercare. The Government need to take that very seriously, support those victims and provide the rehabilitation services that they so desperately need.

7.45 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): The 2019 Act states that the report must include reference to “progress on the use of discretionary powers”

and that it must cover three distinct areas. The key words here are “progress” and “must cover”. I believe the Minister to be a most courteous and conscientious Minister—I, like many other colleagues, welcome him to his new post—but I regret to say that this scant report is a sadly inadequate response to a very grave subject. Only two of the three questions are even touched on in any way. If we are to learn what works in tackling the huge scourge of human trafficking, we need better data-gathering systems, and one thing that the report clearly does highlight is the need for that to improve.

Lady Hermon: I am delighted to endorse what the hon. Lady has said. I suggest that one of the key issues that the Department of Justice ought to have put into this very thin report, and which it should have been capable of doing, is the involvement of paramilitaries in human trafficking, whether loyalist, republican or simply criminal gangs that have no connection with either side. We need to know who is responsible for this hideous crime in Northern Ireland, because it is growing, and that should have been included in the report.

Fiona Bruce: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention.

In 2015, the Northern Ireland Assembly became the first legislature in the United Kingdom to pass comprehensive human trafficking legislation. I commend Lord Morrow on his leading role in initiating that legislation and the Assembly on fully supporting its wide-ranging provisions. In some areas, it goes further than the human trafficking legislation in England and Wales, the Modern Slavery Act 2015, in providing statutory assistance and support for victims during the process of confirming victims, which is known as the national referral mechanism. There is also a fully implemented scheme of independent guardians for trafficked children. An article published in the journal *Statute Law Review* in 2016 described that Northern Ireland Act as “an impressive instrument”.

Section 18 of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) sets out the first statutory support for victims, or potential victims still to be assessed, of a minimum of 45 days during the NRM process, but it also recognises that there are times when that support would need to be extended. Again, the Northern Ireland Assembly was ahead of the rest of the UK in that regard, because section 18(9) specifically allows for assistance and support to be extended beyond the point where a victim receives a positive conclusive grounds decision at the discretion of the Department of Justice. Indeed, it is one of the more bizarre features of the current system of identifying victims of trafficking that, once fully recognised as a victim, the state offers them no further statutory support. As the previous anti-slavery commissioner said,

“supporting a potential victim until the conclusive decision is made and then ceasing support so abruptly could be damaging for the victim and negatively affect their recovery.”

In 2013-14, Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly envisaged that there could be circumstances in which it is not in the best interests of the victim for support to be stopped if they receive a positive conclusive-grounds decision. The Assembly was ahead of its time in recognising the need for victims to receive support beyond that point. The report that we are considering shows that, for the past three financial years, 17 victims received that additional support. That is welcome, although sadly the numbers are low. Will the Minister give us some more information on how long the victims were supported and say why information is scant? Will he confirm that those 17 did indeed receive that extended support after they had had a positive conclusive-grounds decision?

Northern Ireland introduced that pioneering legislation, and there has been much debate and dialogue about what assistance should be provided, and for how long. It has become clear that the extent of stability and support that victims need to help them on a pathway to recover beyond the NRM potentially has a huge impact on their ability to recover, on their resilience to the very real risk of re-trafficking, and on their capacity and confidence to participate in police investigations and court proceedings against their traffickers. They need that support to enable them to have the confidence to stand up and do so.

Jim Shannon: Does the hon. Lady recognise the international aspect of human trafficking? The hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) referred to

[Jim Shannon]

local paramilitaries, both loyalist and republican, being involved in human trafficking. In many cases, the people who are trafficked are from eastern European countries, so the internationalism of criminal gangs must be taken into consideration. Under the legislation that has been introduced to help the victims, that internationalism must be considered so that we find the right way forward.

Fiona Bruce: That is why I was disappointed that there was no reply to the third aspect of the report, on information relating to the immigration status of individuals. It was not so much that I wanted to see particular information, but it might have indicated a pattern of trafficking to this country from certain other jurisdictions, which could be helpful in tackling the problem further.

I have spoken a number of times about the need for much greater support for trafficked victims, which was acknowledged in a court case in June by the Home Office, albeit in an out-of-court settlement with victims of human trafficking. If the Home Office has acknowledged that in a case in this jurisdiction, it should consider that that has implications for Northern Ireland. Forty-five days is better than nothing, but it is still not enough. Several reports and Committees have stated that in recent years, and I shall highlight a few. The Select Committee on Work and Pensions produced an important report on victims of modern slavery as long ago as 2015 and strongly recommended personal recovery plans for victims of up to 12 months in cases in which they wanted to stay in the UK. More recently, the British Red Cross, in its July 2019 report, “Hope for the future”, repeated those needs. The Home Affairs Committee is running an inquiry into the impact of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, including, because it knows that it needs to be looked at, levels of support for victims and how that can be improved. The independent review of the Modern Slavery Act, led by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), along with the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee and Baroness Butler-Sloss, stated in its final report in May this year that there was a need for improved victim support, even though victim support was not in its remit. It said that

“it cannot be right that the Government provides no standardised post-NRM support offer for victims, who are often still incredibly vulnerable, and this can increase their vulnerability to being re-trafficked and re-exploited.”

As I have said, victims who receive support are more likely to be able to work with the police in any investigation of their traffickers and provide important evidence in court.

Following Northern Ireland’s example, Lord McColl of Dulwich introduced the Modern Slavery (Victim Support) Bill at the beginning of this Session in the other place. It is being taken through this House by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) no less, and it recommends 12 months’ support. That is the kind of support that is needed, with the option of different services to meet an individual’s particular needs. I understand that it is possible that, if the Government accept the Bill, the measure will relate not only to England and Wales, but could easily be extended to Northern Ireland. I would appreciate a meeting with the Minister to discuss that and other aspects of my speech.

I sincerely hope that the McColl Bill will be considered in the House so that we can debate more fully the benefits of providing longer-term support for victims. The University of Nottingham Rights Lab recently published a cost-benefit analysis of providing support to victims in England and Wales on the basis of the provisions in the Bill. It estimated, staggeringly, that there would be a direct and indirect net benefit to society of up to £25.1 million from providing all confirmed victims with 12 months of support to help their rehabilitation.

The report of the independent review of the Modern Slavery Act, to which I have referred, called for standardised support for victims wherever they are trafficked in the UK. The Government report on trafficking that we are discussing gives very few details on why the 17 individuals were given further support. It is inadequate for it to say that the reason that the Department of Justice decided that it was necessary to provide assistance related to the general policy intent underpinning the provision. That is the rationale behind the regulation—it does not give us any detailed information. The response is barely five lines long. When one considers some of the desperate situations that people can face when they are trafficked, it is completely inadequate to have so little information to help us understand how they can be helped further. Will the Minister let us know whether or not officials who have made decisions to extend support have received any guidance on how to make those decisions? If there is guidance, can he place a copy in the Library? If there is no guidance, how are decisions made as officials consider the case of each individual victim?

Gavin Robinson: I thank the hon. Lady for the thoughtful and considered way in which she is dealing with these issues in detail. She is making absolutely correct points. There was a response, following consideration of the report, issued to Lord Morrow from our party and the questions that he raised by Lord Duncan of Springbank. May I suggest to the hon. Lady that that could usefully be placed in the Library?

The hon. Lady is right to make these points for a number of reasons. First, there was a conclusive finding in the case of 16 people—they were victims in those 16 individual circumstances. We do not know why there was a delay, or whether other financial support and welfare assistance was provided, but there was a delay in doing so, or whether there was a delay in the administrative system through which they received support. Similarly, we do not know whether there were other people beyond the 16 for whom there was a conclusive finding of victimhood, but that occurred before the 45-day expiration. I thank the hon. Lady for raising the paucity of information in the report and for the detailed way in which she has explained why she hopes it will be provided in due course.

Fiona Bruce: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. To put it on the record, in its first response, the Department of Justice admitted that it did not routinely record information in relation to the exercise of the discretionary power to provide continued support. As he said, that is completely unsatisfactory. Sadly, the report also says that the Department of Justice is not proposing any policy changes or consultations in relation to the provision under section 18(9). That is a great pity, because we need to understand how discretionary support

works and whether there could be a plan to extend it under the statute to provide more comprehensive support to benefit the wellbeing of victims of human trafficking.

I further commend Northern Ireland's legislation as the only legislation in the United Kingdom with substantial provisions to tackle the demand for sexual exploitation—an international treaty obligation—and to provide support for those who want to exit prostitution. Although many women in prostitution are not trafficked, we know from the NRM data that the majority of female victims are trafficked into sexual exploitation. Rachel Moran, a survivor of prostitution, commented that

“prostitution is the context in which sex trafficking takes place”.

A report produced by the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, which I have the privilege of chairing, highlights the need to reduce the demand for prostitution by creating a new criminal offence of paying for sexual services in England and Wales; not supplying them, but paying for them. Since the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015, France, the Republic of Ireland and Israel have introduced similar legislation. Our country will be behind the curve if we do not address this. I commend the commission's report to the Minister; perhaps we can discuss that as well if he is kind enough to agree to a meeting.

Those who have been abused through sexual exploitation must not be treated as criminals. Instead, those who exploit and coerce others must be penalised. In countries such as Sweden and Norway, which have legislated to tackle the demand for paid sex, fewer men report having paid for sex following the introduction of those laws. According to a report published by Queen's University Belfast a couple of weeks ago, relating to the 2015 Act, 11.6% of people asked said either that they had stopped purchasing sex or that the law was likely to make them stop completely, while 27.1 % said that they would purchase sex less frequently.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful point about prostitution, but in respect of victims of sexual exploitation, there is a danger. If prostitution is driven underground, it is much more difficult to recognise and release the victims of human trafficking. There is a balance to be struck.

Fiona Bruce: I hear what my hon. Friend says, but all the evidence that I have seen from countries where paying for sex has been criminalised shows a reduction in that form of abuse. In other words, laws such as the one in Northern Ireland are having positive effects.

As we heard earlier, only yesterday the Police Service of Northern Ireland announced the arrest—through the use of the 2015 Act—of a 57-year-old man in the Belfast area on suspicion of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, controlling prostitution, brothel keeping and money laundering. The PSNI also announced the arrest of five men on suspicion of paying for sexual services. The officer in charge made a powerful statement, and I hope that the House will bear with me if I put it on record; I am approaching the end of my speech. The officer said:

“Whilst the sale of sex in itself is not a crime in Northern Ireland, it is a criminal offence to purchase sex. I want to make it very clear—if you are paying for sexual services, you are committing a crime. Do you really want to be getting a knock on the door

from police, perhaps having to explain to family and friends why you have been arrested? I want to encourage anyone who purchases sex to think of the consequences. Furthermore, you cannot be sure that the person providing the services has not been forced to or trafficked to make a profit for the person controlling them.”

The importance of the way in which prostitution ties in with trafficking is currently being reviewed by a piece of work following up the independent review of the Modern Slavery Act. Prostitution is also the subject of a new inquiry by the Women and Equalities Committee. I believe that we should follow Northern Ireland's progressive steps and create the offence of paying for sex and consequently make England and Wales a less attractive destination for traffickers.

In acknowledging the very significant accomplishment that is the 2015 Act, I cannot but note that it provides a fantastic example of how we have all benefited from a functioning Northern Ireland Assembly. Most of the Act was supported by all the parties, and, crucially, the Democratic Unionist party and Sinn Féin supported all of it. I very much hope that Stormont can be up and running again very soon, so that we can benefit from its legislative prowess in this and other areas.

8.5 pm

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): I do not intend to speak for long because I follow a hugely comprehensive, detailed and valuable speech from the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce). Many extremely detailed issues have been articulated in an excellent way. Although this has been a relatively short debate, with few speakers, it has certainly not lacked detail and substance, and I welcome that. A number of important questions have been asked and I look forward to the Government's response.

First, let me offer huge congratulations to Lord Morrow and the team. In previous contributions, I have indicated my dismay and sorrow about the situation in Northern Ireland, which has experienced 1,000 days without a devolved Assembly, but when we reflect on this Act, we realise that we have something to celebrate in relation to our Northern Ireland Executive. The Executive and the Assembly have often been criticised, perhaps with some cause, but the Act is an excellent example of Northern Ireland's leading the way. It took a lot of inspiration and hard work by those behind the scenes, who lobbied and received a warm and receptive response from Lord Morrow. That team helped him to produce a private Member's Bill that was an innovative piece of legislation which has led the way not just in the United Kingdom, but globally.

I welcome the fact that over the last few days and weeks there has been a significant investigation of human trafficking. I understand that there have been a number of arrests. That is a welcome example of the success of the legislation and the action of the police, and I commend the teams in the police and other agencies who work so hard to identify and to try to stamp out the absolute scourge that is modern slavery.

The report is, of course, very specific. It relates to the support that is given to those who come forward, or who are suspected of being trafficked. I will not go into too much detail—I had a number of questions to ask, but many of them have already been asked by Members on both sides of the House—but I want to touch on a couple of technical issues.

[Emma Little Pengelly]

The report focuses on section 18 of the Act, which provides assistance and support for adults during the process of determining whether a person is a victim of trafficking. That process is known as the national referral mechanism, or NRM. It specifies a period of 45 days. As has already been pointed out this evening, the legislation very much led the way. At that time, the 45-day period involved some flexibility, with the understanding that it might be sufficient, but this matter has moved on. I want to focus on that flexibility, and on what consideration the Government have given to extending it and adopting a more needs-based approach to support. I understand that they are engaged in ongoing discussions about the report and about the possibility of a 12-month period, which would certainly provide more flexibility. Important questions were posed in the original amendment which requested the report. We should analyse the experience in Northern Ireland up to this point.

I agree with other Members that, unfortunately, the report is somewhat scant in relation to the information. There is a bit of detail in there. I accept the Government's view—there are small numbers involved—that we do not want people to be identifiable from that, but I feel that there would have been a way in which to provide a great deal more detail and analysis of the situation without contravening anything or compromising anyone. This legislation pertains to Northern Ireland, so it is worrying if the Department of Justice and other agencies in Northern Ireland do not hold or analyse that data.

There has been a huge drive in public policy making, including in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland has been leading the way on evidence-based and outcomes-based accountability. Government policy making is very much at the heart of that, and I argue that the policy development work of Committees and this House should be also be based on evidence. We have the potential to collect and analyse that valuable data and to evolve, amend or change the law in accordance with our experience over the past three years. References to the data not being held are, therefore, worrying. There is an old adage in public policy making and Departments that what is not measured does not get done. If the data is not being measured, how are we evaluating and analysing information relating to the evolution and development of policy?

The Act broke new ground, in that there was an awareness that we would have to assess, improve and develop. That was discussed at the time. The Act is a really good example of innovative policy work and legislation breaking new ground and taking risks. I welcome that because it is important, but we must also carefully monitor and measure. The most worrying thing is what happens to those people when they move off the system. The Home Office arrangements mean that every MP has a case load of people and we liaise regularly with the Home Office. We know how stressful it can be to navigate the system, and if people are told that they have to leave and are at risk of being lifted at any time and are unsuccessful in getting the right to remain. People who have come through terrible experiences may face that situation, but we do not know because apparently that data is not held by the Department of Justice.

I can only imagine the terrible and unfortunate circumstances in which people who were trafficked found themselves in their countries of origin or perhaps in a country to which they travelled and from which they were trafficked onwards. I can only assume that at the heart of each of those individual stories is a very tragic and unfortunate set of circumstances, perhaps going right back to their childhood. It is deeply worrying to think that some of them are being sent back and about where they are being sent back to. I hope that that is not the case and that, with a little more analysis, the Minister will be able to confirm in due course that they have the necessary support, that they are able to stay and that they are being protected, because it is care for the human and those people who have been through such difficult circumstances that is at the heart of this compassionate legislation. There are a number of questions for the Minister to answer.

I also want to ask about the guidance. I have had the benefit of seeing Lord Duncan's letter to Lord Morrow in response to a number of queries. I know that they have been answered, so perhaps that letter could be placed in the Library for the benefit of Members who have asked questions. Although a number of questions have been answered, it is important to get additional clarity, particularly on the guidance given on the extension and the discretion involved. I understand that there is a very small number of cases. The Government's argument is that they are dealt with on a case-by-case basis and that there is absolute discretion. I fear, however, that that discretion is not necessarily operated fairly or consistently; it depends on who applies it. It would be helpful if transparent guidance could be set down so that Members and others, including victims and members of the public, can be assured about the circumstances in which support can be extended and that the right support mechanism is in place. Many Members across the House would like that additional information, to ensure that that support mechanism is in place for these very vulnerable people if, indeed, the current legislation is not operating as envisaged.

8.14 pm

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly), who made the very good point about the 45 days and the national referral mechanism. When we debated and introduced the proposal in the Modern Slavery Act 2015, I remember 90 days being thought to be appropriate. We were reassured, however, that people would be looked after irrespective of the 45 days, if necessary. We do not have enough information to make that judgment in relation to Northern Ireland. I do not want to say that the Government are not doing that; I would just like more information.

The United Kingdom leads the way on fighting human trafficking. It is a great credit to the previous Government that they passed the Modern Slavery Act and that they listened to Members on both sides of the House. A little while ago, when I was chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on human trafficking and modern slavery, the hon. Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson) invited me to Northern Ireland. I had travelled all over the United Kingdom and I saw in the voluntary and charitable sector in Northern Ireland an effort that exceeded what was happening in the rest of the UK. It

is to their great credit that those voluntary organisations help victims of human trafficking in Northern Ireland. I also had the pleasure of meeting the Justice Minister at the time, and I was absolutely convinced that there was a determination in Northern Ireland to do their best to stamp out the evil of human trafficking.

The phrase “The evil of human trafficking,” does not really grasp what really happens. We are dealing with violent, evil, criminal gangs. It is no surprise to hear today that loyalist and other evil gangs that have operated in Northern Ireland on sectarian lines are the sorts of gangs that would get involved in human trafficking. They are just despicable.

I will give one example of what happened in Northern Ireland some time ago. A restaurant in Belfast was importing young girls into Northern Ireland. They were told when they came in that they would be working in the restaurant, but that is not what they did. They were taken to a terraced house in Belfast where the locks on the bedroom doors were on the outside, not the inside, to lock the girls in. These girls were then used for prostitution, but let us be honest: it was not prostitution; it was repeated rape. I still cannot really get across the evil of it. Imagine if you were a young girl, brought up perhaps with a strong religious background in Hungary, who had come to this country thinking you had got a job, but you finished up being raped and raped and raped.

To the great credit of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, it broke that gang up. Police forces across the United Kingdom have a very good record of doing that, but we have to look after the victims who are rescued. I have to say that in the case of adults, we do that very well. The approach taken in England and Wales—with the Salvation Army, the distribution of money from the Ministry of Justice, and voluntary organisations—is exactly the right way to look after adults. I am sure that adult victims in Northern Ireland are also very well looked after. I am not at all concerned that victims of human trafficking are sometimes regarded as criminals and sent home; I just do not believe that happens. We look after victims properly.

What I worry about are the child victims of human trafficking. For a 20-year-old girl who comes over expecting to work in a restaurant and who finds herself repeatedly raped, it is appalling, but let us imagine being a 15-year-old girl in those circumstances—it is even worse. They are rescued and the police service does its job but, as a child victim of human trafficking, they should not be looked after in the same way as an adult victim. The Minister said in one line, “and there are similar arrangements for child victims.” No, there are not. They are totally different arrangements. We have to get a grip so that we do not look after child victims in the same way as we look after adult victims.

As the hon. Member for Belfast South said, the data is not there. The problem is that so many children who have been trafficked find themselves re-trafficked because we do not give them the same protection that we give adults. We have an excellent Minister—I am pleased he is in the Northern Ireland Office and not the Brexit Department, because we do not agree on the Brexit issue—and I want to know about the pathway. This touches on what all Members have said: once a person has been recognised as a victim, it is no good just looking after them for 45 or 90 days and patting them

on their head. That does not happen, of course, but the children disappear into a system that is not the same as the system for adults. They are re-trafficked but, of course, we do not have the data.

When a victim of human trafficking is rescued, I want to know where they are and what has happened to them after a year. If we cannot prove they are still safe, we can bet our bottom dollar that they have been re-trafficked. It is not a difficult thing to do, and thankfully there are not that many victims, but it is no good looking after victims only at the beginning; we have to look after them continuously so they are not re-trafficked.

In a future report to this House, would it not be good if we could know what has happened a year later to every victim of human trafficking in Northern Ireland? If they are all safe and well, we will know our system is working; but if they are not, we can take action to sort it out.

8.22 pm

Mr Robin Walker: I am grateful to hon. Members on both sides of the House for this wide-ranging discussion; they will recognise that it has sometimes ranged beyond the confines of the specific legislation and report before us.

It is a pleasure to face the hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) across the Dispatch Box. I have enjoyed working with her at the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, and I recognise and share the interests of Members on both sides of the House, and in the other place, in ensuring that support is available to all victims of human trafficking, both adults and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) said, children, although children are not specifically within the scope of this report.

The hon. Member for Bristol South asked about the common travel area and cross-border co-operation between the PSNI and the Garda, and I assure her that we are confident that that will continue in all Brexit scenarios—those discussions will continue. She asked about extra police officers for Northern Ireland and, even though that is not specifically part of this report, I am happy to be part of a Government who are supporting extra police officers across the UK. I understand that around 206 extra officers have been recruited in this financial year as a result of extra support from the Treasury for the PSNI, which has also sustained 102 more officers recruited over the past financial year.

Modern slavery is a global issue, but it is also a local one. It is widely accepted that there are more slaves in the world today than at any point in human history, which is a shocking thought. As my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) said, Northern Ireland has, in many ways, pioneered action in this space. As the hon. Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) said, that is a reason to celebrate the work of the Northern Ireland Assembly. As we debate these motions and regret the absence of the Northern Ireland Assembly, we should celebrate that good work where we have seen the Assembly leading the way.

I am grateful to all those involved in developing and implementing the strategy at the Department of Justice, and I am sure there will continue to be a sustained and

[Mr Robin Walker]

increased collaboration with the voluntary service, which my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough rightly praised as outstanding.

I acknowledge and commend the Northern Ireland civil service for its progress on these matters in the current difficult circumstances, and I look forward to a time when these issues can be properly considered by a restored Northern Ireland Assembly which, as the hon. Member for Belfast South said, can look at the evidence and take this issue forward.

As we discussed, there were a number of arrests in Northern Ireland over the weekend for crimes related to human trafficking, and Members across the House will join me in praising the work of the PSNI in that respect.

My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton asked specific questions about the guidance, and I refer her to the letter from Lord Duncan to Lord Morrow. I am happy to make sure a copy of that letter is placed in the Library for all Members to look at because, as the hon. Member for Belfast South said, it makes the point that support is extended on a case-by-case basis and is not based on specific guidance. When we go into more detail, the body of the report sets out the general policy intent to accommodate those cases where a short transitional period may be needed to facilitate a smooth transition for individuals exiting Department of Justice-funded support into mainstream agreements. I can confirm that, where an extension of support has been requested, it has been extended in all cases until that transition is facilitated.

A number of hon. Members on both sides of the House raised areas where they would like to see this issue taken further, and my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton talked about her wider campaign and the legislation before the House in other areas. Recognising, of course, that responsibilities for this area sit with the Home Office, the Northern Ireland civil service and the Department of Justice, as well as with the Northern Ireland Office, I am happy to take up her invitation for a meeting.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of and approves the Report pursuant to Section 3(12) of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 - Use of discretionary powers to provide assistance and support under section 18(9) of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015, which was laid before this House on Wednesday 4 September.

Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 Section 4

8.27 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Robin Walker): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of and approves the Report pursuant to Section 3(11) of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 - Gambling, which was laid before this House on Wednesday 4 September.

I present to the House a report that provides an update on the current nature of the gambling laws in Northern Ireland. As many Members will be aware, the gambling legislation in Northern Ireland differs from that in place in Great Britain, and the report recognises the challenges associated with the likes of online gambling and fixed odds betting terminals and notes that existing legislation has not kept pace with industry and technological changes.

A high-level strategic review of gambling policy, practice and law is currently being carried out by the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland. There have been some moves towards more thorough regulation of gambling in Northern Ireland in recent years. As a result of the Gambling (Licensing and Advertising) Act 2014, for example, it is an offence for an online gambling operator to advertise to Northern Ireland consumers unless it holds the appropriate GB Gambling Commission licence and complies with its codes of practice. However, the Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, which regulates gaming machines in Northern Ireland, has become increasingly outdated and contains no provisions related to online gambling. The introduction of any measures to address online gambling will require primary legislation. The report also highlights the lack of specific services commissioned by the Health and Social Care Board to help those suffering from gambling addiction. No data are kept on the number of people dealing with addiction, but we are all aware that this is a growing problem among all age groups. There are no statutory codes of practice in place in Northern Ireland, nor is there any statutory or voluntary arrangement with the gambling industry requiring any contribution to funding support services for problem gambling.

Gambling operators in Northern Ireland have taken some positive steps towards addressing the impact of gambling addiction, by reducing the maximum stakes in fixed odds betting terminals from £100 to £2, for example. That mirrors the law set out in Great Britain under the Gaming Machine (Miscellaneous Amendments and Revocation) Regulations 2018, but it is voluntary, rather than statutory action. In addition, the industry's main trade associations, the Northern Ireland Turf Guardians Association, representing more than 80% of bookmaking offices, and the Northern Ireland Amusement Caterers Trade Association, representing 60% of the amusement arcade/gaming machine sector, state that they are committed to implementing social responsibility measures. Both organisations state that their members voluntarily adhere to industry codes of practice and protocols, and provide induction and regular refresher training to staff on all aspects of social responsibility. Both organisations state that members operate self-exclusion schemes for customers who wish to avail of them.

Many operators contribute to Dunlewey Addiction Services, one of a number of resources available for problem gamblers. Dunlewey operates a free confidential helpline service, 365 days a year, between 9 am and 11 pm, for individuals affected by their own or a family member's problem gambling issues, with a 48-hour referral commitment, and has local access to counselling available across Northern Ireland. The NHS has services dedicated to all forms of addiction, including problem gambling, and where a person who is struggling with problem gambling has a mental health issue, whether related or unrelated to the gambling, such as anxiety or depression arising from the consequences of gambling, they should receive the appropriate help and treatment in the health and social care system for that condition.

As I said at the outset, there is no doubt that regulatory arrangements for gambling in Northern Ireland differ greatly from those in place in Great Britain. Following a review of the legislation and a public consultation, the Northern Ireland Executive agreed, in 2012, to the drafting of new legislation to modernise the law on gambling, which would have delivered some element of alignment. However, the then Minister for Communities decided not to progress this legislation. So I welcome the opportunity to open this topic for debate in the House and look forward to hearing from hon. Members across the House on this issue.

8.31 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): I rise as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for gambling-related harm. The Minister alluded to the fact that legislation in Northern Ireland fails to protect problem gamblers. For example, there is outdated regulation. He mentioned FOBTs and how the gambling companies so “willingly” reduced the stake to £2 from £100, but the law in Northern Ireland would be that the stake could be 25p, which is a considerable difference from what those companies have done out of the goodness of their heart. Online gambling is technically illegal in Northern Ireland, so the online gambling companies are advertising illegally and making vast profits illegally.

Given the Gambling Commission's reluctance to challenge these companies to make sure that they pay for their misconduct in Northern Ireland, there is something amiss and we need to act to make sure that people in Northern Ireland get the same protections as those in the United Kingdom. Shockingly, no gambling-specific services are currently commissioned by the Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Board, as a result of which there are no data on the number of problem gamblers in Northern Ireland. We used such statistics very effectively in the United Kingdom when tackling the FOBT problems, so may we have some clarity on what more we can do to bring gambling legislation in Northern Ireland into line with that in the UK, so that we can protect gamblers?

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way. One particular challenge in Northern Ireland—[*Interruption.*] Had she finished?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): I do not think she had given way. Let us just clarify this. Have you finished your speech?

Carolyn Harris *indicated assent.*

Mr Deputy Speaker: In which case, I call Fiona Bruce.

8.32 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I would be delighted to welcome that intervention at some point in my speech. Should the hon. Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) wish to make it.

Emma Little Pengelly: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way, and I apologise to the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris). I thought she had given way, but it was clear from her demeanour that she had not.

I want to raise the particular problem in Northern Ireland, which is that online gambling and gambling appears to operate under the regulation of the Gambling Commission but if something goes wrong with that, there is no body to complain to. I am dealing with a case where there is an issue with online gambling. I have tried to make a complaint, but I have been told by the Department for Communities and by the Gambling Commission that they have no remit over it. I have been told that they make the regulations under which these sites operate, but if there is a breach of those regulations there is nobody to complain to and nobody to investigate that breach. Does the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) agree that that needs to be urgently addressed, given the scale of the issues in Northern Ireland?

Fiona Bruce: I do; in fact, as I understand it the oversight in respect of gambling responsibilities in Northern Ireland is completely unco-ordinated. The report admits that licensing responsibilities currently rest with a mixture of

“the courts, district councils and the Department for Communities.” That is unacceptable.

This brief report on gambling law and policy in Northern Ireland was a demoralising read. That is no reflection on the good and caring Minister who presented it, but early in his speech he recognised the fact that in Northern Ireland this policy area has been left behind compared with elsewhere. That leaves me with great sadness. The report was meant to outline progress on six specific, enumerated areas. For years, little progress, if any, has been made on this hugely important matter that so devastatingly affects people's lives. I am always a little thoughtful—I will not use the word “suspicious”—when a response to questions that are enumerated fails to repeat the enumeration, as in this case. It is sad, because we know from what the Assembly has done on human trafficking, which we have just heard about, that innovative policy and legislation in Northern Ireland are possible.

We all know from the many debates and discussions in the Chamber on gambling about the huge damage that gambling addiction can cause. It can destroy individual lives. Children and families suffer. The flaws in gambling law and policy have been debated at length in this place. We have taken positive steps in the form of reducing the stake on fixed-odds betting terminals from £100 to £2, following widespread campaigning. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) for her leadership in much of that campaigning.

We continue to debate and consider this issue. The all-party group for on gambling related harm is currently conducting an extensive inquiry—it has been going for

[*Fiona Bruce*]

several months—into the harms related to online gambling. We have looked into how we can increase the support provided on the NHS for those suffering from gambling addiction, and we have looked at how to increase the amount of money provided by betting companies to support those suffering from gambling addiction. Of course, we need to go further, and there is no room for complacency, but it is entirely evident from the report that the lack of progress in Northern Ireland must be causing real harm there—and that in a place where I understand gambling may be far worse than it is here.

So, what are some of the problems? As we have heard, the fact that gambling in Northern Ireland is still governed by an order, passed under direct rule, that dates back to 1985 is quite remarkable. That legislation predates the invention of the internet and widespread access to mobile phones, which have revolutionised how individuals gamble in the UK. It is no surprise to discover that the legislation struggles to cope with how the modern gambling industry operates. That is especially evident with regard to FOBTs and online gambling. I, too, have heard that there is no clarity as to whether FOBTs are even legal in Northern Ireland, and the report itself states that

“the legal position of these machines is unclear”.

I, too, have heard that there is a strong argument that they are in fact illegal in Northern Ireland because they do not meet the definition in the 1985 legislation that states how slot machines are supposed to work.

The Northern Ireland Department for Communities estimates that currently around 800 to 900 FOBTs are operating in Northern Ireland, although in January the main trade association, the Northern Ireland Turf Guardians Association, estimated that there were 620. The differential is of major concern. The fact that the Department can only provide an estimate highlights a major issue: an inadequate understanding of the extent of this form of gambling—a form that we have recognised does such damage and that has been referred to more than once as the crack cocaine of gambling. I welcome the fact that some betting shops have voluntarily reduced stakes for FOBTs in Northern Ireland, but the people of Northern Ireland should not have to rely on the good will of operators to determine the way that gambling operates in the Province. The fact is that only the main operators—not all providers—are operating a £2 maximum stake. Consumers are not being given the protection they need.

It is obvious that the law in Northern Ireland is not fit for purpose any more. Indeed, the report says that the order of 1985 has become increasingly outdated, has not kept pace with industry and technological changes and contains no provisions that relate to online gambling. It needs to change as it simply cannot cope with the reality of how individuals gamble today and the operation of the industry. It is not protecting consumers who are vulnerable to gambling addiction. It is in desperate need of reform.

Not only is the law clearly failing, but support for those suffering from gambling addiction is clearly completely inadequate in Northern Ireland. The report makes for especially stark reading in this area. It notes that

“there are no statutory codes of practice in Northern Ireland, nor is there any statutory or voluntary arrangement with the gambling industry requiring any contribution to funding support services for problem gambling.”

This in and of itself is a major concern as it appears that the gambling industry is simply operating on trust in Northern Ireland, unlike in Great Britain. Relying on the gambling industry, as the report says, to implement socially responsible measures is simply unacceptable.

In reading the report, we also discover that

“there are no gambling specific services commissioned by the Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Board”,

as we have heard,

“and therefore the Board does not hold data regarding the number of people who are seeking treatment for problem gambling.”

I am informed that, in fact, only one of the five health and social care trusts operating in Northern Ireland hold data on the number of individuals coming forward suffering from gambling addiction. Is it any wonder that the significance of this issue has not come to light when no data is collected about it centrally?

Before I conclude, may I recognise that it is positive that, as a result of some local authorities calling on betting providers to adopt that £2 stake in their area voluntarily, that is happening? However, as I have said, these arrangements are not backed up by the force of law. People can still walk into some betting shops in Northern Ireland and place a much higher stake than £2. However, I do want to pay tribute to the campaigning charity CARE, which has worked very effectively with local councillors in Northern Ireland to achieve these positive council resolutions.

In England, in a really welcome step forward, the current Government recently announced that the NHS would fund 14 clinics for individuals suffering from gambling addiction, with one focused on children and young people. In Northern Ireland, there is not a single clinic.

We then read in the report that the trade association contributes only £24,000 per year to one addiction service provider—the Dunlewey Centre. I must confess that, when I read that figure of £24,000, I thought that a couple of zeros were surely missing, but apparently not. This is a drop in the ocean in terms of what is necessary in a jurisdiction that, according to statistics that I have been given, has a problem gambling prevalence of 2.3% of all adults in Northern Ireland. That equates to 30,000 to 40,000 adults in Northern Ireland today. The only figure produced in this report of people who have been helped is just 82 users at the Dunlewey Centre. There appears to be less than £1 provided for each person who is experiencing problem gambling.

The situation with gambling in Northern Ireland is nothing less than tragic—I do not think that that is too strong a word to use to describe the current situation. It highlights yet another reason why the Northern Ireland Executive need to return. I believe in devolution. I want Northern Irish politicians, alongside others, to solve this problem. I appreciate the huge difficulties between the parties in Northern Ireland, but what this report highlights once again is how real people are suffering owing to the lack of governance in place.

Northern Ireland, as I have said, has a high rate of gambling prevalence. It is possibly as much as four times higher than in England, but it has virtually non-existent support for individuals suffering from problem

gambling and legislation that is not fit for purpose. This has to change—real people and their families, particularly their children, are suffering because of this sorry situation which has been allowed to develop. I sincerely hope that the Northern Ireland parties can get the Executive back, so they can act in this matter as well as in so many others.

8.45 pm

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), who have both spoken with great knowledge and experience of this area through their work in the Chamber.

Whatever people's views about the purview of the reports and the appropriateness of talking about them within this particular piece of legislation, I think they have really shone a light on some situations in Northern Ireland that have shocked many people in the House. People who have worked in this area for some time have been asking some very valid questions on behalf of people and families in Northern Ireland, and that must be a good thing. We would also like the Assembly up and running to take this work and legislation forward. In an outpouring of unanimity around some of these issues, I agree with the Minister; the situation is clearly outdated and there is a real lack of specific services.

It is estimated that problem gambling in Northern Ireland may be up to four times that in England. That really is quite an extraordinary figure. It is really important to shine a light on that and to understand the real impact on individuals, families and communities. The other thing that has struck many of us who have looked at the report is the hard work addressing this issue will involve and the pressure on local authorities, which are already heavily overstretched. They try to do great work, but are they really in a position to be able to manage this level of workload on top of everything else? That needs to be taken into consideration.

The report repeatedly mentions the need for the Health and Social Care Board to provide mental health services, but those of us who spend time in Northern Ireland know that its ability to provide additional mental health services is compromised in an area that is already so heavily stretched and in a community where the demand for mental health services is so much greater than in Great Britain, owing to Northern Ireland's recent history. I would question the board's ability suitably to provide the services needed by individuals, families and—as the hon. Member for Congleton mentioned—children. We are only just beginning to understand the impact of addictive behaviours on children, and we really need to be able to have that learning read across from England, Scotland and Wales into Northern Ireland somehow, with or without the Assembly.

The reports we are discussing really highlight the need for—dare I say—some greater harmonisation with Great Britain in some areas where people's wellbeing is so starkly affected. I agree that the report we see today is limited in scope, but maybe the work will continue, given that the issue has now been so starkly highlighted. The system is obviously desperately in need of reform.

8.48 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Once again, we have to ask the question: where are they? The House is silent. There are hardly any Members here who called for these reports to be issued. The Labour Benches are not heaving with people ready to give us their weighty opinions on matters that they claimed to care about, such as gambling and problem issues in Northern Ireland. The Labour Benches are silent; the air is not pervaded with their wonderful views and wisdom. No, the House is silent—yet, those Members told us they wanted to ask numerous questions of the Government: to hold them to account for what they are doing in Northern Ireland. They wanted so much to legislate on these matters, but I cannot hear anything because their Benches, with the exception of one or two Members who have their own commitments to these issues, are empty. It is amazing, and my constituents are asking, “What conclusion are we to draw? Is it that they actually don't care?” That is a fair conclusion to draw if those Members want to legislate on these matters, and then, when we come to discuss the reports on them, they do not bother to turn up. One is left with the conclusion that they actually do not care.

Carolyn Harris *rose*—

Ian Paisley: Of course I will give way—to a Member who does care.

Carolyn Harris: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that I am here and I did speak up? It is a matter of record that I have a real interest in this, in any part of the United Kingdom—I am not invisible.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): We are dealing with section 4. I understand that, quite rightly, the point has been made and the hon. Gentleman has got it on the record, but I am sure that as the spokesperson for the DUP on gambling he desperately wants to get to the points that are relevant.

Ian Paisley: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Of course, as I have said, the hon. Lady—my hon. Friend—has a particular and well-known interest in this, but the Members who brought forward the legislation are not here, and I think that is a fair point to make. It is important for my constituents out there watching this event to understand who really cares about these issues, and to see that we are left to mop up the political issues that Members bring before us.

I am sorry to say to the Minister that this report on the Executive Formation Act and gambling is utterly irrelevant. It says that there is no work done in this area. In 2016, the Department of Health, and then the Department for Communities and Local Government, commissioned a report on the prevalence of gambling. They found that the levels of gambling in Northern Ireland were slightly higher—about 2% higher—than in England, about equal with Scotland, and slightly higher than in Wales. That is not mentioned in the report. It did not talk about those issues of prevalence. It was about setting down a measurement of where the issue of gambling rests. We should be targeting issues that it has identified, such as how we cope with problem gambling—the actual figures.

[*Ian Paisley*]

Facts are stubborn things. The facts were recorded by the Departments, and that should have been reflected in this report. I do not blame the Government for bringing forward an utterly irrelevant report. They were asked to commission a report in a fit of pique by some Members of this House, and now they have rushed into bringing forward a report that is irrelevant because it has not even dealt with some of the issues that exist.

The laws that pertain to gaming and gambling in Northern Ireland are already very different from those that obtain in the rest of the United Kingdom. Indeed, this matter, as Members across the House have rightly said, ought to be left to the Assembly unless we are prepared to introduce a root-and-branch change to all gaming and gambling legislation in Northern Ireland and make it identical to the rest the UK. Let us look at where things would then be different. For example, in English high streets we see four or five competing gambling companies running the same shops, neighbour to neighbour, on the same street, whereas in Northern Ireland we see maybe one gaming or gambling shop in a street, and then several streets away there might be another one.

I have heard Members of this House demanding that that sort of thing should happen in England. The fact is that it happens in Northern Ireland by agreement among the betting shop owners. There are, in effect, only about three major betting shop owners in Northern Ireland, and they have made that agreement among themselves. Yet that is not reflected in the report either. Would we like to import what has happened in Northern Ireland, which is a good thing, to the rest of the United Kingdom, or would we like to import what has happened in England and have numerous betting shops lined along street after street in Northern Ireland? I think that my constituents, and all my colleagues, would object to seeing their streets having loads of these shops. We do not have the prevalence of these shops that England has. We have no Sunday betting at all. In England, people can bet seven days a week. It is not possible to go into a betting shop in Northern Ireland on the Sabbath and bet; we have that restriction. Will we just import those regulations into Northern Ireland and change Northern Ireland's culture? That would be crazy.

Emma Little Pengelly: Although some aspects of the legislation in Northern Ireland are perhaps positive, many aspects require reform. Does my hon. Friend agree that, although there is no gambling in shops on Sundays, given the evolution of gambling—for example, online and through devices—the situation has moved on, but our laws have not, and we now need and are committed to bringing forward new, fit-for-purpose legislation?

Ian Paisley: Yes. I will come back to that point, because it is very important that we change the law in that way.

I turn to the matter of FOBTs. It has been said in the House tonight—wrongly—that people can walk into any gambling shop in Northern Ireland and place a £100 bet. They cannot. Betting on FOBTs is now the same by agreement in Northern Ireland as it is in England, with only up to a £2 stake. Whether we would

like to see that stopped altogether is a completely separate matter. The fact is that Northern Ireland's betting shops regulated themselves. They recognised that this was changing, and instead of waiting, as they could have, until the Northern Ireland Assembly came back and continuing to rake in the funds that FOBTs would have given them, they decided to self-regulate and impose that restriction themselves. It is therefore not possible for someone to walk into a betting shop and place those bets.

People can, however, walk into an illegal club and place bets on FOBTs. They can walk into a pub that should not have FOBTs and place those bets. Most of those pubs and clubs are run by paramilitary organisations, but is there any regulation or policing of those matters? I understand that when the betting shop owners ring up and report those illegal clubs, dens and vices, the police say, "That's too much hassle for us. That could cause major problems. We don't want to run into the paramilitaries on those particular issues." That is where the real problem lies, and that is where we should be focusing our attention and pushing to ensure that those illegal activities are stamped out.

The major contribution that betting shops make to horse-racing in particular in Northern Ireland is very different from how horse-racing is regulated here on the mainland. Horse-racing is regulated through a completely different system. The only reason we have a racetrack—one functioning racetrack—now in Northern Ireland is that betting shops have to pay a levy. Every single shop that exists in Northern Ireland has to pay, I think, £1,600 per year to the company that runs the racetrack. If we regulate betting in Northern Ireland in the same way it is regulated in the rest of the United Kingdom, racing will come to an end in Northern Ireland. That is a fact of life. As the betting shops will tell you, people bet more on athletics, football and other things than they do on horse-racing. The betting shops subsidise the horse-racing industry in Northern Ireland, and that would go.

Those are the facts. People can make their own judgment on whether that is a good thing, but those matters need to be addressed, and they are not addressed through this report. If we bring things into line with the rest of the United Kingdom, those would be the impacts. The big issue is illegal gambling. That has to be addressed, and the sooner it is addressed, the better.

My hon. Friend the Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) put her finger on the key point: we have a largely unregulated industry. It is done by voluntary agreement. It is run by 35-year-old legislation. That is completely and totally unacceptable, and it needs to be brought up to date. But there is only one place competent to bring it up to date. It is not this Chamber—look who is interested. Let us not kid ourselves. It is the Northern Ireland Assembly. That is why the Opposition Members who pressed the Government to legislate should have realised how big a mess they were creating, because they are not addressing the real issue. That 1985 legislation is so antiquated that only the Assembly is fit to grapple with it.

That is why we would like the Assembly to be encouraged. That is why I encourage the Minister, as I did in an earlier debate in the House, to call a meeting of the Assembly tomorrow at 10 am and see who turns up. My party will turn up in total and other parties will turn up,

but I bet that not one Member from Sinn Féin will turn up, because they have the Government and this House over the barrel. They do not have to turn up, and that is where the real disgrace lies.

Nationally, as my hon. Friend intimated, the issue is online gaming. Someone drunk can pick up a phone and gamble away to their heart's content. They can lose their wage by playing with one of these toys or a gaming machine all night. Someone drunk cannot go into a betting shop and cannot be served alcohol in a betting shop, but they can drink away and play on a phone. Where does the money go when they play on this? It goes to Spain and other parts of the world, and the Government reap no benefit from it whatsoever. Unless the Government grapple with this issue, the companies that run online gaming are going to make the most out of gambling, and the taxpayer and the tax collector are going to receive zero.

The report touches on one other absolutely crucial matter, which is that there is no support for people who require treatment. The hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) touched on that. It is a disgrace that there is no assistance. The Government are quite happy to lift the levy from betting shops, but put that levy elsewhere. That money should go towards the treatment of people who are problem-gambling. I will leave those thoughts with you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

9.1 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I, too, thank the Members here for making the effort to be present. The hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) is always here when a debate on gambling is taking place, and the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) never misses an occasion to comment on these issues. The fact that there may not be as many here tonight does not mean that it is of any less interest to the people in this House. It is important to put that on the record. Those of us who are here are here for a purpose, and we are here to have our voice heard.

I am very grateful for the report on gambling, which has been produced under section 3(11) of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act. The report proves to be a sobering read about the state of the law on gambling, and the support provided for those suffering from gambling addiction.

I have had the pleasure of being with Peter and Sadie Keogh, who are working with a newly formed charity, Gambling with Lives. They were in Westminster earlier this year. I have known them for some time, and I have met them in my office. They are not my constituents; both Pete and Sadie are from Fermanagh in Northern Ireland. Their son Lewis tragically took his own life after a battle with gambling addiction. Therefore, their story is of critical importance. Their experience really brought home to me the dreadful reality of gambling addiction: the damage it can do to individuals and families. They have become diligent campaigners on this issue, seeking to help to ensure that others do not go through the experience they, sadly, went through.

Emma Little Pengelly: I had the pleasure to attend that event to raise awareness. Does my hon. Friend agree that what was really striking was what a slippery slope there is? It very often started with very young people getting access inappropriately to these sites—it

is a bit of fun to put £1 on here and £2 on there—and it really consumed their lives and ended up taking their lives in the most tragic of circumstances. Does my hon. Friend agree that we also need to look at how we protect young people with access to social media and the internet—virtually without regulation—from being sucked into these types of initiative?

Jim Shannon: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, and I full-heartedly agree with what she says. I think there is no one in this House who would disagree with it, including the Minister.

Mr Robin Walker *indicated assent.*

Jim Shannon: The Minister agrees very clearly that those issues also need to be dealt with.

People cannot read the report and not realise that we have a significant problem in this area in Northern Ireland, but the past is the past, and there have been various reasons why gambling legislation and the policy have not been updated. We are where we are, and it is evident to me that change is badly needed.

According to the research published in 2017 by the Department for Communities, Northern Ireland has the highest problem gambling prevalence rate in the United Kingdom: 2.3% of the adults surveyed were deemed to be problem gamblers. This equates to some 30,000 to 40,000 adults in Northern Ireland, and it is proportionally over four times the rate in England, which at the time stood at 0.5%. As the Minister in the other place put it, the situation with problem gambling in Northern Ireland is “extraordinary”. What an understatement that word is when we look at the magnitude of the addiction.

I understand that we have no data on the number of children and young people who are addicted to gambling in Northern Ireland, but according to CARE—Christian Action Research and Education—if the figure is equivalent to what it is in Great Britain, according to Gambling Commission research, it would equate to about 2,360 children—the very point mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly). Again, facts are facts. Northern Ireland is in a serious place, and that cannot be ignored. Each of those individuals matters. Those adults and young people have families, and they come from the different communities in Northern Ireland. Gambling addiction can wreak havoc on their lives at enormous cost. Despite the significant problem we have, we discover that no figures are collected by the Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Board on the number of individuals seeking help for problem gambling. Only one health and social care trust, the Southern Trust, collects data on the numbers seeking help in its area. Maybe it is time that other trusts did the same.

In addition, England has 14 NHS clinics for adults and children suffering from problem gambling, but Northern Ireland does not have even one. It is time that that was addressed. The Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Board does not commission any gambling addiction-specific services. It should, indeed must, because of the addiction levels in Northern Ireland, and perhaps the Minister could respond on that point.

In addition to the dearth of support coming from the agencies of the state in Northern Ireland, we also discover from the report that the Northern Ireland Turf

[Jim Shannon]

Guardians Association provides only £24,000 in support to Dunlewey, which provides support for individuals suffering from problem gambling. That strikes me as a very low figure considering the enormous profits being made by the gambling industry. It is time to shake the sector's tree and get the gambling industry's hands out of its pockets.

I was very glad to hear that five of the biggest gambling operators in the UK have committed to providing £100 million over four years to support individuals suffering from problem gambling and for research in this area. I welcome those steps, which are good news, but I would like to ask the Minister several questions. I gave his parliamentary private secretary a copy of my questions in advance. I do not expect the Minister to have all the answers to hand, but I would like responses to my questions at some point in the future. Considering the fact that a number of those operators provide services in Northern Ireland, will any of that money come to us? We should have the benefit of it, because from what we read in the report it could really help to make a difference.

I had the privilege of playing a role in seeing an option for online gamblers to have a one-stop shop for exclusion from all gambling websites, through the new GamStop service. We debated the need for that five years ago during the passage of the Gambling (Licensing and Advertising) Act 2014. Given the increasing importance of the online gambling sector, now nearly 40% of the market, the need has become more acute. The Gambling Commission said that GamStop would be in place by spring of 2018. Some 18 months later, it is not yet fully launched. I am never critical of the Minister, as he knows, but I have to ask him what is going on. Despite reports last week suggesting that the roll-out of the scheme across the UK, with all gambling companies being required to sign up to GamStop, would take place in a matter of days, a Gambling Commission spokesman subsequently suggested that that reporting was inaccurate. Some clarity is needed on whether it is in place, when it will be in place and when it will be in action. I understand that as of last Friday over 97,000 people had signed up.

I commend the work of GamStop and the fact that it will be available in Northern Ireland. I hope that the Minister will indulge me in asking a series of questions. Can he tell us when GamStop is expected to be launched nationally? How will GamStop keep track of whether people in Northern Ireland sign up and whether the numbers are in line with expectations? If not, is it not time to set targets? How will people in Northern Ireland be informed of GamStop when it is finally launched?

That brings me to the concerning lack of regulation for online gambling in Northern Ireland. At the time of the 1985 order, the internet did not exist. Today, most of us cannot imagine life without the internet, but the regulatory framework in Northern Ireland completely ignores it. It is unbelievable that, as online gambling has come in, we have not moved on and responded to what is happening in modern society. That does not mean that online gambling is unavailable—far from it—but it means that it is available without regulation of any sort, and that worries me greatly.

The exception is section 5 of the Gambling (Licensing and Advertising) Act 2014, which makes it an offence to advertise unlicensed remote gambling in Northern Ireland.

That means that only an organisation that holds a remote gambling licence with the GB Gambling Commission can advertise in Northern Ireland without committing an offence. We were told that:

“As a result, consumers here can be assured that they will continue to have the same protection as consumers in GB from the advertising of remote gambling.”

I hope the Minister will be able to assure us that section 5 has been effective and that there are no unlicensed operators advertising in Northern Ireland. I hope he can respond positively and, if not, I know that he will respond with the truth, as he always does. I appreciate that.

Could the Minister please tell the House how many times section 5 has been used against unlicensed remote operators? Again, I would be interested to know whether it has ever been used at all; I would certainly like to think that it has. The reassurance given previously related only to protections on advertising, but, given the lack of regulation in Northern Ireland, is anybody checking? If they are not, they should be. Tell us, Minister, who is going to check it? Who is going to make sure it is happening? Does the Gambling Commission review whether the advertising protections are the same as for consumers in the rest of the UK? Are we in Northern Ireland following those on the mainland? Maybe we are not. Maybe the Minister can tell us where we are.

It is not clear whether those licensed operators who legally advertise in Northern Ireland consider that they have any responsibilities to the people of Northern Ireland or whether they are required to provide all the responsible gambling protections to Northern Ireland gamblers that they are required to provide to gamblers in other parts of GB under the Gambling Commission's licence conditions. Are there two rules? What is happening?

For instance, in the rest of GB operators need to conduct age verification of anyone wanting to gamble, and are required to promote self-exclusion and to have policies and procedures for customer interaction where an operator has concerns that a customer's behaviour might indicate problem gambling, as they should.

Emma Little Pengelly: Does my hon. Friend agree that this is at the heart of the difficulty in Northern Ireland, particularly for young people? These online websites advertise around sport, which many young people watch, but if they do not carry out that verification or do what they are obliged to do in Great Britain in Northern Ireland, there is no mechanism to investigate that breach. The Gambling Commission has no remit in Northern Ireland, and, as far as I can ascertain, there is no body to investigate any breaches of those regulations.

Jim Shannon: I thank my hon. Friend and colleague for that intervention. I believe that that is the case, which is why we are looking to the Minister to see what we are going to do about it. If we do not have the legislation in Northern Ireland that we should, as the hon. Members for Swansea East and for Congleton want and, I believe, every person in this House wants, let us get it in order.

The gambling report we are discussing today cites Northern Ireland industry groups “implementing social responsibility measures” and “adhering to industry codes of practice and protocols”

to protect people who might be experiencing problem gambling. Again, that is a commitment in words if not in deed.

I have five questions for the Minister, and I have asked him some already. Will the Minister clarify whether these are voluntary measures for the industry, which would at the minimum be welcome, or, where we are talking about online gambling, they are a requirement of a Gambling Commission remote operating licence? If it is only the former, I would be grateful if he can be clear about the protections that Northern Ireland online gamblers receive as a result of section 5. What redress do individuals have if they feel they have been mistreated by the online betting companies but live in Northern Ireland? If there are player protections for online gamblers in Northern Ireland under the licensing conditions, are these clear to individuals who may need them? It is important that these questions are asked, and I ask them respectfully of the Minister. My constituents have asked me them, and they see possible legislation that does not do what it should or go as far as it should, as my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast South mentioned.

Much needs to be done to bring Northern Ireland legislation into the 21st century. Bring it forward from 1985—wow!—to today. I welcome the news reported in today's *Belfast Telegraph* that the Department for Communities is planning to hold a fresh consultation on gambling law and policy in the near future. I wish the near future was this week or next month—this cannot happen soon enough. I should like to hear greater detail of what the Minister in the other place described as a “high-level strategic review”. What does that mean? Both steps are helpful. Where there is good work done, let us welcome it, and where there is other work that needs to be done, let us ask for it. Of course, we need a Minister in place to execute policy change.

I hope that the Executive and the Assembly will get back up and running, so that they can tackle this important issue. Consumers need to be clear about the law and the help and support they can receive in their communities from betting companies. Whenever I think of Peter and Sadie Keogh from Fermanagh, their lost son and the many others like them, I think we need legislation not tomorrow but today. Although it will not bring the Keoghs' son back, they and others like them are very worried about gambling in Northern Ireland. Hopefully, I have given the Minister much food for thought and many questions to answer. I know that he is well up to answering those questions. The people of Northern Ireland want to see gambling legislation in place that actually works and controls the online gambling that we are all really concerned about. It cannot happen soon enough.

9.16 pm

Mr Robin Walker: We have heard a range of views in the debate, but I think that everyone has been saying one thing: we want the devolved responsibilities to be fulfilled properly by a devolved Assembly and Administration, and we want Northern Ireland's legislation to be properly updated. I have listened to the considered views expressed by the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and a number of Northern Ireland Members, all of whom have reached that conclusion.

We can welcome some small steps taken to regulate online gambling more effectively, such as the Gambling (Licensing and Advertising) Act 2014, but I note the concern expressed by the hon. Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) about the enforcement of that legislation. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) asked myriad questions about steps being taken and enforcement, and I am of course happy to write to him with as many responses as I can give, but not all the answers necessarily lie within the remit of the Northern Ireland Office today; we will need to consult colleagues in other Departments and in the Northern Ireland civil service. He mentioned the work being undertaken by the Department for Communities, which is indeed welcome, but of course the fact remains that the last ministerial decision taken in the Executive was to not go ahead with legislation, so under the terms of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Act 2019, it is difficult to see how civil servants could do much further work on legislation.

It comes back to what the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) was saying: we want these issues to be decided in a Northern Ireland Assembly by a restored Executive. There are important issues to be dealt with. The hon. Gentleman voiced concern about paramilitary clubs and pubs running fixed odds betting terminals. Any evidence of that should be reported to the PSNI. The Department for Communities says it has no evidence of FOBTs in either pubs or clubs, but if that is a concern, clearly it should be taken up with the police.

A number of hon. Members mentioned the welcome announcement of 14 gambling clinics in England. Health is a devolved matter in Northern Ireland, and with the extra money going into the NHS and the Barnett consequential of that, investment in these areas is possible, but I recognise from the debates in the other place the strong feelings about existing pressures in the health system in Northern Ireland. Progress could be made on all these matters by a restored Executive and Assembly, and we want to see them in place as soon as possible.

Ian Paisley: The Minister is making some very relevant points. He was to be in Northern Ireland last week for a walkabout—I was looking forward to welcoming him to Ballymena. I would encourage him on his next visit to Northern Ireland to speak to the police and for them to arrange for him to have an overview of where these illegal activities take place. I would not encourage him to visit those locations—he might be able to walk in, but walking out may be a problem—but I would encourage him to talk to the police about those places and to see and hear for himself the problems that exist.

Mr Walker: I am very happy to take the hon. Gentleman up on that invitation. I was disappointed not to be able to be in his constituency last week, but I look forward to future visits. We have reached a clear conclusion: people would like to see action taken on these issues by a restored Assembly and Executive. We will ensure that all steps are taken to put that Assembly and Executive in place as soon as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of and approves the Report pursuant to Section 3(11) of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 - Gambling, which was laid before this House on Wednesday 4 September.

Maraviroc and Progressive Multifocal Leukoencephalopathy

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Mr Marcus Jones.)

9.20 pm

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): I am glad to be able to discuss an issue that I have been working on closely with my constituent, Ms Amarjit Rai. This is an urgent matter and I believe it is important to put this issue on public record and to seek greater flexibility in NHS policy on the commissioning of the drug Maraviroc to treat Natalizumab-induced progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy, and in NHS England's approach to individual funding requests. I thank Amarjit, her advocate, Kartik, her consultants and Mary Jo Bishop and Neha Soni in my office, as well as the House of Commons Library, for their assistance with this debate.

In my work on this case, I have been struck by parallels with the campaigns by the late Dame Tessa Jowell on the more experimental use of drugs for very rare conditions, for which there will never be the sample sizes in one country, or potentially across the world, for a full clinical trial, but for which the anecdotal evidence is positive and the patient voice should be heard. Some of my contribution today will be slightly technical, but I hope it will be clear.

Ms Rai was sadly diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 2013 aged 34. She was prescribed Natalizumab, but sadly as a consequence she contracted PML, a highly rare and often fatal viral disease that affects only a handful of people across the UK. She has since been rendered disabled with no functional use of her right arm. She has other debilitating effects. PML affects the brain by damaging the nerves. The symptoms include muscle weakness, visual disturbance, impaired speech and cognitive difficulty.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady for bringing this matter to the House. Does she agree that the treatment of this often fatal viral infection of the brain must be focused on survival rates and that, given that survival rates are better with Maraviroc, it must be available where clinically determined? If it is key to making lives better and halting this disease, we must do everything we can to make it available.

Seema Malhotra: The hon. Gentleman makes a point that I will come on to about how the decisions need to be made on the medical evidence and with the voice of the consultants being clearly heard by those making the decisions.

There is no cure for this condition, but two years ago my consultant's neurologist advised that Maraviroc had had a positive effect on patients suffering from PML in relation to her condition, immune reconstitution inflammatory syndrome in multiple sclerosis. An individual funding request was submitted by my constituent's consultant, national expert Professor Ciccarelli at the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery. The application was refused and a subsequent appeal was also unsuccessful—this process went on through

2017 and 2018—seemingly on the same basis as was given to me in writing in October by NHS England, which was that the

“use of Maraviroc for this condition is currently seen as experimental as the current evidence is limited to very small observational studies. NHS England has concluded that there is not sufficient evidence to support the routine commissioning of this treatment for the indications listed.”

The effect on Amarjit was heartbreaking. I met Amarjit and her friend and advocate Kartik. She had a wheelchair and a walking stick, and even the most basic activities were a struggle. She had decided to fund the drug privately from her savings. Maraviroc had remarkable results for her—importantly, that was also the opinion of her consultants—without any side effects. Other treatments that the NHS had sought to prescribe, such as MRIs and monthly steroids, were not just neutral but net negative. Amarjit and Kartik explained the impact that Maraviroc had had on Amarjit's health and quality of life. I was just staggered when she told me:

“I can talk. I can walk. I can go to the bathroom on my own”—

things that we take for granted. Clinically, the PML lesion appeared inactive and there was a reduction in the inflammation around her brain.

The drug costs around £480 a month, but by the end of June this year Ms Rai could no longer afford to pay for it herself, so she has since been without it. Although her health has been stable so far, such is the condition that it could dramatically change at any time.

Aside from the issue of funding, I have been surprised over the past year by inconsistencies in NHS policy and advice. We all believe in an NHS that is free at the point of need. This is a situation where the patient, leading neurologists and all involved in her care agree that she should have the drug. In November 2018, consultant neurologist Dr Michael Gross, who was also supporting Amarjit's care as an expert advocate, wrote to Kartik:

“Thank you for confirming further information about Amarjit Rai... Professors Johnson and Ciccarelli agree that this is the appropriate treatment for Amarjit. Long term steroids have already generated severe osteoporosis in 2016 and are not her choice.

You will have already proved in what is an N=1 trial that her treatment would appear to be effective. There will almost certainly never be the size of trials in this rare disorder that would allow a definitive statement by a funding organisation.

I think we have to ask who is making the decision, given that there are now three senior consultants confirming this is the right decision... Quite frankly I am appalled by the lack of humanity that is being demonstrated here.”

In November 2018 I wrote again to the Minister. I received a response from Lord O'Shaughnessy in the other place, who helpfully said the following:

“Maraviroc is not licenced for the treatment of symptoms of PML. There are clinical situations when the use of unlicensed medicines or use of medicines outside the terms of the licence, known as off-label, may be judged by the prescriber to be in the best interest of the patient on the basis of available evidence. The responsibility for that falls on healthcare professionals.”

Sadly, this made no difference.

Following the lack of progress, I wrote again to the Secretary of State in March 2019. I quoted the helpful response that I had received from Lord O'Shaughnessy. The Health Minister in the other place, Baroness Blackwood, responded in May and referred again to the

individual funding request process. She stated that the IFR can be considered only if the patient can be demonstrated to be clinically exceptional. She said that “an IFR can only be considered if the patient can be demonstrated to be clinically exceptional compared to the wider group of patients and is likely to derive greater benefit from the treatment.”

At face value, all of this would appear to be true for my constituent, but the use of Maraviroc is an area where policy appears to be in some confusion.

In response to a parliamentary question I asked in July about the assessment that NHS England has made of the availability of Maraviroc to patients with PML, a third Health Minister, the hon. Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy), wrote:

“We are informed by NHS England and NHS Improvement that it does not commission Maraviroc for progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy... NHS England and NHS Improvement have published a do not commission policy for ‘Natalizumab-induced progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy in relation to immune reconstitution inflammatory syndrome in multiple sclerosis.’”

That response seems to contradict earlier responses and advice. First, “does not routinely commission” is different from “does not commission”. Secondly, it made no reference to the IFR process, which two Ministers had previously mentioned.

I tabled a further parliamentary question last week to ask what assessment the Secretary of State had made of the effectiveness of Maraviroc in patients with PML. A fourth Health Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Ms Dorries), responded to my question. The response I received today was mind-boggling:

“Maraviroc is currently authorised for the treatment of patients who are infected with HIV type 1. The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency which is responsible for the regulation of medicines in the UK is not aware of any application for use in patients with PML and therefore cannot comment on the efficacy of this drug in patients with PML.”

It might be helpful if I highlight for the Minister findings from wider medical journals that the House of Commons Library has helped me to compile. In December 2016, the American Academy of Neurology published an article entitled “Severe early natalizumab-associated PML in MS: Effective control of PML-IRIS with maraviroc”. A summary of a case involving a 55-year-old Caucasian HIV-negative man diagnosed with relapsing, remitting MS in 2013 shows that that led to a subsequent diagnosis of PML. Clinically, the patient deteriorated rapidly, according to the article. Oral Maraviroc was initiated six days after his admission. Eight days after Maraviroc initiation, MRI follow-up revealed stable PML lesion size. Over the following weeks, the patient improved continuously. After 25 weeks of Maraviroc treatment, the John Cunningham virus DNA was no longer detectable. Maraviroc was continued and well tolerated at a stable dose. The patient survived both PML and IRIS.

A subsequent article was published by the American Academy of Neurology entitled “Maraviroc as possible treatment for PML-IRIS in natalizumab-treated patients with MS” in December 2016. It cited a 34-year-old man treated with Natalizumab for three years without previous immuno-suppression. After a period of time, the patient was admitted with seizures, headaches, and impaired memory, and an MRI scan subsequently confirmed PML. Twelve months after diagnosis with PML and

six months after the start of Maraviroc, PML-IRIS lesions were resolved, and no new MS disease activity was detectable.

An article in 2017 by Steiner and Benninger published by the American Academy of Neurology built the medical explanation for why Maraviroc had been effective in cases of PML in MS sufferers. In summary, the condition for which the cause is believed to be the John Cunningham virus, which infects the central nervous system in patients with low immune conditions, became more prevalent and was observed in around 5% of patients with HIV prior to the availability of highly active antiretroviral therapy, or HAART. The article goes on to describe how the era of

“monoclonal antibodies for immune-mediated conditions such as Natalizumab for MS and Crohn disease heralded another context for PML. As of November 2016, there have been 698 reported cases of PML under natalizumab.”

The research goes on, and it is true that some research such as that published in *The Journal of the Neurological Sciences* in July 2017 confirms that it does not work in all circumstances, and steroids may be more effective in some patients. However, an article in *Neurology Times* in January 2018 states that in PML treatment options are limited. Maraviroc has been used successfully in some PML patients to avoid IRIS, although not all patients respond to Maraviroc. It recommends further research and testing in identifying patients at risk of IRIS and tailoring treatments accordingly.

In that context, let me make reference to the urgent clinical commissioning policy statement on Natalizumab-induced PML, which was published by NHS England in March 2018. It said:

“It has been assessed that the development of a full policy is not needed at this time as there is currently little evidence into its effectiveness for this indication”.

I do not believe that that policy statement takes account of all the research available or indeed that which has appeared subsequent to its publication. The research is more nuanced, the medical benefits for my constituent are undeniably clear, and the denial of funding is inexplicable to her and renowned experts in the country.

Maraviroc, or Celsentri, as defined by the European Medicines Agency—formerly in London, it is now based elsewhere in the European Union—is a medicine that is routinely prescribed for HIV. Although it does not cure HIV infection or AIDS, it may hold off the damage to the immune system and the development of other infections and diseases.

Medical research has identified that the JCV most associated with HIV patients with low immunity has found another context in patients with PML. My constituent’s condition is incredibly rare, affecting, potentially, 10 or fewer people in the country. Given that very few options are available, she is not the only patient for whom, in anecdotal studies, the drug Maraviroc has shown remarkable results. With no other options available, my very ill constituent has been paying £500 a month privately for the past year to fund Maraviroc herself, but she can no longer afford to do so. Amarjit’s consultant neurologist and other specialists support her receiving the treatment. There is an irony in the fact that more is potentially being spent by the NHS in a month on treatment and tests that do not benefit her as much, and have damaging side-effects. The IFR system in

[*Seema Malhotra*]

the NHS should be able to review and respond to that situation on the basis of medical need, and I cannot see how that has been done in this case.

Will the Minister tell me how her Department liaises with and challenges NHS England on cases such as this, and how well-researched the Department's responses to me have been? Will she tell me with what medical advice the treatment has been refused, although three of the leading experts in the country support it in this rare case, and whether their advice can be shared with my constituent and her consultant, Professor Ciccarelli? Will she also agree to a meeting with me, my constituent and her consultant, and a senior member from NHS England to discuss the IFR process?

This is a matter of £500 a month, and of demonstrable medical benefits to my constituent. I should be grateful for the Minister's response, and her advice on how we can move forward.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): I welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box. I believe that this is her first outing. She is obviously held in high esteem, given that so many Whips are present at once.

9.37 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill): I thank the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (*Seema Malhotra*) for raising this matter in the House, and for the comprehensive and sensitive way in which she has set out problems that will certainly be well recognised by many patients—not only her constituent, but people throughout the rare disease community. A number of the issues that she has raised affect what are often very small cohorts trying to put their case for particular drugs.

As we have heard from the hon. Lady, progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy is a terrible disease which can have devastating effects on patients whose immune systems are already impaired, often as a result of taking medicines. Maraviroc is an antiretroviral drug approved by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency for the treatment of HIV. In this case, the hon. Lady's constituent, who unfortunately has multiple sclerosis, has been paying privately for the drug, which I understand she feels has a positive effect on her condition.

The use of Maraviroc for people with MS is "off-label". Medicines sold and supplied in the UK must, rightly, have a licence, which specifies the medical conditions that they are approved to treat, and also specifies the recommended doses, contra-indications, and special warnings as specified by the MHRA. All that is intended to ensure the safety of the patient. Off-label use, as I am sure the hon. Lady is aware, describes that situation where the licensed medicine is used for an indication other than that for which it is licensed originally. However, as she said, a decision to use a medicine off-label is one for the individual clinician. In each case, it is for that professional to make that decision if they think the treatment is appropriate for a patient and they are satisfied that there is robust evidence to support their prescribing decision.

As the drug in question is a licensed medicine for the treatment of HIV, not PML, it has not been fully tested with PML patients in clinical trials. Therefore, it has not been approved as safe and effective. Crucially, it is

important to note that the use of this drug to treat Natalizumab-induced PML currently has an evidence base limited to small observational studies where no conclusive evidence of patient benefit was found. However, I fully appreciate that it is a real challenge to establish a clinical evidence base when the patient population is so small.

In fact, as the hon. Lady mentioned, NHS England and NHS Improvement were asked in 2018 to develop a commissioning policy on the use of Maraviroc for the treatment of Natalizumab-induced PML. They concluded, however, that there was insufficient evidence of benefit and advised against routine commissioning. Maraviroc is not currently appraised or recommended by national bodies for the treatment of PML, because there is a lack of evidence of effectiveness and a lack of any evidence-based clinical support in the treatment of PML. NHS England has therefore concluded that there is not sufficient evidence to support the routine commissioning of the drug—a conclusion that clinical commissioning groups are minded to follow. Of course, that position would be reviewed should further evidence become available.

Despite Maraviroc not being routinely commissioned by the NHS, it remains possible for patients to access the drug through the individual funding request, which, as the hon. Lady has said, her constituent did. An independent panel would have considered the circumstances of the request before making a decision. In this case I understand that the IFR was rejected, which I know would have been upsetting for the hon. Lady's constituent. Following the outcome of the IFR, the reasons for the decision would, I am sure, have been explained to her constituent. If not, I urge the hon. Lady to ensure that they are explained in full.

Seema Malhotra: I understand that this is a technical matter in some respects, but I am a little surprised that I have not heard the Minister say anything new compared with the responses I have received to parliamentary questions. I have laid out the evidence and shown that there are nuances. In the case of my constituent, the medical benefits have been clear. I am surprised that the IFR was denied, including subsequently on appeal, and, given that I have laid out the evidence, that the Minister is not in a position to give advice on how we can move forward so that we do not keep going around in circles.

Jo Churchill: I think that part of the confusion has come from the fact that the NHSE advice not to commission is different from the independent funding route process. Clinicians can always apply for IFR funding in exceptional circumstances. The MHRA parliamentary question was about availability. One offer I can make is that we will try to unpick those four answers and to understand a little more in the round how we can be of assistance and give the hon. Lady's constituent clarity, if nothing else.

Seema Malhotra: The Minister is very generous in giving way. Rather than restating the policy, will she support the request for the medical advice that was the reason for the treatment and funding being refused? There must have been some medical input into the decision made by the panel at NHS England. Will she also be able to meet me to review the process and what my constituent has been through? Clearly my constituent

is in a very rare circumstance—she is possibly one of fewer than 10 people in the country—but surely we are able to work a bit faster and with more agility in a situation where, in a sense, the patient and the experts in the field should be leading.

Jo Churchill: I am, of course, happy to meet the hon. Lady, but we must be led by clinicians. As she says, her constituent has been supported by her clinicians, and it is up to them to make clinical judgments and to put the case for the best course of treatment in each particular case. The first thing to do is to seek clarification on where we know we are going, and hopefully we can move forward from there.

As the hon. Lady says, the PML group is around 10 in number, so getting robust evidence is obviously a challenge—that is all part and parcel of the issue. As she knows, another challenge is that the Department of Health and Social Care does not have direct responsibility for what is routinely commissioned. Instead, it is the responsibility of NHS England, NHS Improvement and the CCGs. Faced with an unprecedented level of demand for services, all those involved have to make difficult decisions about commissioning cost-effective care on a daily basis. They make those decisions based on patient need and clinical evidence, which I acknowledge can feel very cyclical for the rare disease community.

Seema Malhotra: Does the Minister agree it is slightly more problematic in this case, because the cost of Maraviroc is arguably a bit less than the MRI scans and the steroids every month that the NHS would otherwise prescribe or suggest to my constituent? The negative health impact of that treatment should also be taken into account.

Jo Churchill: I thank the hon. Lady, but I return to the fact that it is a judgment for clinicians to make; it is not one for me to make at the Dispatch Box.

My colleague Baroness Blackwood rightly said this summer that we need a national conversation on rare diseases to identify the big areas on which we need to

focus so that we can offer the best possible care for rare disease patients and their families, who are often affected by what their loved ones are going through. I could not agree more so, starting this autumn, we will be engaging with patients, researchers and clinicians to gather evidence and identify the major challenges faced in this field.

Jim Shannon: I am pleased to see the Minister in her place. I offer her congratulations; it is well deserved.

Will money be set aside at the end of the consultation to address the medicines that are needed for those rare diseases? If money is not set aside, it will not go anywhere.

Jo Churchill: I am not in a position to say. Although each cohort is small, the overall rare disease community is large. That is why such debates make an important contribution to the broader conversation. I am grateful for how they raise awareness of the rare disease community, which comprises some 3.5 million people in this country.

Seema Malhotra: I will make this my last intervention. I just want to welcome the work that will be done in respect of the rare disease community. May I add to the comments in this House in welcoming the Minister to her place? I know that her experience will be extremely valuable in the work that she does in the Department.

Jo Churchill: I thank the hon. Lady sincerely for that and for speaking so passionately here today about the situation on behalf of her constituent. I know that her constituent may not feel that this is the answer that she wanted, but I cannot emphasise enough the positive effect of bringing this issue to the Chamber. Not only will it raise awareness, to help inform Government strategy, but it will support others in the rare disease community. As the hon. Lady said, allowing their voice to be heard is what is important here.

Question put and agreed to.

9.50 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 30 September 2019

TREASURY

ECOFIN

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Sajid Javid): An informal meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) was held in Helsinki on 13-14 September 2019. The following was discussed:

Working Lunch

Enhanced Action on Climate Change

Ministers discussed how to move climate action forward in the policy areas relevant for finance Ministries.

Ministers were then joined by central bank governors for the first working session.

Working Session I

Resilience of Financial Market Infrastructure

Ministers and central bank governors discussed the resilience of financial market infrastructure and the role of the financial sector in countering hybrid threats.

Capital Markets Union

Ministers and central bank governors then discussed the priorities in the field of the Capital Markets Union for the next institutional cycle.

Working Session II

EU Fiscal Rules

Ministers discussed the functioning of the current set of EU fiscal rules with the aim of providing input into the European Commission's review of the EU fiscal framework, due in late 2019.

Energy Taxation

Ministers then discussed the present and possible future role of energy taxation in mitigating climate change, based on experiences at national and EU level.

[HCWS1836]

Guarantee of EU-funded Programmes

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Rishi Sunak): Today the Treasury is confirming that £4.3 billion of funding will be allocated to Departments and the devolved Administrations for the financial year 2019-20 to deliver the HMG guarantee of EU-funded programmes, with a total of around £16.6 billion expected to be allocated over the lifetime of the guarantee.

Leaving the EU on 31 October with a deal which works for the whole of the UK remains the Government's top priority.

However, the Government are continuing with no-deal preparations to ensure the country is prepared for every eventuality. It is the responsible thing to do and an important part of this process is giving certainty to UK citizens and organisations.

To provide this certainty, and as previously announced in the written statement of 24 July 2018 (HCWS926), the Government have guaranteed certain EU funding. The guarantee covers the following:

the full multiannual financial framework allocation for structural and investment funds over the 2014-20 funding period, with payments to beneficiaries made up to the end of 2023;

the payment of awards where UK organisations—such as charities, businesses and universities—successfully bid directly to the European Commission on a competitive basis while we remain in the EU (e.g. before exit day), for the lifetime of the project;

the payment of awards where UK organisations successfully bid to the European Commission on a competitive basis to participate as a third country after exit, and until the end of 2020, for the lifetime of the project; and

the current level of agricultural funding under CAP pillar 1 until 31 December 2020.

[HCWS1834]

EDUCATION

Education Update

The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson): Education is key in creating a productive economy as well as maximising the opportunities for future generations. It is vital we are supporting the right mix of skills and delivering for all young people so that they can reach their potential, regardless of their background.

The Government recently announced an additional £400 million investment in the provision for 16 to 19-year-olds. Building on this investment, today I have set out a series of measures to ensure we have the opportunities and infrastructure in place to offer a world-class education to everyone—so that more young people are supported to reach the level of qualification needed to access skilled employment.

We are making good progress in boosting higher-level technical qualifications through our institutes of technology. Twelve institutes are already being established across the country—backed by £170 million of Government investment—to provide employers with the skilled workforce they need to drive growth and productivity across the country and get more people into rewarding jobs. To build on this, the Government will make available up to £120 million to enable every region in England to establish a high-quality institute of technology. We will launch a second competition with the aim of establishing up to eight more institutes in areas of the country that do not currently have access to one.

To continue driving up standards and support more disadvantaged young people aged 16 to 19 to study maths, we will open a network of 11 maths free schools across every region of the country, including a new maths free school in the north-east through a partnership between Durham University and Durham Sixth-Form College. Maths schools offer A-levels in maths, further maths and physics in partnership with top universities—helping young people, whatever their background, to fulfil their potential by learning from the best mathematicians.

Apprenticeships and technical education play a huge role in driving productivity and ensuring our country has the skills it needs. Today I have set out an ambition to boost further education over the next decade with an aim to overtake Germany in the opportunities we offer to those studying technical routes by 2029.

As we improve our offer of technical education, it will be important that we remain focused on the right skill mix for the economy. We will establish a new skills and productivity board to provide the Secretary of State with expert advice on how to ensure the courses and qualifications on offer to students are high-quality and aligned to the skills that employers need for the future.

[HCWS1837]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Labour Market Update

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Dr Thérèse Coffey): Latest data released in September shows UK employment has increased by 3.7 million since 2010. Around three-quarters of that increase in employment has come from full-time, permanent and higher-skilled roles. Youth unemployment has also halved since 2010, meaning more young people are in work and the number of children growing up in in workless households is at an all-time low.

It is important that we continue to build on this progress so I am introducing a £4 million package, including two new initiatives, to help disadvantaged young people into work and use mobile technology to help jobseekers into higher-paid jobs.

Additional funding of up to £1.2 million will provide extra support in Manchester and the west midlands, ensuring extra time and resources for young people facing the biggest hurdles to getting a job, like care leavers and young offenders.

Since 2018 the Department for Work and Pensions has worked with the West Midlands Combined Authority to develop the youth employability coaches concept (previously known as progression coaches). Following this successful pilot, we will be expanding the programme to other parts of the west midlands and Greater Manchester area to reach more disadvantaged young people. Youth employability coaches will continue to support young people for up to six weeks after they start a job, helping them continue to build skills and stay in employment.

A new data service will also be piloted, initially in Manchester, with up to £2.8 million funding. Using the latest data-analysis technology, this service will gather a range of skills and labour market data from a variety of public and commercial sources.

It will provide local areas with high-quality and real-time information on skills supply and demand. Additionally, jobseekers or those seeking to progress in work will be able to search for roles based on their skills and experience. The pilot service will show them what new skills they need to move into higher-paid roles available near them. By providing more tailored local labour market intelligence we can help individuals find jobs, back businesses, grow our economy and help people reach their full potential.

Both pilots have the potential to be rolled out nationally, helping reduce youth unemployment even further after it fell 48% since 2010, and helping more people boost their earnings.

[HCWS1835]

Petition

Monday 30 September 2019

OBSERVATIONS

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Air Quality

The petition of Staff and pupils of Godwin Junior School, Forest Gate,

Declares that we are deeply concerned about the air quality in the area around our school and London in general; we are concerned about how air quality impacts on our rights to the best possible health and a safe, clean environment under Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; further that it is unacceptable to us that the number of children who suffer from breathing difficulties such as asthma and bronchitis is increasing as a result of poor air quality; further that it is unacceptable to us that 443 schools in London are in a location where the air quality levels are illegal; further that nearly 10,000 deaths a year can be attributed to air pollution; and further that we all have a right to the best possible health and a safe, clean environment to live, work and study in.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to dedicate more time and resources to find longer term solutions to improving air quality.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Lyn Brown, *Official Report*, 25 July 2019; Vol. 663, c. 1552.]

[P002476]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, (Theresa Villiers):

The Government thank the petitioners for raising the issue of air quality around your school and in London generally.

This is an issue the Government take very seriously. Air quality has improved significantly over recent decades and will continue to improve thanks to the action we have already taken. Average levels of nitrogen dioxide at the roadside are at their lowest level since records began. Emissions of nitrogen oxides have fallen by almost 27% between 2010 and 2016 and are also at their lowest level since records began. We recognise however that more needs to be done because there is increasing evidence of the impacts that poor air quality has on public health, on the economy, and on the environment.

The most immediate air quality challenge is nitrogen dioxide concentrations around roads, the only statutory air quality limit that the UK is currently failing to meet.

In July 2017, we published the UK plan for tackling roadside nitrogen dioxide concentrations, setting out how we will achieve compliance in the shortest possible time, supported by a £3.5 billion investment into air quality and cleaner transport. In July 2018, the Government published the Road to Zero strategy, which sets out our comprehensive approach to reducing emissions from road vehicles and meet our 2040 mission to end the sale of new conventional petrol and diesel cars and vans. The cycling and walking investment strategy published in 2017 sets out the Government's plans for cycling and walking, with an ambition up to 2040 for making cycling and walking the natural choices for short journeys or as part of a longer journey.

The Government are committed to continue improving the UK's air quality and actions are ongoing to support implementation of measures that will minimise air pollution. In January we published our clean air strategy, which includes new and ambitious goals, legislation, investment and policies for England, which will help us to clean up our air faster and more effectively.

We are the first major economy to set goals working towards the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommendations on particulate matter emissions, which is why the WHO has praised our clean air strategy as "an example for the rest of the world to follow".

In London, the Mayor is responsible for mitigation of local air pollution in areas where people may be exposed, including schools. The Mayor, and local authorities in London, have powers to take actions to improve local air quality. For example, local authorities can issue fixed penalty notices to drivers leaving engines running unnecessarily after being asked to turn off their engine. The ultra-low emission zone and the congestion charge operate in London in relation to pollution from road vehicles.

The Government have provided almost £500 million to local authorities to enable action to tackle harmful roadside emissions of nitrogen dioxide and £3 million has been awarded to local authorities this year via the air quality grant fund. We have also introduced the implementation fund to support local authorities to take action as soon as possible, encouraging implementation of measures such as electric charge point hubs, traffic management systems via junction improvements and bus priority measures, and incentivising ultra-low emission taxis through licensing schemes and leasing electric vehicles.

Ministerial Corrections

Monday 30 September 2019

TRANSPORT

Thomas Cook

The following are extracts from a statement on Thomas Cook by the Secretary of State for Transport on 25 September 2019.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): I would like to update the House with the latest information and give hon. Members a sense of the scale of the operation that has been going on. We have put arrangements in place to bring back 150,000 people, across 50 different countries...

So far, 95% of people have been repatriated to their original point of departure.

[Official Report, 25 September 2019, Vol. 664, c. 689.]

Letter of correction from the Secretary of State for Transport.

Errors have been identified in the statement I made on Thomas Cook.

The correct information should have been:

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): I would like to update the House with the latest information and give hon. Members a sense of the scale of the operation that has been going on. We have put arrangements in place to bring back **over** 150,000 people **to the UK**, across 50 different **locations**...

So far, 95% of people have been repatriated **on their original date** of departure.

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

International Climate Action

The following is an extract from questions on the statement on International Climate Action made on 26 September 2019.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): Does the Secretary of State agree that the climate emergency demands that we reform the whole financial system, to decarbonise capitalism and green the City? If so, why are the Government taking three years to implement the mandatory disclosure of climate-related financial risks, when it could be brought in within one year?

Andrea Leadsom: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that just this weekend the Prime Minister doubled our international climate finance contribution, from £5.8 billion to £11.2 billion, for 2021 to 2025. That demonstrates our commitment to providing support for those in developing countries.

[Official Report, 26 September 2019, Vol. 664, c. 909.]

Letter of correction from the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrea Leadsom).

An error has been identified in my response to a question on my statement on International Climate Action.

The correct response should have been:

Andrea Leadsom: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that just this weekend the Prime Minister doubled our international climate finance contribution, from £5.8 billion to **£11.6** billion, for 2021 to 2025. That demonstrates our commitment to providing support for those in developing countries.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

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Monday 30 September 2019

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Monday 30 September 2019

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