

**Wednesday
16 October 2019**

**Volume 666
No. 3**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 16 October 2019

House of Commons

Wednesday 16 October 2019

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Point of Order

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (IGC): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. As you have often commented, we often have to rely on media reports and not statements in this place. That is how we first learned that the Government intend for us to sit on Saturday from 9 o'clock in the morning until 2.30 in the afternoon. Can you assist, Mr Speaker, as to the very special emergency circumstances that would require this place to sit on a Saturday?

I accept that, if the Government have secured a deal within the meaning and terms of both the Benn Act 2019 and the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, it would be perfectly proper for us to meet on Saturday, but, as is now reported on Twitter, I accept that the Government are going to have to seek an extension in any event.

I suggest that, in the absence of any deal as I have described, there is no reason for this House to meet on Saturday. It makes no difference to me, because I shall be here for the people's vote march, but there are many hon. and right hon. Members who need to make proper arrangements for childcare. One hon. Member has just told me that she has already spent £200 because she thinks that she will have to have somebody looking after her children on Saturday. Other hon. Members have constituents to see in surgeries, family events or other engagements that they will now have to break, because they do not know what is happening on Saturday.

Mr Speaker, do you agree that it would be wrong for the Government to abuse the procedures of this House, and that we need clarity now as to the Government's plans for any Saturday sitting, especially to ensure fair and democratic debate on any deal? Have you been given any notice of the Government's intentions?

Mr Speaker: I appreciate the points that the right hon. Lady has raised. Indeed, they are very similar to those raised yesterday during exchanges on the business statement and by the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) in a later point of order. I should preface any substantive response by thanking the right hon. Lady for her courtesy in giving me notice of her intention to raise a point of order on this broad theme.

As I said in reply to the point of order yesterday from the right hon. Member for Leeds Central, there can be a Saturday sitting by a motion passed by this House, or, under Standing Orders, by the recall procedure. The former, that is to say by a motion of this House, is clearly preferable because it entails far more notice and, indeed, a decision of the House. I will not go into the detail, and the right hon. Lady would not expect me to do so, of discussions that, necessarily, the Speaker has with key players in the House, but the relevant representative of the Government is well aware of my thinking on this matter. I said what I think is preferable. However, it is for the Government to table such a motion, which they must do before the House rises today if it is to be agreed by the House tomorrow. I do not think it is productive for me to be drawn into a discussion about the criteria for recall when another, and better, avenue remains available to the Government. I hope that that is helpful to the right hon. Lady and to the House, and I think it is best if we leave it there.

I now call on Priti Patel to open today's debate on the Queen's Speech. By the way, I know the difference between the Home Secretary smiling and the Home Secretary laughing. I do not think any education is required on that matter and we look forward to hearing her.

Debate on the Address

[3RD DAY]

Debate resumed (Order, 14 October).

Question again proposed.

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

Public Services

11.38 am

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): It is an honour to open this Queen's Speech debate today on behalf of this Government, who are driven by the people's priorities. They are a Government who stand up for the brave men and women of our police, our security services and all those who serve across our public services—from the frontline of our emergency services to our schools and our NHS. These workers are the hard-working silent majority, selflessly serving our communities and our country. We are the Government who are investing record amounts in our public services and backing the forces of law and order.

Since becoming Home Secretary, I have ensured that the fundamental principle of giving people the security they need to live their lives freely has informed the Home Office's work. As Her Majesty the Queen outlined in her Gracious Speech on Monday, that will also drive the Government's wider legislative programme, because nothing is more important than keeping our people, our communities and our country safe.

The people of our United Kingdom must have confidence in the ability of our police and security services. They need to know that, day or night, no matter what the crime, the police and the security services have the power and the resources they need to ensure that criminals are brought to justice. They want to be reassured that we are working to tackle the senseless and sickening violence that destroys lives on our streets and in people's homes, and that serious criminality will lead to tough sentences and justice for the victims of crime. They should have confidence that our prison system works to give victims justice and to keep the public safe from those who do harm to others, and that the justice system and our prisons support will reform offenders.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): I welcome the Home Secretary's refreshing approach. When a spate of crime occurs in a local area, it often comes down to one or two individuals. She can imagine the frustration when they are caught and receive only a suspended sentence. What happened to "two strikes and you're out"?

Priti Patel: When it comes to criminality and the justice system, it is important to reflect that every case is looked at on a case-by-case basis—that is the purpose

of the system. At the same time, it is important to ensure that victims of crime get justice and that the perpetrators of crime are given the appropriate sanctions.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I welcome the Home Secretary's no-nonsense approach. I sit on the Home Affairs Committee and I prosecuted cases before I came into Parliament. I welcome the joined-up approach of having not only enough extra police officers, but an extra £85 million for the Crown Prosecution Service, so when individuals are brought to account they can quickly go through the justice system, which will ensure that those who should be acquitted are acquitted and that others are sentenced for their crime.

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is correct, because it is vital to have a criminal justice system and a Crown Prosecution Service that work to drive the right outcomes. Resources do matter.

As we leave the EU, the public want to know that we are enhancing our co-operation with international partners, particularly in bringing foreign criminals to justice, and that their Government, and no one else, have full control over the borders of our nation. That will end the free movement of people once and for all.

In the three months since the Government came to power, we have begun urgent work, particularly on supporting the police. All hon. Members on this side of the House agree that our police forces are the best in the world. Every day, we see examples of their professionalism, bravery and dedication. No matter how good they are, however, they can do their job only if they are supported. Officers on the frontline need to know that they have a Prime Minister, a Home Secretary and a Government who stand beside them, and that when they run towards danger, they are not alone. This Prime Minister, and this Government, will always back the police.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (IGC): Can the Home Secretary help me? In the nine years that I sat with her on those Benches, the Conservative party's determined policy was to reduce the prison population by the careful introduction of all manner of sentences and by the support of suspended sentences, which have great power. Is not the real way to help our police to ensure that our criminal justice service is fit for purpose? It needs huge investment and for our courts to be able to hear trials quickly. At the moment, there are two years' of delay in most cases.

Priti Patel: The right hon. Lady will recognise that the legislative programme of the Queen's Speech makes greater investments in the justice system, which will address the issue of the time it takes to prosecute cases and to bring about justice for victims. I think the whole House will welcome the investment that the Government are putting forward to ensure that justice can be served and that the right support can be given to prisoners.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): We know that the Government propose to increase police numbers, but what new initiatives are they taking to deal with knife and gun crime, particularly in the west midlands and Coventry?

Priti Patel: I urge a degree of patience from the hon. Gentleman, because I am about to come on to new investments and how we will deal with serious criminality.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Priti Patel: If Members persevere, I will come to them shortly. I also know that many Members want to speak in the debate.

This Government are backing our police and it is important, now more than ever, to support our police and our intelligence and security services to keep us and our country safe. If I may, Mr Speaker, I will give a few examples that I think the House would like to hear. With the changing profile of crime, policing in the UK has had to adapt to confront new types of criminality, ranging from county lines to organised crime, violence on our streets and the horrendous harms, often against children and the vulnerable, that are often conducted online through the dark web.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I very much welcome the extra police we will see in Suffolk and the extra powers for the criminal justice system to act as a deterrent. Does my right hon. Friend share my concern about the young age at which people are getting caught up in county lines? What can we do to work across Departments, particularly with education, to keep children away from this trafficking?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that ongoing issue. Young people need to be protected. Through the public service duty announced in the Queen's Speech, much more can be done by agencies and Departments working together to provide support and preventive measures. Quite frankly, far too many young people are being exploited. The Government are recruiting 20,000 new police officers and investing in not only their training and equipment, but their protection, so that they are empowered to tackle such crimes. *[Interruption.]*

While Opposition Members chunter from a sedentary position, it is worth reminding them that the Labour party would recruit 10,000 fewer police officers and, importantly, fail to back our brave police officers. Police forces and officers have told us that they need backing to search people for bladed weapons to tackle the appalling knife crime we are seeing. That is why we have lifted restrictions on emergency stop-and-search powers for all forces in England and Wales—something described by the shadow Home Secretary as “unhelpful”.

When our frontline officers told us they needed to be better able to defend themselves against reckless armed violent criminals and thugs, we listened. That is why we have announced a new £10 million fund to give police chiefs the ability to equip officers with Taser. Again, we have not heard from shadow Ministers, who have refused to back this measure. I urge them to back this investment in our frontline officers, who protect our people, our communities and our country.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The Home Secretary says that the Government are backing the police, but does she accept that in South Yorkshire there are 700 fewer police officers to back than there

were in 2010, as a deliberate result of the policies and cuts pursued by the Government of which she was a member?

Priti Patel: I had hoped the hon. Gentleman would welcome the 151 additional police officers who are coming to South Yorkshire, along with the 6,000 who will be coming over the next year up to March and the 20,000 that we are recruiting. I think all hon. Members should recognise that crime has changed and, rather than criticise our police officers, get out there and back them.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): My right hon. Friend's acquisition of this role is causing great excitement in South Holland and The Deepings and across the nation, because at last we have a Home Secretary who is not an apologist for miscreants but believes, as my constituents do, that people who cause mayhem and misery should be caught, convicted and locked up for a very long time, in stark contrast to the views of the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry).

Priti Patel: My right hon. Friend is right: when it comes to crime and criminality, we owe it to the British public to be on their side and to ensure that their communities are protected and that they are safe.

With crime changing, it is right that we listen to the police on how to tackle the most urgent crimes. That is why I have made rolling up county lines drugs gangs a priority, with a £20 million package to stop those gangs exploiting children and young people, in addition to the £25 million safer streets fund to bring in new security measures for the worst crime hotspots in England and Wales. That is what I mean by backing our police and tackling the most appalling criminality that we see today.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I strongly welcome the additional 20,000 police who are going to be recruited, particularly in the Thames Valley police area of my own constituency. Could my right hon. Friend give us any news about the timing of that and how it is all going, because we are very keen to get on with it?

Priti Patel: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right, because we are now getting on with the recruitment of police officers. Only last week, my hon. Friend the Policing Minister announced a new allocation of police recruitment—the number of police officers who are being recruited right now and will be in place by March next year.

Never before have the demands on police officers been so complex and challenging. No Member who was here on 22 March 2017 will ever forget the events of that day or the sacrifice made by PC Keith Palmer, whose memorial stands outside Carriage Gates. Tragically, on Monday I joined thousands of officers and mourners to pay my respects to PC Andrew Harper, a newlywed officer senselessly and brutally killed in the line of duty. I know that the whole House will want to join me in paying tribute to PC Harper and to all our brave officers.

Findings from our review of frontline officers suggest that the police at all levels feel that they need more support to carry out their duties effectively. Their protection

[Priti Patel]

and wellbeing is a priority for this Government. That is why the police protection Bill will support the introduction of the police covenant—a covenant that recognises that policing is no ordinary job and pledges to recognise the bravery, commitment and sacrifices of serving and former officers. The Bill will also increase legal protection for police drivers, giving them confidence to use their greater skill and training when dealing with moped robberies and similar crimes.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Does the Home Secretary agree that while we all support and respect the work done by our police officers, and sometimes worry for their safety in what they do, the best way to protect them and the public is not by indulging in scare tactics and language but to prevent crime—to invest in the social, medical and educational programmes that prevent people from getting involved in crime in the first place?

Priti Patel: The hon. Lady makes a relevant point. Of course, this is not just about what we do through the criminal justice system but about what we do through all our public services—through education and local government—and how we engage with communities. It is therefore vital—I am going to come on to this later in my remarks—that we bring those public duties together, integrating our governance at a local level as well as a national level to absolutely do more to prevent and to protect innocent victims, and also to prevent people from even going into a life of crime.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): I welcome the additional funding in Hertfordshire. May we have a strong focus on rural crime, including fly-tipping and fly-grazing? Farmers suffer hugely as well as people having animal cruelty issues associated with criminality.

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As someone who represents a semi-rural and coastal constituency myself, I know that this is absolutely a problem that we have all experienced. There is no doubt that the new numbers for territorial policing will mean more police officers on the streets of our constituencies who are able to tackle the whole range of issues covering policing, including rural crime.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Priti Patel: I am going to make progress and come on to the many other Bills that I would like to touch on.

Protecting and supporting our police is vital if they are going to carry out their duties, but greater protection must be matched with enhanced powers. As Britain leaves the European Union, co-operation with international law enforcement agencies such as Interpol will become more important. That is why we are introducing an extradition Bill that will give police the power immediately to arrest criminals wanted by trusted countries for serious offences without having to apply to a judge first. Right now, people wanted for serious crimes in countries outside the EU cannot be arrested immediately if police come across them on the streets of the UK. This Bill will ensure that where a person is wanted by the police

for a serious offence in all trusted countries they have the power to get them off the streets and into our courts system.

The tougher action on international criminals will be matched by tougher action on foreign nationals who commit crimes in this country. Those who come to the UK to work hard and contribute to our national life will always be welcome, but those who abuse the system by committing crimes should be in no doubt: we are determined to take action. That action is needed to stop abuse of the system, to speed up the process for deporting foreign national offenders and, importantly, to deter foreign criminals from coming to the United Kingdom. That is why the foreign national offenders Bill will introduce tougher penalties for those who return to the United Kingdom in breach of a deportation order—a measure that has been opposed by Opposition Members.

While we work to keep this country safe from foreign criminals, the public rightly demand further action on crimes closer to home. The Government's broadband Bill will make it easier for homes and businesses across the country to be connected to high-speed, resilient and secure broadband. As we ensure that our citizens have better internet access, we must do more to keep them safe online. The online harms White Paper sets out the Government's plan for world-leading legislation to make the UK one of the safest places in the world to be online. That will be enforced in a proportionate way, ensuring that freedom of expression is upheld and promoted online, and businesses do not face undue burdens. We will publish draft legislation for prelegislative scrutiny.

Our dedication to keeping the public safe extends, of course, to the most serious crimes. I am sure that Members on both sides of the House will agree that this is an important focus for us all, because very few constituencies have not been affected by the rise in serious crime.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Broadband is an enormous issue in my constituency. In 2016, the SNP promised 100% broadband coverage in Scotland by 2021. Does the Home Secretary agree that, when there is a failure to deliver, which is clear in my constituency, the UK Government should step in and take over?

Priti Patel: It is right that we ensure, through the investment we are making in speeding up broadband and wider broadband investment, that the whole of the United Kingdom has access to fast, reliable broadband. With that access to broadband, we have to ensure that we are protecting those who are vulnerable to the harms that come from the internet.

We all have a role to play in tackling serious and violent crime, in particular to prevent the loss of young lives. We are working across Government to stop young people being drawn into crime in the first place. The new legal duty established by the serious violence Bill will ensure that key public bodies work together to share intelligence and collaborate on an effective local response, so that we can intervene earlier to protect young people and their communities. Safeguarding young people is essential, which means that every statutory service must provide care and support to our young people to ensure that they are protected from the criminals who seek to exploit them.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Home Secretary will know that the Home Affairs Committee conducted an inquiry into serious and violent crime, looking particularly at knife crime. In Castleford this week, two teenagers have been stabbed, following a pensioner being stabbed to death in Pontefract. Our Committee has warned for some time that serious and violent crime is spreading to towns; it is not just concentrated in cities. We recommended in our report not only a big increase in policing but a big investment in youth services, which have been cut by £1 billion since 2010. What is she doing to urgently invest in youth services, before more lives are lost?

Priti Patel: I thank the right hon. Lady for her comments, and I agree with her in terms of serious and violent crime. Far too much of it is taking place on our streets, across all our constituencies. We have to do more to invest in youth provision and young people. That means not only giving them hope and opportunity, but providing services for them, which is why we have invested more than £200 million in the youth endowment fund. There is much more work coming, but there is more to do to ensure that our statutory services—through safeguarding, Ofsted and public services—support our young people, so that they are not only protected in every single way from criminals, but given opportunities and alternative provision, if they are not in school, to help them to get on in life.

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): I welcome the Home Secretary's comments and approach to her new job, and I wish her all the best in it. There is a real concern among my constituents about the increase in knife crime across the capital and the terrible loss of life. Only last weekend, another young life was lost in my constituency. What she is doing is right, to protect our young people and to end the terrible tragedy of young lives being snuffed out by knife crime.

Priti Patel: I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments and I am appalled by the tragedy that took place in his constituency, which he has previously raised with me.

Policing matters, as does support for our police and the way in which we support young people to prevent them from getting sucked into a life of crime.

Serious violence is a visible and high-profile crime, and I know that everyone in the House is also determined to do more to tackle the insidious abuse and violence that go on behind closed doors. Domestic abuse shatters lives and tears families apart. It is vital that we all act together to better protect victims of domestic abuse, extend the support available to them and their children, and bring the perpetrators to justice.

I pay tribute to the work of the Joint Committee on the Draft Domestic Abuse Bill and to all those, inside and outside Parliament, who came together to shape our response to domestic abuse. It is only right that it receives strong cross-party support, which was shown when the House gave the Bill a Second Reading a fortnight ago. As hon. Members know, the Bill introduces a new statutory definition of domestic abuse and recognises that many forms of abuse can take place, including physical, emotional, psychological, sexual and emotional abuse. It establishes in law a domestic abuse commissioner to champion victims and survivors and provides for a

new domestic abuse prevention order so that the police and courts can act earlier and more effectively to protect victims.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Will the Home Secretary commit to ensuring that the social security system does not penalise victims of domestic abuse who leave their partners but are made worse off as a result? My constituent lost £400 a month after leaving her very violent relationship as a result of going on to universal credit.

Priti Patel: The hon. Lady raises a very important point, and we are in the process of working with the Department for Work and Pensions. I come back to the point about a statutory duty, but also stress that all organisations across Government must work together. That is the right thing to do because protecting victims from abuse, whether it is mental, physical or emotional, and getting justice are important, as is ensuring their wellbeing and their ability to move on with their lives.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Does the Home Secretary welcome the publication of the Bills that will apply to Northern Ireland, specifically the measure on historical institutional abuse in Northern Ireland? It is welcome that at last we will get this awfulness addressed and that the victims will hopefully get some sort of recognition for the problems they have had to face.

Priti Patel: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's point about getting the right kind of justice and welcome the steps that have been taken.

I have outlined the Government's response to some of the most shocking crimes. I reassure the House and the British public that we are determined to have sentences that properly reflect the severity of the crime. We want the public to have confidence in the criminal justice system. Too often we are told that the current system is failing victims and the wider public. That is why we have ordered an urgent review of sentencing for the most serious violent and sexual offenders. We will take immediate action to deal with the most serious cases so that offenders sentenced to fixed terms of seven years or more have the time that they serve in prison extended from half to two thirds of their sentences.

Time served must reflect the severity of the crime. Measures to protect and serve victims are also vital because becoming a victim of crime or abuse is often a life-changing experience.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): Many victims of violence and domestic violence experience terror when their assailants are released from prison. At the moment, provision to exclude those assailants from areas where the victims live is restricted to the time of the sentence. Will my right hon. Friend consider extending that, possibly to lifetime exclusion?

Priti Patel: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reflection and his comments, which show why domestic abuse protection orders have such an important role to play.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Priti Patel: Let me continue, specifically on victims. My time as co-chair, with the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), of the all-party parliamentary group on victims of crime gave me deep respect for those who dedicate their lives to representing victims of crime and for the strength and determination of the victims themselves. I thank members of the APPG with whom I have worked, and I have also followed their work. They have supported many victims of crime, and include the hon. Members for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), for Darlington (Jenny Chapman) and for West Lancashire (Rosie Cooper). We are committed to ensuring that victims receive the help and support they need to cope and recover and, importantly, to giving them a voice and to giving a voice to those who sometimes cannot speak out for themselves.

We will now accelerate plans to enshrine in legislation the rights to which victims are entitled, as set out in the victims code. We recognise that rights are meaningless without the means to enforce them and we want to legislate to ensure that where criminal justice agencies have failed to provide victims with their entitlements they are held to account. This includes increasing the powers of the Victims' Commissioner, already a powerful advocate for victims' rights. We will also legislate for a new victims law, to be consulted on early in the new year. This will be testament to the bravery of all those who have spoken out and given a voice to the voiceless.

Although we will be tougher on prisoners who are unco-operative, we must also recognise that the majority of inmates simply want a second chance and an opportunity to rebuild their lives after a custodial sentence. We cannot allow our prisons to become factories for making bad people worse. We need to reduce overcrowding, strengthen security and do more to educate and rehabilitate prisoners. We must invest in turning people's lives around through education and training and do more to integrate ex-offenders back into society so that they themselves can rebuild their lives. That is why, as well as investing up to £2.5 billion in prisons for an additional 10,000 places, we are addressing the health and wellbeing issues, raising levels of educational attainment and skills, and rebuilding and reinforcing the relationships offenders have with friends and family.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I thank the Home Secretary for attending, with me, the funeral on Monday of PC Andrew Harper, and for the support she showed the community in Abingdon where he served. It was very gratefully received. She also joined me in commending a local social enterprise called Tap Social, which makes "criminally good beer", and takes former offenders and gives them that first chance in life to help them to take that step on that ladder.

Priti Patel: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments, and it was a real honour to be with her at the cathedral on Monday to pay tribute to Andrew Harper. She is right; there are many good examples of social enterprises across all our constituencies that do tremendous work to give offenders a second chance. Importantly, they educate and train offenders and give them the skills to move on and rebuild their lives. As with many of the Bills I have mentioned today, we can come together to demonstrate strong cross-party support on this issue.

The Government recognise that freedom and security are not opposite but equal and that ensuring that people can live their lives free from fear is the essential foundation of a life of liberty. There is no greater service that a Government can perform for the public than keeping them safe. That is at the very heart of our agenda. Monday's Gracious Speech contained improvements for every stage of policing in the criminal justice system, each designed to make the United Kingdom a safer and a fairer nation. We live at a time of new and acute challenges to policing and justice, whether they involve tackling the established evils of serious violence, domestic abuse, the arrest of foreign national offenders or keeping people safe from online harms. Officers need to know that the Government have their backs, so we have brought forward measures to extend the protections offered to police officers, to establish a police covenant and to give the police the necessary powers to arrest foreign national offenders. We are also clear that tough measures to bring criminals to justice must be balanced with a fair approach to those who have served their time and support for those who genuinely want to turn their lives around.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Home Secretary has outlined the Government's strategy to deal with criminal gangs here in the United Kingdom. She will recognise, as we all do, that criminal activity reaches beyond the borders of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and is international. Will she outline what discussions have taken place with other countries to ensure that the problem of criminal gangs from Europe, including Romania, China and elsewhere, which we heard about in the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs today, is dealt with internationally and together?

Priti Patel: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. As an outward-looking country that prides itself on its security both domestically and internationally, a tremendous amount of work takes place not just bilaterally but across many other institutions. We have our own agencies, such as the National Crime Agency, working internationally to ensure that many of the issues in terms of serious organised crime, criminality and the sheer extent of the crime taking place are addressed, while at the same time preventing further criminal activity from taking place.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): I welcome what the Home Secretary says about putting victims at the heart of the criminal justice system. Will she expand on the point that murderers who withhold information should be punished more severely, and on how Helen's law will be implemented through the Parole Board?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Offenders who have committed the most heinous crimes should be in receipt of the appropriate sentences and justice should be served. He mentions Helen's law. He is absolutely right in terms of making sure that we deliver on that and enable the justice that needs to take place.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): May I remind the Home Secretary of the excellent private Member's Bill presented by the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) on increasing sentences for those who attack members of the emergency services? If I can take her

back to prison officers, from what I hear in my constituency about a number of prison officers who have been assaulted, the offenders are not receiving severe enough punishment. The deterrent is still not there. Will she look at that and ensure that anyone who assaults someone in the emergency services faces the full force of the law?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend raises an incredibly important point. He is right in terms of the legislation. He will be aware, as I think all Members are, that sentences are not, I am afraid, fitting the level of assaults that have been committed. That is why we are now going to have a police covenant. We will also work across Government, including with the Ministry of Justice, to ensure that, for example, when probation and prison officers are assaulted the right sentences are given.

The Government believe in second chances when it comes to offenders and overcrowding in our prisons, but at the same time it is important that we continue to serve our country and our public and do more to protect the victims of domestic abuse, to ensure that criminals pay a price for withholding information about their crimes and to enshrine in law a system of support set out in the victims code.

By the time these debates on the Gracious Speech are over, we will have heard about the Government's ambitious agenda for every area of our public services, whether it is our long-term plan for the NHS, adult social care, the Mental Health Act or improvements to railways, aviation and our national infrastructure. We are preparing our country for a brighter future. At the heart of this Government is a solemn promise, from the Government to their people, that we will protect the vulnerable, see justice done, keep our citizens safe and deliver on the people's priorities.

12.12 pm

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Let me welcome the Home Secretary and the whole House back after the conference season. I echo her words regarding supporting our police. They do an absolutely fantastic job across the United Kingdom. I also want to echo her words regarding our fallen friend PC Palmer. I recognise the commitment across the House of everybody who has worked, and continues to work, on the Domestic Abuse Bill. The Home Secretary emphasises the rights of victims, and I absolutely agree with her on that. I also want to recognise the work the Prime Minister has done recently in relation to Harry Dunn's family. It is my first opportunity at the Dispatch Box to mention that tragic case. I urge the Prime Minister to continue to support the family through this very difficult time.

The Home Secretary mentions prisons. I suspect that all Members have had individual constituency cases, and one constituent recently came to see me. The suicide rate and the mental health situation for our young men in prison is a really serious issue. I hope that we continue to tackle it and support families and young people into rehabilitation, which is what our Prison Service should be about.

Our conference slogan was "people before privilege"—I think that the Conservative party's was "people for privilege". The Home Secretary made a speech at conference denouncing the north London elite. Personally, I look forward to the day that they can denounce me as part of the south Manchester elite, but I have to tell her that if she thinks that this Prime Minister is going to cut it as

an anti-elitist, her speechwriters need to get better jokes. Mind you, I imagine that the elites are probably pleased not to be associated with him these days. I certainly would not want to judge old Etonians by the example of the Prime Minister. After all, every class has its clown—even the upper class.

We know what is behind the ridiculous rhetoric. The Conservatives believe that they can somehow con people into thinking that they are not the party of the privileged. We know the depths that they will sink to. There is not just the Prime Minister's rhetoric on Brexit, but the revelation that they have been polling so-called "culture war" issues, such as human rights, in northern working-class constituencies. Well, let me give them an absolutely clear message from a proud, northern working-class Member representing a proud, northern working-class constituency: you can take your bigotry elsewhere. If the Home Secretary wants to know where the dog-whistle politics appeals, I tell her to look no further than her Cabinet table, because my constituents know better than to swallow the Conservatives' self-serving spin. They know who stands for people, and who stands for privilege, and there is no better example than what has happened to our public services.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way, though I am surprised by the tone of her speech. Would it not behove us all to remember that the people who suffer most from crime in this country are the poorest and most vulnerable?

Angela Rayner: The reason for the tone of my speech and for my upset is the Prime Minister describing my constituents as "letterboxes", and then my constituents suffer racism on our streets. That is why I get passionate about what is happening on our streets and why I will not defend the cuts to our police services, when police officers in my constituency have faced attacks and cuts, and the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary come here saying that we are getting more police when they have cut the police in the first place. That makes me pretty passionate about what is happening in our northern working-class areas. We will not be hoodwinked by people who believe that they know better for our constituents, who I came here to represent, and that somehow I have lost my way and that I do not care about the people in the north any more. The truth is that the Prime Minister has never cared about the people in the north.

Take the Home Secretary's Department: the Conservatives were once the party of law and order. Even her hero, Thatcher, did not cut the police, yet they have suffered the worst cuts in their history under her party. She claims that she is recruiting 20,000 new police. The truth is that she has not even restored what her Government have cut. That is the reality of a Tory Government—more crime and less police—and those who have suffered the most from the cuts are those who are already worse off.

Mr Jayawardena: If the hon. Lady is so passionate about increasing police numbers, why did Labour vote against making another £970 million available for extra police?

Angela Rayner: The Conservative party is very good at trying to do spin, but everybody knows that a Labour Government will invest in our public services and our police. They also know that you cannot trust a Tory with public services.

[Angela Rayner]

Take the victims of the Windrush scandal: people who have spent their lives as citizens, working and paying their taxes, only for the Home Secretary's Government to ruin those lives with their incompetence and contempt. This week's Windrush Bill is yet another insult: a tortuous process to get adequate compensation, with elderly victims literally dying while the Government drag their feet. We know what she thinks of the working people in Britain from her book, "Britannia Unchained":

"the worst idlers in the world",

she called us. This Government have cut every bit of support for ordinary working people, while shovelling endless sums to big business, the banks and the billionaires. The simple truth is that they are the party for the tax dodgers, not the taxpayers. They are not standing up to the elite; they are the elite, and their shameful gesture politics will—

Priti Patel: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. May I ask for a retraction of a statement that has been made? The hon. Lady referred to something that she claimed I had written in a book, but those were not my words, and I should like that to be corrected.

Mr Speaker: It is incumbent on each Member to take responsibility for the veracity of what he or she says in the Chamber. If a Member feels that an error has been made, it is the responsibility of that Member to withdraw. We had a similar exchange yesterday with roles reversed. The Minister in that case did not feel the need to correct the record. If the hon. Lady does, she can. The Home Secretary has made her position extremely clear, but I must leave it to the hon. Lady to exercise her own judgment in this important matter.

Angela Rayner: Everyone has heard what the Home Secretary has just said, but the truth is—my understanding is—that the Home Secretary was part of that book and the author of that book. If she wants to distance herself from those words, Mr Speaker, it is for her to do that.

While the Home Secretary offered a party-political broadcast disguised as a legislative programme, in education we did not even get that. It is two years since I opened a debate on the last Queen's Speech. I am now facing the third Education Secretary to hold the post in that time, and the three of them have not tabled a single piece of primary legislation. I suppose that it should come as no surprise that the only education bill revealed this week is being handed to parents in schools in Surrey, who are being asked to pay £20 a month simply to keep teachers in the classroom. Instead of action to tackle an education system in crisis, the Government have offered us only more meaningless words—and when those words come from this Prime Minister, they are not worth very much. The Government have said that they will implement a school-level national funding formula at the earliest opportunity, but they have not introduced legislation to implement it.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Given what the hon. Lady saying, does she welcome the additional funds that the Government are putting into schools, including a small rural school in my constituency whose funding will be increased by 22% next year?

Angela Rayner: I shall say more about this later in my speech, but the hon. Gentleman and other Conservative Members should look at what has happened in schools since 2010. The Prime Minister promised that he would reverse those cuts, but he is not reversing those cuts. If there is some funding going into schools, that is of course very welcome, but let us not pretend that it will reverse the cuts and support teachers now, because it is not going into schools now, and they are desperate for it.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that the problem with the Conservatives is that, having cut and cut and cut funding for schools and the police, they think that providing a sudden surge in numbers can make up for the damage to the sense that people have of working in teams? Those people have been debilitated. Does she agree that it takes much longer than this to reverse such pernicious policies and put things right again?

Angela Rayner: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, but I also urge the Government to look at what is happening in our schools today. That money is not even going to our schools today. Our teachers and support staff are doing a superb job in all our constituencies, but they do not have that money where it is needed, right now, where the cuts are hurting, right now—as the Secretary of State for Education knows, because his own wife has told him so.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Pretty much every school in Chester will suffer a budget cut next year, despite what the Conservatives say. Does my hon. Friend have full confidence in the mechanism that the Government are using to put money into schools? We do not seem to be getting any of it in Cheshire.

Angela Rayner: My hon. Friend has made an important point. Although increased funding is welcomed by many schools, it will do nothing to reverse the cuts that they face. Moreover, they will not even see the money before a general election, so it could all be toast again. Some would say that that is a cynical move ahead of an election.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Schools in Erdington have seen teachers cut, teaching assistants cut, curriculums cut, outside trips cut and music lessons cut. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is simply not true that those cuts have been reversed? The figures demonstrate that, notwithstanding last week's announcement, 98% of Birmingham schools will still lose out in relation to where they were in 2015. It is a confidence trick.

Angela Rayner: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, who makes another important point: the curriculum, and what has happened to it. Many teachers and schools are very concerned about the fact that music, arts, culture, drama and all the things that help young people with STEM subjects have been cut—decimated—because of the austerity that schools have faced. I want all children across the whole of England and the United Kingdom to have a diverse curriculum; that is very important, and I think the whole House could agree on that point.

Mrs Main: We have excellent schools, both state and private, in Hertfordshire and St Albans. The state schools will have an increase, which they welcome; the private schools are terrified that they will be scrapped under Labour's proposals. What are the Labour party's plans for increasing capacity within the state system for all the trashed private schools that will find themselves out of business?

Angela Rayner: Conservative Members need not scaremonger, because the only thing that schools across England fear is more austerity and more broken promises from the Conservative party. Let me be absolutely clear: what the Labour party will not do is subsidise private education with taxpayers' money when our state schools are crippled by the Conservative party. I pledge this to every parent across the country: I will not play party politics with their children. I will ensure that every child in this country gets the opportunity they deserve whether that is through a SEND, the comprehensive system, an academy, a free school, or in private schools. All their children matter to me, unlike the Conservative party.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Is not the truth that the proof of this policy pudding is in the eating, and that comes down to the reality of what parents and children see in their schools? In many schools in my Grimsby constituency there is now a policy of non-replacement of support staff. That means there is not enough support to go around for children with special educational needs, those working in offices and those doing lunchtime supervision. That is the reality of education in the country today.

Angela Rayner: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and nobody can move away from the fact that our schools face a tremendous burden from the pressures of the cuts and the additional costs that have been placed upon them. Our support staff and our teachers have done an absolutely superb job and I want to put on record my thanks to the teachers, the parents, the staff and everybody else who, through these really difficult times, has done their utmost for every child in our education system—and quite rightly so. But they need the support of our Government now, and that is what I am pushing for: no more warm words or jam tomorrow, but actual support in schools, where they deserve and need it most.

If the Conservatives really believe in their own proposals for education, when will they be put into law? If this week was not the earliest opportunity for them to do that, when is?

Another issue where parents have been left paying the price for Government inaction is the spiralling cost of school uniforms. Only weeks ago, the Secretary of State wrote to the Competition and Markets Authority committing to

“put the school uniform guidance on a statutory footing”

and promising to do so

“when a suitable opportunity arises.”

The opportunity surely arose on Monday, but it was not taken. In November it will be four full years since the Government first made that commitment. We are also four Education Secretaries and three Prime Ministers on; each has reiterated the promise made by the last, yet none of them has managed to keep it.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making such an incredible speech—[*Laughter.*] School uniform grants are available in Wales, which has a Labour Government, in Scotland, under the SNP, and in Northern Ireland; England is the only part of the United Kingdom that does not give school uniform grants. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is because this Government do not seem to count or value the children who might possibly need a grant?

Angela Rayner: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Conservative Members might laugh, but the spiralling cost of school uniforms and the problems that the poorest in our society face in dealing with that is no laughing matter. It is a matter for England and for this Government, and it is directly a matter for those Conservative Members who have shamefully done nothing about this issue. Parents across England will be listening to this debate and will recognise who is on their side.

It is the same story on home education. The Government were consulting on new legislation, but it is now nowhere to be seen. Then there is the Augar review, the flagship that has now sunk without trace. When it was published, the previous Education Secretary promised me:

“We will come forward with the conclusion of the review at the end of the year, at the spending review. That has always been the plan.”—[*Official Report*, 4 June 2019; Vol. 661, c. 58.]

We have had a spending review and we have had a Queen's Speech, but we have had no conclusion and there is apparently no plan. I can only hope that the Education Secretary will be able to tell us in the wind-up that these remain Government commitments and, if so, when the Government intend to act on them. This is particularly absurd when their legislative programme is a wish-list of Bills that have no chance of getting a majority in this House, because the Secretary of State knows full well that there would be cross-party support for some of these issues.

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I am most grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way, and I apologise for interrupting her leadership speech. I agree that her speech is unbelievable, but not in the same sense.

Every school in my patch is getting more money, over and above the rate of inflation. I am very happy with cash now and cash tomorrow. If she is so concerned about legislative proposals, why will she not agree to have a general election?

Angela Rayner: All I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that he needs to get out more.

The Secretary of State's predecessors, and even the former Prime Minister, have now admitted that the abolition of maintenance grants was a mistake, but unless the Government act in this Session another generation of 18-year-olds will go to university next summer without maintenance support. The Education Secretary has already accepted that the system is unfair. In a recent letter to the Office for Students, he raised the possibility of moving to a new system of post-qualification admissions. I am delighted that he is keen on one of Labour's many evidence-led radical policies on education. If only that had been in the Government's programme this week, and if only they had fully acted on the recommendations of another of their independent reviews on school exclusions. So far, they have promised to take up only

[Angela Rayner]

those relating to formal permanent exclusions, but if they take no action to deal with the problem of children falling off school rolls without any formal process at all, they risk making that situation worse.

The Secretary of State's predecessor did manage to get almost the whole House to support the passing of one signature piece of legislation: the regulations implementing statutory sex and relationships education. I was proud to support that step from this Dispatch Box. Before I became an MP, I was a volunteer for the Samaritans, a charity that was founded after a young girl took her life because her periods had started. She did not know what was happening to her; she thought she had a disease. If she had had sex and relationships education, she might have been here today. So now we have legislated, but we must support the schools that are teaching the curriculum. We need to set down the resources that they need and the moral leadership that they deserve. I hope that the Education Secretary will make it clear later that there is no opt-out from equality in schools, and that he will stand with teachers and heads in delivering that.

Mr Betts: My hon. Friend is making a really important point. Will she emphasise the importance of saying to schools that they are required to do this form of education? If they leave it open as an option, that is when they come under real pressure from those who want to undermine this whole agenda.

Angela Rayner: Absolutely. There is a majority across the House to ensure that we push forward with this important legislation and support teachers and heads in delivering it in our schools. We have to lead the way, taking communities with us, in ensuring that our children and young people feel safe, secure and valued. Every young person deserves that in our education system.

School support staff are another section of the workforce who deserve that support, which the Education Secretary rightly acknowledged in our first exchanges. He will have been told at close quarters about the value of teaching assistants as he is married to one, so I will not question his commitment. However, as his predecessors found, commitment from the Education Secretary is not enough if they do not have it from their Prime Minister, so I hope that the Education Secretary will stand firm and make it clear that he will not countenance balancing the books on the backs of our support staff. Perhaps he could look again at the abolition of the national body for school support staff, because restoring it would be another step that he could take with the support of the House.

There is no doubt that the Education Secretary will talk about investment in schools as if they have not faced a decade of cuts. The Prime Minister promised to reverse those cuts, forgetting to mention, of course, that he sat around the Cabinet table and supported those very cuts time after time. Far worse is the gap between his words and his actions, because the Government are not even reversing their own cuts. Not only did the package ignore the cuts to capital funding, central education spending, further education and so much else, but the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that the announcement made in the spending round would not even undo the cuts to schools since 2010 in its final

year—another broken promise from a Prime Minister who cannot be trusted. He promised £700 million next year, but councils are already facing such a shortfall. The Local Government Association has put next year's deficit at £1.2 billion.

The Education Secretary has warm words about further education, but the spending round included less than £200 million for increasing the base rate—little more than a real-terms freeze. If the Secretary of State truly believes in investing in further education, why did the spending round not include a single penny for adult education? After a decade of managed decline and billions of pounds of cuts, why are the Government refusing to give that vital part of the system the investment it needs? Even in apprenticeships—apparently his passion—we are far from on course to meet the Government's target of 1 million this year. We do not even know whether that is still the target. We have been told it is an ambition, an aim and an aspiration, so perhaps the Secretary of State will tell us which of those it is and what on earth that means?

The story of decline and neglect is the same in perhaps the most vital area: early years provision. The hourly rate for child care providers has not increased since 2017, Sure Start funding has collapsed, and the additional funding for maintained nursery schools runs out at the end of the next financial year. Will that be addressed, or have the youngest children been forgotten?

Even in schools, the extra money promised by the Government is not only years away but is being deliberately skewed to schools with the wealthiest intakes. The Education Policy Institute put it plainly, stating that

“almost all schools serving the most disadvantaged communities would miss out.”

The EPI found that the average pupil eligible for free school meals would attract less than half the funding of their more affluent peers. That comes on top of the research conducted by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook) last week, which found that over £200 million has been lost since 2015 thanks to the freeze in the pupil premium. The EPI concluded:

“If this is the Prime Minister's idea of levelling up, then his legacy might be even more disappointing than his predecessor's.”

Frankly, the funding that the Prime Minister has promised for future years will be rendered a fantasy if it comes after a bad deal or a no-deal Brexit.

We are yet to hear, of course, what all this means for higher education. Will the Education Secretary tell us any more about the fee status of EU students or our participation in Horizon 2020 or Erasmus? We are no wiser this week than we were before. The Queen's Speech may have had nothing to say about education, but I can promise parents, children and educators across the country that a Labour Government will not neglect our education system, as the Conservatives have.

Layla Moran: The hon. Lady is giving a powerful speech that shows how this Government are giving with one hand and taking away with the other. Every Member looking at the raw numbers of how much money their schools will get should be aware that the rise in the starting salary for teachers, which we would all agree is a good thing, will be coming out of those very same budgets. Do not assume this money is going directly

into the hands of teachers and children; it is not. The Government should be funding this on top of the extra money.

Angela Rayner: I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady, who has a wealth of knowledge from being an educator. She has also been an advocate for ensuring that, rather than hoodwinking teachers and parents across England, we actually support them by stopping this decimation of our education system so that we do not have newly qualified teachers pitched against experienced teachers.

What we want to see in our education system is a wealth of newly qualified and experienced teachers in our classrooms, because we know that is best for our classrooms and for all children. We will radically expand high-quality early years education so that it is available for all two, three and four-year-olds alongside a renewed Sure Start Plus.

We will give our schools the investment they need, fully reversing the cuts that the Tories have imposed. We will end the managed decline of further education by investing in students and staff so that a genuinely high-quality technical education route is available to all those who wish to pursue it. And we will scrap tuition fees and bring back maintenance grants. Free education for all throughout their life—that is the prospect the Government would have us believe is so terrifying.

Finally, I pay tribute to all those amazing staff who work day in, day out to improve children's lives. In particular, I mention my friend and constituent Lynn Stott, who was a youth worker for many years. She is gravely ill today, and I cannot be there because I am here at the Dispatch Box. I know what a difference she has made in our community, and the difference that all our educators make every day to the lives of our children.

This Queen's Speech is the last gasp of a Government with nothing left to give. A Labour Government will do so much more.

12.41 pm

Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con): I am pleased to have my first opportunity to welcome my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to the head of what I believe is the greatest Department of State.

I listened very carefully to the impassioned speech of the shadow Secretary of State, but she omitted one fact. Why was it that, in 2010, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats coming into government had to take tough decisions because of the state of the public finances left by the last Labour Government?

Christian Matheson: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs May: It is a bit early in my speech, but I will happily give way.

Christian Matheson: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for giving way so early in her speech. Can she explain how the last Labour Government were responsible for the subprime mortgage market in the United States causing the longest, deepest recession in the world?

Mrs May: The biggest deficit in our peacetime history—that is what the Labour Government left us and that is what we had to address.

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): Does the right hon. Lady remember that the last Labour Administration picked up the biggest ever debt from any previous Government? And that was a Conservative Government.

Mrs May: The hon. Lady might like to recall the words of the last Labour Chief Secretary to the Treasury. When we came into government, he wrote “there is no money.” That was the Labour party in government.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it appears the Labour party has not learned any lessons at all? They have a plan to spend over £150 billion on renationalisation, which would leave no money for schools and hospitals.

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that the Labour party's plans for spending and for crashing our economy would actually mean there is less money available for schools, less money for the police and less money for our hospitals.

This is an important debate because the Queen's Speech sets the tone for the sort of country that we want to be post Brexit. I am pleased to see in the Queen's Speech so many Bills that will take forward work that was proposed or started under the Government I had the privilege to lead. One very good example of that is the Domestic Abuse Bill. I shall not speak about it now, because I spoke on Second Reading, but it is an important piece of legislation that will help to improve people's quality of life.

There are many other Bills in the Queen's Speech that will also help to improve people's quality of life and show that it is the Conservatives who listen to people but also recognise that it is not about headlines; governing is about delivering practical solutions to the problems that people face day to day. We can have the best headlines, the greatest oratory and the most arresting phrases, but they are of no use if they do not practically deliver for people. That is what this Government are about.

Another Bill that will make a huge difference to people's lives—my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary referred to it in her opening speech—is the serious violence Bill. There is no doubt that there is a problem that we have to address in relation to serious violence, particularly knife crime among young people. A lot of serious violence is, of course, linked to drugs. In February, we were able to set up a review, and Dame Carol Black took on the work of looking at the link between serious violence and drugs.

That review is important, but what is also important—it is reflected in the serious violence Bill—is a recognition that it is not a single Department's issue. I believe Dame Cressida Dick, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, said that we cannot arrest ourselves out of this problem. It is for every Department to play its part, because if we look particularly at the issue of gangs and young people, we can see that, sadly, gang membership is giving young people an identity and a sense of purpose and belonging. We need to address those issues if we are to deal with that violence.

Mr Seely: Is there therefore an argument for the legalisation of some drugs—not out of approval for them, but to regulate and tax them?

Mrs May: I am afraid my hon. Friend and I will absolutely disagree on this issue. I do not believe in the legalisation of drugs. I am happy to introduce him to my constituent Elizabeth Burton-Phillips who set up DrugFAM as a result of the tragedy that she and her family faced when one of her sons died as a result of drugs. I firmly believe that we should maintain a very strict rule and approach in relation to drugs.

The Government are putting into the serious violence Bill what is effectively the public health duty on which we consulted earlier this year, thereby saying that it is for all Departments to consider these issues. We have to deal with the causes of crime. As my right hon. friend the Prime Minister said from the Dispatch Box on Monday:

“This is a one-nation Government who insist on dealing not only with crime but the causes of crime”.—[*Official Report*, 14 October 2019; Vol. 666, c. 23.]

Jamie Stone: I thank the right hon. Lady for graciously giving way. Of course, policing in Scotland is devolved to the Scottish Government, and the Scottish Government can make laws different from those made by the UK Government. Does she agree that the closest possible co-operation with the Scottish Government will be necessary if these laudable aims are to be realised?

Mrs May: The hon. Gentleman is right that we should have co-operation on these issues. We also need to have great co-operation between Police Scotland and the police forces in the rest of the United Kingdom. When I was Home Secretary, I visited Gartcosh and saw the excellent work that was being done in respect of Police Scotland working not only with other forces in England, but with other agencies throughout the United Kingdom. Excellent work was done as a result of that.

Ian Paisley: The right hon. Lady will know that before policing was devolved in Northern Ireland, we had 13,500 police officers. Under the previous Labour Administration, that number was cut to 6,000. In the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee today, the chief constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland called for the reintroduction of another 1,000 officers in Northern Ireland. I am sure the right hon. Lady would extend to Northern Ireland the Government's proposals to increase the policing footprint throughout the whole UK.

Mrs May: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing out the actions of the previous Labour Government. Conservative Governments have, of course, ensured that the Police Service of Northern Ireland has the resources that are available to it. Let me take the opportunity to say that the PSNI does an incredible job in Northern Ireland. In fact, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, all our police officers across the whole of the United Kingdom do an excellent job. We do have the best police force in the world.

The police are, of course, dealing with a variety of new types of crime. One of the other Bills that I am particularly pleased to see in relation to that is the online harms Bill. We know that the internet, great invention though it is, can be used to ill purpose to encourage others into violent activity and extremism. We also know, of course, how our young people can

suffer harms from online activity. The approach that we have taken in the White Paper, published in April, sets out at its heart that duty of care for companies. That proportionate approach will not only have an impact, but makes us world-leading in this area. We are the first country to have been willing to dip our toe into this matter and say that we need to find an answer to it.

Mrs Main: That is why my constituents, who are very worried about online gambling, online self-harm and some of the darker webs that are out there, will be puzzled as to why the Opposition parties will not support the Queen's Speech, as they are indicating. For young people, the world out there has got incredibly treacherous, incredibly bullying and divisive. My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to the value of that Bill.

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Parents worry, but young people worry as well, about the impact of online harms. This is a very important matter. We are leading the world on this, and it is incredible that the Opposition are not willing to stand up and support that particular Bill.

Sir John Hayes: I am extremely grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. As she has said, crime is changing. Cyber-crime, for example, is now the preoccupation of our police forces, because it is, of course, the preoccupation of so many criminals. She did important work in that field, which I was very happy to support, with the development of a national strategy, which is linked to what she is saying about online crime. What more can we do to tackle cyber-crime in the spirit that she began when she was at the Home Office?

Mrs May: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his comments. He is absolutely right. It was right that the National Crime Agency was set up, and it is absolutely right now that we have that increasing capacity in relation to cyber-crime. One issue though is how to attract people with those skills to work in the National Crime Agency and in our police forces. Having a more flexible approach to the way people can be employed in support of our police, and within our police, is a key way of doing that. I was pleased also to have introduced the direct entry at superintendent level, which has brought some other skills into the police. It is looking at such innovative approaches that will help in these matters.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): Does the right hon. Lady accept that some of this is cultural? It is still quite often the case that, when online harassment is reported to the police, the police will tell people to come off the platform on which they are being harassed. That is not about resource; that is a cultural issue within the police and it is about how the real world and the online world come together. We also need more regulations for platforms. It is not right that these platforms are allowed to, essentially, self-police and to decide for themselves what they believe is appropriate.

Mrs May: As cyber-crime has developed, it has been necessary for the police to develop their approach, and that is absolutely right. Another thing that I was pleased to do as Home Secretary was to set up the College of Policing, which helps to provide the “what works best”

advice to police forces in areas such as cyber-crime, which is, increasingly, the area that we have to look at, in addition to other areas of crime.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): My right hon. Friend is talking about the training of police officers. Does she welcome the approach taken by the Hampshire police force, which involves industry experts in cyber issues through the use of police specials, and will she applaud that approach of getting experts in cyber-crime involved in policing?

Mrs May: I am very happy to commend the Hampshire force for the work that it does in introducing specialist specials. It is extremely good. Hampshire has always been one of the forces at the forefront of the use of technology and at looking at these issues around cyber-crime. We want to be the safest place in the world to be online and the best place in the world to set up a digital business, so the proportionate approach set out in the online harms Bill is absolutely right.

I want to say just a word about the Environment Bill, because it will have an enormous impact on people's quality of life. I was pleased that, when we launched the 25-year environment plan last year, we set out the aim to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than when we came into government. That is so important. The debate is often crystallised around climate change, but it is about so much more than that. If we are to deal with these issues, it is about the very small ways that, individually, each one of us can make a contribution. Within the Bill, I am particularly pleased about the work that is going to be done on biodiversity, on protecting natural habitats and, indeed, on waste crime, which afflicts too many of our constituencies.

There are many excellent Bills that will improve people's quality of life, building on four years of good Conservative Government and nine years of Conservatives in government. None the less, I wish to press the Government on three areas. The first is on mental health. The work done by Sir Simon Wessely and his team in reviewing the Mental Health Act 1983 was incredibly important. Some of the findings of that work were truly shocking, particularly in relation to the way some people in mental health crisis were being treated. It is important that this Government not only consider the Government response to that review of the Mental Health Act as soon as possible, but commit to introducing new legislation—a new mental health Act—to deal with these issues. I sat and listened to the testimony of some service users, and it was truly shocking to hear how they had been treated as second-class citizens, or worse, in their treatment. We do need to address that.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): My right hon. Friend is being very generous in taking interventions. I pay tribute to the work that she did on mental health, particularly on school age mental health, but does she agree that, as well as changing legislation, the biggest impact that we can have on the mental health of children is in the initial 1,000 days of that child's life? Forming a strong attachment between a child and their parents is the best way of making sure that that child arrives at school in a balanced state, able to take advantage of good education and able to go on to be a contributing member of society. We must do much more, much earlier.

Mrs May: My hon. Friend makes a very important and valid point. Obviously, in his time as children's Minister, he paid a lot of attention to looking at the ways in which we can provide children with the best possible support and the best possible start in life, because, as he says, that early stage is what actually helps to determine a child's future through the rest of their lives.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs May: I will give way one final time. Lots of people do want to speak.

Paula Sherriff: I thank the right hon. Lady very much for giving way. I, too, welcome a number of recommendations in Sir Simon Wessely's report, but does she agree that early intervention is absolutely crucial? We must do a number of things, including reintroducing Sure Start centres and reinvesting in our staff in mental health services.

Mrs May: The Government are reinvesting in staff in mental health services and increasing the number of mental health professionals in the health service. On early intervention, I was very pleased to have introduced the concept of ensuring that, in every school, there is somebody who is trained in identifying mental health problems and who is able to focus and direct people to the support that they need.

Another area on which I wish to press my right hon. Friend relates to immigration and foreign national offenders. It is absolutely right to look at those cases where foreign national offenders, having been deported, are then brought back into the country, often illegally by criminal gangs. The issue that I have, though, is that, as a result of the proposals, we will potentially see more foreign national offenders in our prisons. The issue of dealing with foreign national offenders in our prisons is faced by every Home Secretary when they come into office. I urge the Government, alongside what they are already doing, to consider how we can most effectively remove foreign national offenders and also ensure that we have prisoner transfer schemes to replace those that are available to us within the European Union.

On immigration, I note the many recent references to a points-based system. In 2010, when I became Home Secretary, one challenge that I faced was dealing with the abuse that had arisen in the immigration system, which had largely been enabled by the Labour party's points-based system. It is possible that the best brains of the Home Office have come up with a very good scheme, but I urge the Home Secretary and the Home Office to look carefully at the lessons that have been learned about points-based systems, which are not in themselves an answer to controlling immigration and which can allow abuse to take place.

I am also concerned about some references in the press to what looked like, effectively, regional visas, or the ability for somebody to be given a visa if they were going to work in a particular part of the country. I urge the Home Secretary to look carefully at how that could operate logistically, because there are some real challenges. *[Interruption.]* I hear some muttering from SNP Members, but that issue has been rejected by the independent Migration Advisory Committee.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs May: I said that I was going to make some progress, and I will, because I want to raise a final point.

In the police protections Bill, there will be a measure to protect and give support to police drivers who are involved in chasing criminals, which has been an issue—there have been challenges when accidents have happened or people have been hurt. That is absolutely right, but it was always intended to be part of a wider Bill that would introduce reforms to sentencing for dangerous driving, which is an issue that the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) and other hon. Members on both sides of the House have taken up. I am disappointed that those reforms are not in the Queen's Speech.

I am particularly concerned because of the case of my constituent Bryony Hollands, who was 19 when she was struck by a car in Nottingham in August 2015 and died. The individual responsible, Thomas Burney, was thought to have taken cocaine and was three times over the drink-driving limit. He pleaded guilty to causing death by dangerous driving and to causing injuries by dangerous driving. He was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment. He was released in August, halfway through his sentence. Her parents, among other parents who have found themselves in such tragic circumstances, have long campaigned for those reforms to sentencing.

In October 2017, we published the outcome of the dangerous driving consultation, and it was always the intention to introduce a Bill that included those reforms, the protections for police drivers and some other measures in relation to cycling. Although it is right to have the protections for police drivers, I am sorry that the other elements have not been included. I think it is probably the Ministry of Justice that is the prime Department here, and I urge it to look at ensuring that those reforms can be introduced to give some comfort to those parents, and others, who have sadly seen young lives taken away too early by dangerous driving, and who feel that justice has not properly been served.

1.2 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): It is interesting to follow the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May). I extend my sympathies to her constituent who was killed by a dangerous driver.

The Queen's Speech takes place in the context of Brexit and a decade of austerity and damaging cuts to the public sector, whether to local government, to the Scottish Government's budget or to jobcentres and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, all of which affect our constituents. All those services have been stretched to the limit by having to pick up the pieces as a result of the austerity driven by the UK Government.

I draw hon. Members' attention to the Child Poverty Action Group report on Tower Hamlets and universal credit, which came out today. It says that the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and council staff have found "increased demand for...services" and found it harder to resolve problems, and that universal credit has presented particular challenges with regard to housing. The public sector has to pick up all those issues as a result of the damaging policies of the Government.

I pay tribute to the police in my constituency, in Scotland and across the UK, who put in the hours every single day, risking their own lives and safety. The numbers of police have increased in Scotland by 6.3% since 2007. At the same time, there has been a decrease of 13.3% across England and Wales, and we have seen that in the impact on knife crime and other areas. One thing that would help the police services and the fire service in Scotland would be the return of the VAT that the UK Government pinched from them. That would put £125 million back into frontline public services and would certainly help in this time of ongoing austerity.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Alison Thewliss: I have a long speech to get through; I will see if I can get the hon. Lady in later.

I recently joined the police in my constituency for the Give a Day to Policing initiative. It was incredibly interesting to see how things work on the frontline, including officers booking people into custody. When doing so, they have access to important EU databases that guarantee safety, because if somebody has been booked into custody and the police officer at the desk does not know whether they have outstanding warrants for violence in other countries, they will not be able to make an appropriate judgment about how that prisoner is treated in custody. It is very important that we have continued access to those databases.

The Guardian reported in July that the National Crime Agency was harvesting EU databases, just in case it did not have access to them in the event of Brexit. There is a fundamental issue about how we treat crime agencies in the UK. I noted recently a case in Govanhill in my constituency in which it took five years to bring to justice those involved in people trafficking from Slovakia to Glasgow only because of the co-operation of Police Scotland, UK forces, Europol, Eurojust and the Slovakian police force. I contend that, in the event of Brexit, and certainly a no-deal Brexit, that case would have been far more difficult to resolve. There will be cases going through the criminal process now that might not be concluded. We will be a lot less safe as a result of Brexit if those databases cannot be accessed.

Brexit also puts further pressure on our police services. It has been widely reported that police leave at the end of this month has been cancelled in many cases. That will have a huge impact on staff morale and the ability of forces to respond to everyday issues of crime on our doorsteps. The police need to be able to provide that service and to go about their job. They should not have to defend people who may end up trying to raid their local shop for bread because food supplies cannot get through. The Government have put people in a ludicrous position. In 2019 we should not be discussing the possibility of civil contingencies such as the Army coming to support the police on our streets, but that is the situation that this Government have driven us to.

I welcome the UK Government's approach to the serious violence Bill. In Scotland and in Glasgow, we have significant experience of the impact of knife crime and what can be done to tackle it. It is welcome that the UK is following Scotland's lead, but we await further details as to the effectiveness of that policy. The violence reduction unit in Scotland worked because it was organic; it came from grassroots experts who knew what they were

doing, such as Medics Against Violence and the police; it was sustained; and it was a long-term plan. The UK Government need to think about the long term and to work across agencies in a truly co-operative fashion to make sure that the policy is successful.

For example, we have people in hospitals who can sit down with victims of knife crime when they come into A&E and make an intervention at that vulnerable time. We do not want people to walk out the door and go on to commit an act of revenge or further violence. Those mentors are very important in violence prevention. The UK Government would do well to look at that model. As a result, the murder rate in Glasgow has dropped by 60%, but we cannot be complacent about knife crime. We need to make sure that that is sustained.

I also ask the UK Government to look to Scotland with regard to the Sentencing (Pre-consolidation Amendments) Bill. In Scotland, we have a presumption—not a ban—against short sentences. They are ineffective, because they put people into a cycle of prison. We need to make sure that people do not enter that cycle, because it is incredibly difficult for them to get out once they are in that system. I ask the UK Government to move away from the populism of, “Let’s lock everybody up.” Instead, they should consider the purpose of prison and the criminal justice system and look at models that move towards rehabilitation.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making an important speech. The former Justice Minister, the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), was looking to Scotland and the good work being done there on short sentencing. We are seeing that our reoffending rates have dropped. Does she agree that it is so important for the new Cabinet to continue their predecessor’s work?

Alison Thewliss: I agree with my hon. Friend that there is a lot to be learned from that. We should be in the business of closing prisons down, not building more. We should look at the reasons people are driven into the criminal justice system—at the causes of poverty and inequality, which drive so many people into it.

I look with interest and some despair at the immigration and social security Bill. We see immigration as positive. It is a good thing for our country and it is very good for public services in our country. Brexit will have a huge and damaging effect on our public services, because often the people who provide them have done us the huge honour of coming to our country.

The NHS in particular will suffer as a result of Brexit. Recently, *The Independent* quoted research by Medbelle that said that EU doctors and nurses have been worth more than £3 billion to the UK economy over the past five years. There has already been a 91% fall in EU registrations to the Nursing & Midwifery Council since 2016, and more than 7,000 nurses have left that register. What impact do the Government think that will have on the most vulnerable? How do they expect our NHS to cope with the shock of that sudden drop? According to Medbelle’s analysis, educating more than 30,000 British nurses to replace EU nationals would cost £1.2 billion. If and when we finally see a Budget, how will the Chancellor provide for that?

Age UK has raised concerns about the adult social care Bill. From the announcements so far, it thinks that the Bill is too restricted in being just for the elderly and

that it should be extended right across the board. I urge the Minister to look at Scotland, where there is already free personal care and where we are moving towards making non-residential social care free as well, because it is desperately important to people. EU nationals are at the forefront of providing that service.

Jamie Stone: Thinking of social care and care of the elderly, I give the Scottish Government credit for their good work on tackling fuel poverty. Altnaharra in my constituency is the coldest place in the UK every year, and I therefore have many good people who simply cannot afford their fuel bills. Does the hon. Lady agree that it would be a good move for the UK Government, or possibly the Scottish Government, to consider some form of social security system whereby additional payments are made to the most needy to help meet those extra big bills?

Alison Thewliss: I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman on that notion. It is interesting to look at how other European countries treat people. Other countries can be colder than or as cold as Scotland, but I am not aware of pensioners in Sweden or Finland freezing to death in the winter. What he proposes is a good quick fix, but we need more fundamental reform to how we make our homes, how we insulate our homes and how we ensure that people are kept warm and safe in colder weather.

The prospects for restricting immigration are grim. It is an existential threat to Scotland’s public services, as well as to businesses, and it will impoverish us as a society. Interestingly, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead pointed out the myth of the points-based immigration system, and I am glad that she did. It was taken apart by Fergus Peace in the *i* earlier this month, when he pointed out that we already have a points-based immigration system to an extent, and it is harsher and less flexible than the one in Australia.

There are significant problems with the UK’s immigration system. It is arbitrary and damaging. The hostile environment leaves people in tears at my surgeries week in and week out. For example, visitor visas cannot be appealed. I see many people who fill out the application forms for visitor visas diligently and correctly, only to find them refused because Home Office officials cannot distinguish between the opening and closing balance of a bank account, because they use the wrong means of calculating the foreign exchange rates for a currency or because they do not believe that somebody who has been to visit half a dozen times before will go back to their country. All people want to do is to come and visit somebody, whether it is a mum whose child is dying or an elderly relative. Some people simply want to visit during the school holidays and see around the country their family call home.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): My hon. Friend will be aware of the report by the all-party parliamentary group for Africa on how the issue of visitor visas affects people coming from that part of the world in particular. Does she agree that the impact that is having on our cultural festivals, universities and creative industries flies in direct contrast to the “Britain is GREAT” and “Global Britain” rhetoric we hear? Britain is not open for business; Britain is closed. [*Interruption.*]

Alison Thewliss: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. I hear Ministers chuntering—perhaps they do not have the same experience in their constituency surgeries as me and my hon. Friend. Perhaps they are among the MPs who decide to shop their constituents to the Home Office, rather than help them out. I agree with my hon. Friend, who has done a great amount of work for the all-party parliamentary group for Africa. This issue does damage our credibility.

Often, such cases are resolved only when they are raised with the media. I challenge the Home Office on this. I have had a number of pretty much identical cases, but the ones that have been resolved a full six months ahead of the others are the ones I have got in the press—on Channel 4, in *The Guardian* and in other places. I therefore question the impartiality and fairness of the Home Office.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): Like me, my hon. Friend will see people at her surgery regularly who are looking for a family member to come here who has been numerous times before, but they are knocked back. Is not the fallacy of the UK Government's proposal on ending free movement that, inevitably in a free trade agreement, they will start dishing out lots of visas anyway, and we will end up with more people at our surgeries when the incompetent Home Office fails to administrate those visas, creating more work for us as MPs?

Alison Thewliss: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend.

There is also great unfairness with spousal and family visas, due to the minimum income threshold. I am aware of constituents who have had to take on several jobs to meet the threshold—they are absolutely exhausted. The daft thing is that, if their spouse was able to come over, they would more than meet the threshold. The threshold is stopping that person coming over and contributing to our country.

John Redwood: Which Bills, if any, in the Queen's Speech will the SNP support?

Alison Thewliss: We doubt whether many of the Bills in the Queen's Speech will make it. There was an article in *The Times* yesterday—I do not know if the right hon. Gentleman saw it—that did not give any of the Bills a five out of five for their chances of passing. We will wait and see if any of them make it, never mind whether they have our support.

The spousal visa system leaves many people unable to see their children or their family. It is heartbreaking having to deal with that week in, week out and having children coming in saying, "When can I get to see my daddy?" If Home Office Ministers want to come to my surgery and sit in on those meetings, I would absolutely welcome it, because they should see what is happening at first hand.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) will talk more about post-study work visas. We would welcome their return, because we believe that it is important to say to people who want to come and study in Scotland, "You are welcome. You will get to come here, to contribute to our society and to carry on your lives in Scotland after you have concluded your studies." The UK Government seem to say, "Come, we will take your money for your international

student visa and then you can go—we're done with you." That is just unacceptable; it is not welcoming in the slightest.

Jim McMahon: I agree entirely with the points the hon. Lady is making. Something that was absent from the Queen's Speech was progressing the work on modern day slavery. I give credit to the former Prime Minister for the leadership she has shown on this issue, but it is clear that we need to do more on progressing the security and support given to victims of modern day slavery.

Alison Thewliss: I very much agree with that. A lot more needs to be done to ensure that people who have been victims do not end up being blamed for having been trafficked into the country or for being party to that. Those people should get some leniency and help from the Home Office, rather than it trying to remove them at the first instance.

On post-study work visas, the Government need to consider the fact that the Scottish education system has four-year degrees as standard and that many other degrees, such as engineering, architecture and medicine, are longer than three years. It should not be the case that people get three years into a degree and have to reapply, with no certainty that they will finish it. Those courses will be deeply unattractive to people if they do not know whether they can finish them. Perhaps each type of course should carry a visa with it, rather than there being an arbitrary three-year cut-off.

Jamie Stone: Obviously, I am in Scottish form today. Is not another strength of the Scottish degree that it has a much broader base in terms of first-year subjects, one of which people carry on in the second year?

Alison Thewliss: I agree with the hon. Gentleman on that.

The way in which entrepreneurs and highly skilled migrants have been treated by the Home Office has been despicable. I have had people at my surgery who have been brought here by the UK Government as part of entrepreneurial schemes and then told that they cannot stay. They have been chucked out after having sought all the investment for their companies and having established themselves. The Home Office whips all that out from underneath them. Highly skilled migrants are still waiting for an apology from the UK Government, after they were found in the courts to be incorrect. Those people deserve an apology and deserve to have their cases resolved and their leave to remain progressed. The Government are looking at a Windrush compensation scheme. I would like to see compensation for everybody the Home Office has done wrong and made incorrect decisions on, because their life chances have been seriously diminished and they have gone into debt in order to fight the Home Office, only to be proved right at the end of the day.

I also call on the UK Government to do more to end the scandal of indefinite immigration detention, which leaves so many people with no certainty as to how long they will be stuck in that system. I have had many constituents who have gone into Dungavel only to be sent out not having had to be there in the first place. All the stuff in the immigration Bill and all the cases that I have seen tell me that the shoddy treatment that the UK

Government dish out to non-EU migrants should not be dished out to EU nationals as well. We should be removing this unfairness, not extending it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) will speak more on settled status and its limitations later, but I highlight from my own casework people who have been left upset and baffled by being refused settled status, despite having been here for decades in some cases. In addition, the Department for Work and Pensions has regularly been refusing EU nationals access to universal credit. There appears to me to be a concerted, underhand effort to remove the rights of EU nationals even before Brexit. That is utterly unacceptable and it must stop.

Scottish Government economic modelling shows that each EU worker in Scotland adds, on average, £34,400 to GDP and £10,400 to Government revenue. The Migration Advisory Committee has found that people coming to this country contribute more in UK taxes than they take out of the system. It makes absolutely zero sense, on any level, to turn them away and to make them feel unwelcome, as this UK Government are determined to do. We have found so far that people have found Scotland more welcoming. The words of the First Minister and others have been instrumental in making sure that people do feel welcome in Scotland and stay, but there is only so much that we can do under the hostile environment of this Government, the way in which they treat people, and the way the media in this country have been treating people. We will do our very best. We hope that it will make a difference to people.

Scotland needs a tailored system to meet our needs. Our challenge has long been emigration, not immigration. The thresholds and targets that prioritise the south-east of England, not our more varied economy in Scotland, do us no favours whatever. For example, tonnes of fruit and veg have been rotting in the fields. Apparently 87,000 punnets of raspberries remain unpicked on one farm alone while people in this country are driven to food banks. Across these islands we are seeing the uncertainty of Brexit and the impact of that on people's lives—people who would have come here but have been made unwelcome by this UK Government. The seasonal workers scheme is woefully inadequate if we see food rotting in the fields.

We also have uncertainty for the university sector with regard to funding through Horizon, Erasmus+ and the research development fund. We have the uncertainty about the future of research collaboration. We must see some progress on this. I would also question the logic of 12-month visas, although I suppose that is typical of a UK Government who clearly want to discourage people from coming here. The low-skilled jobs that they talk about are actually the ones that are the most vital to our country; they are done by people working in care homes and other public services who we desperately need. This UK Government continue to see people for the value of their salary rather than the contribution that they make to our society and our communities. We on the SNP Benches thank those people for their endeavours. If immigration was in the control of the Scottish Parliament, we would be treating people with dignity and respect.

Kirstene Hair: I very much thank the hon. Lady for eventually giving way. [*Interruption.*] Well, it seems to be a recurring incident, where Scottish Conservatives

are not allowed to intervene in debates when the Scottish nationalists are leading on them. She is talking about immigration and she is inevitably going to suggest that immigration should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament, but does she recognise that, on welfare, for example, it will be a whole 10 years—a decade—before that is devolved to the Scottish Parliament because the Scottish nationalists did not want to take it? It is always the case in this Parliament that they ask for powers and then do not take them.

Alison Thewliss: The hon. Lady, as so often, misses the point. We want control over all the levers of our economy, and all the powers that we can have, because we want our country to be independent. We do not want to be beholden to this bunch of chumps who just cannot seem to realise the things that Scotland has going for it.

We welcome the Domestic Abuse Bill. We call on the Home Secretary and others to look at our work in Scotland on Equally Safe. I also ask them to look at the SNP's announcement, just yesterday, of new protective orders to remove domestic abusers from the homes of their victims, because it has never been right that those perpetrating abuse have been able to keep a roof over their heads while the victim and, often, the children have been forced to leave and undergo the additional trauma of moving—finding a new home and starting over. I thank Scottish Women's Aid and all who have campaigned in Scotland for this change. If the UK Government are serious about supporting those facing domestic abuse, they must also look at the welfare benefits system and restore universal credit payments to women, rather than asking them to go through asking for split payments, which will put them in more danger. They must remove the two-child policy and the rape clause, which force women into staying with their abusers and into poverty; in some cases, as reported by some of the rape crisis organisations, women have been asked to terminate pregnancies because the child will not bring them any money. All these things are extremely dangerous and traumatic. The Government also need to end the scandal of no recourse to public funds. All these policies impoverish but they also put women at significant risk.

On housing policy, which is an important public service, the Tories continue to undermine social rented housing, contributing to spiralling housing costs in England. The difference in poverty across these islands can be put down, in some cases, to the housing costs in England being far more expensive than the housing costs in Scotland. House building in England is at its lowest level since 1920, and evictions are at a record high. How different in Scotland, with 50,000 new homes delivered across this parliamentary term and five times more social rented properties per head than in England from 2014 to 2018. We have ended the right to buy, we have invested, and we are bringing empty homes back into use, whereas they lie empty in England. The Tories should look to Scotland for how to make sure that this vital public service, through our housing association movement, is providing social rented housing that people can be proud to call home.

We welcome the Bill on building safety. Again, Scotland, in legislative terms, is well ahead of the game on this. However, I ask for further clarity on both insurance and mortgage lending for those who find themselves in a home with cladding, because I have had surgery cases

[Alison Thewliss]

where people have lost out in the sales of homes because of that uncertainty. I ask for some comprehensive action from this UK Government to try to make sure that people do not end up stuck in homes that they cannot sell and cannot get insurance on.

In Scotland we are leading where we have responsibility. We have the best performing NHS in the UK, we have social housing to be proud of, we have tackled knife crime, and we are making huge progress on many health issues. We are held back, however, in areas where the UK Government have responsibility—in immigration policy, in the parts of DWP policy that remain in the hands of that Department, and in areas such as drug reform. We desperately need safe drug consumption rooms to save lives in Scotland, but we are hampered by the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, which makes criminals out of those who want to give help to those suffering addiction problems. We do not have full control over all the important levers of our economy.

This debate takes place in the context of austerity and of broken Brexit Britain. It fails to tackle the fundamental issues that this country faces and it will hold Scotland back. We need the full powers of independence that will allow us the ability to look after all our citizens and to build a fairer, more prosperous Scotland, where all citizens can participate and play their role. Westminster has failed us—it is time for independence.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. A seven-minute limit on each Back-Bench speech will now apply.

1.28 pm

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): This week, we meet to debate a Queen's Speech put forward by a Government who do not have a majority. Many of the Bills in this Queen's Speech are addressing real public problems of great interest to our constituents of all persuasions, and many of them will attract support from voters who are not planning to vote Conservative. It is therefore particularly disappointing that when I asked SNP Members to say which of the Bills in this Queen's Speech they would support, the answer came that they would not support any of them. They could not think of any Bill—presumably, including the Domestic Abuse Bill—that they will support.

David Linden: The right hon. Gentleman will of course be aware that vast areas of the Domestic Abuse Bill are actually devolved. One of the problems that we in the SNP have in criticising this Queen's Speech is that the vast majority of the Bills in it do not apply to Scotland. In fact, there was no mention of Scotland in this Queen's Speech, so there is very little that is relevant to Scotland.

John Redwood: What I am about to say is still very relevant, which is that I think the public of the United Kingdom, given the circumstances in which we find ourselves, expect the Opposition to be a bit more positive and co-operative in tackling their priorities. It is not the Government's fault that we cannot resolve this problem, because the Government have put forward a very simple solution to it, which is to allow the public to choose a new Parliament, and I trust that they would then choose

a majority Government. If we are not allowed to do that because the Opposition parties can agree on blocking a general election, surely it is incumbent on them to help us to use the time we have intelligently and productively, in the wider interests of the electorate of the nation.

I want our Parliament to be well thought of by as many voters as possible of all persuasions. This Parliament is doing itself grave further damage if it does not co-operate and use this time during which the Opposition wish us to be here to find things on which we agree, to make improvements for those we represent. Those who represent a part of the United Kingdom with devolved government will, of course, be mainly interested in what their devolved Government do in those chosen areas, but there are still Union elements in this programme, and that is no reason to get in the way of us in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, where appropriate, doing what we need to do here. It would be good if SNP Members said that they were happy for us to do the things we want to do in our part of the United Kingdom, where we do not have the advantage of devolved responsibilities in a separate English or Welsh Parliament.

That is my message—Parliament should think about this. Why should Opposition parties co-operate? Well, for the simple reason that when we get to the general election, the public will take a particularly dim view of any party or group of MPs who have deliberately been negative about everything and unwilling to use the time, money and powers that this place and Government can bring to try to solve some of the problems before us.

On public services, I very much welcome the loosening of the purse strings. In 2010, my party and I thought that the deficit was massively too high and that emergency action was needed—as did, incidentally, the outgoing Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, who was planning pretty draconian measures to correct the deficit that his Government had created by bad management—but in the past two or three years, I have felt strongly that some parts of the public service are not getting enough money, and I have also felt that we had enough flexibility economically to do something about it. I also have my own favourite way to pay some of the bills, which is to stop paying any money to the European Union. I look forward to the day when that comes to pass, but many Members of Parliament here are desperate to spend as much money in Europe as possible, which has made that more difficult.

Let us leave out that contentious issue and concentrate on the extra money we can afford. I welcome that money for two reasons: first, because my local schools, health facilities and police force need that extra money; and, secondly, because our economy needs that money. The fiscal and monetary squeeze of the past three years has been too tight. I predicted that it would slow the economy, and that is exactly what it is doing. Superimposed on those domestic stresses, we now have a nasty world manufacturing recession and a general world economic slowdown. Policies in several of the great economies around the world have led to that slowdown and are taking time to correct. The United Kingdom needs to be part of the process of correcting that. We need looser fiscal and monetary policy to project a bit more growth and create a bit more prosperity.

I am pleased that the Secretary of State for Education is here, because along with other colleagues whose constituencies have seen schools and education services

deprived of adequate funding for some time, I strongly welcome the new minimum figures that will be given to my schools that have been below the minimum figures. But I do not think that my schools at or near the minimum figures are getting enough, and I look forward to future settlements dealing with that problem. It costs money to employ enough good teachers. In a part of the world such as mine, facilities and buildings are expensive, and that has to be reflected in the amount of money allocated.

I look forward to the 20,000 new police officers in the Thames valley, and I was pleased to hear my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary say that progress will be made on that soon, because we have a series of problems with drugs and violence that we need to tackle.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I thank my good friend for giving way. In the past 15 years or so, those in the armed forces have had a problem getting into things such as the police service, the fire service and the Prison Service. Does he agree that it would be good to have a recruitment drive for those junior non-commissioned officers, senior NCOs and young officers leaving the armed forces to go into that kind of profession?

Mr Speaker: Judging by the hon. Gentleman's appearance, I do not know whether he is anticipating an early dinner, a long dinner or, conceivably, both.

John Redwood: I agree with my hon. Friend, who has lots of expertise from his distinguished military career. There is a lot of talent in the armed forces. My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) said that such measures were taken to try to get personnel into teaching from that important resource, and we could spread that more widely.

I look forward to progress in particular with the county lines issue, with illegal settlements and with casual violence on the streets, which even comes sometimes to my constituency and is not welcome. More and better-resourced policing would be extremely good.

I also want to see progress in the health service. I am pleased that substantial sums of money have been allocated, under both the immediately retiring Government and the new Government. That is doubly welcome. I urge Ministers to do serious work with organisations such as those in my area on what the priorities for that money should be, because it is important that these large sums are spent intelligently. The priorities for patients are clear: we need more GPs, to provide better coverage of services; and we need better access to GP services, with better systems, so that people can make timely appointments, and enough GPs to offer advice and consultations. We certainly need more money for the large hospital in Reading, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead and I share with the Reading MPs, where various works need to be done, and recruitment is needed where there are shortages of trained staff.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): My right hon. Friend was saying earlier how important the additional resources going into education funding are. Does he agree that one of this Government's great achievements is the fair funding settlement, which provides for counties to be properly funded?

John Redwood: I agree, and we need to build on that, because we do not yet have all the answers.

In conclusion, I welcome the extra money, but let us put in the homework to ensure that it is spent intelligently and deals with the people's priorities, which I briefly sketched; I can go into greater detail with Ministers, if they would like subsequent meetings. Let us also think about the economic implications, because the UK economy has slowed too much, although is not in recession in the way that I fear the German economy is. There is a general trend of manufacturing collapse and big slowdowns or even recessions worldwide. We need both to increase public spending, as the Government are doing, and to cut taxes to stimulate the enterprise economy, because there is one simple thing that all Conservatives know: we cannot properly finance public services if we do not have a healthy and viable private enterprise economy.

1.38 pm

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I want to deal first with the myth that is perpetuated about the so-called economic mismanagement of the last Labour Government. Until 2008, that Government had an excellent record of controlling both the national debt and national deficit as a percentage of GDP. From 2008 to 2010, the increase in deficit and debt was not due to overspending; it was due to the collapse in revenues because of the banking crash, which affected every Government in the western world—that is the truth of the situation.

I will concentrate my comments on matters relating to the remit of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, not because I am not interested in matters to do with the police, education and the national health service—of course I am—but because of time restrictions.

I want first to deal with local government spending. The Government have said that there will be extra spending power for local councils. It has now become clear that that depends on councils putting their council tax up by 4%. A 4% council tax increase is what the Government are requiring of councils to deliver the spending power that the Government say they will have, including a 2% increase to fund social care.

As Councillor George Lindars-Hammond said the other day, 2% for Sheffield is very different from 2% for Westminster. The position is even worse for some other small authorities, which will simply not be able to raise the money to provide the social care their citizens need. Of course, it is all right—isn't it, Mr Speaker?—because we will have social care reform. The Queen's Speech says that we will have legislation on social care. I welcome that, as I have welcomed the similar promises on the seven or eight occasions they have been made before. When will we get at least a Green Paper on social care? Will social care be kicked into the long grass once again?

I welcome the reference in the Queen's Speech to devolution, which has been on the back burner for too long. Good work was done with the deals and setting up mayoral combined authorities. I am just a bit disappointed that the Queen's Speech refers to more of the same: city deals, other sorts of deals or enhancing those already in place. We need a comprehensive devolution framework, which as of right devolves powers to all local authorities—urban or rural, cities or towns—

[Mr Clive Betts]

throughout the country that want to take them up. We should move towards that, and the Select Committee on Housing, Communities and Local Government is holding an inquiry on devolution. I am sure all members of the Committee will push for devolving powers to local authorities. We want more progress on devolution, but I welcome at least the mention of it in the Queen's Speech and the commitment to doing something about it.

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Betts: I will because I know that the hon. Gentleman is very interested in devolution.

John Stevenson: As the hon. Gentleman will know, I am quite sympathetic to what he has just said. Does he agree that, if we are to have a White Paper, no council should necessarily have a veto on any changes in its locality and that, if a number of councils want change, one should not be allowed to stop it happening?

Mr Betts: I am very sympathetic to the point the hon. Gentleman makes about the situation in Cumbria. Having one council holding everything up certainly needs addressing, and I understand the problem he highlights.

I will move on to building safety. The Government have finally accepted that they will legislate to bring in the recommendations of the Hackitt review. When Dame Judith came to the Select Committee last December, she said she was disappointed that it had taken the Government seven months to accept that they would implement all her recommendations. I am a little bit worried that the Queen's Speech refers to legislating, but no specific Bill is mentioned in the list of measures. Building safety is really important, but it needs to be accompanied by adequate funding.

Thousands of people in this country still live in high-rise blocks and other properties with dangerous cladding. The Government have put money in place for social housing, and they have now put it in place for the private sector, but there needs to be greater urgency to ensure that it is spent, and in particular that reluctant private owners are made to do the work. There is an additional problem. Not only high-rise but high-risk buildings, such as old people's homes and hospitals, need addressing, as well as cladding other than ACM—for example, zinc cladding material. The Government are reviewing all that, but there are many concerns and suspicions. The hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) has pushed hard on the matter in the Select Committee. Cladding needs addressing and the Government will have to find probably billions more pounds to deal with the problem to ensure that not merely homes, but hospitals, schools and every form of accommodation are safe.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I thank the Chair of the Select Committee for giving way. On safety in high-rise buildings, does he agree that it is repugnant that leaseholders could end up paying the cost of making the buildings safe and that the freeholders should take responsibility?

Mr Betts: Absolutely. The Select Committee has welcomed the Government's indications that that is their intention. The pressure now has to be on how that intention will be put into practice, because clearly there are many examples of where that is not happening.

I want to raise one or two other issues that are not in the Queen's Speech—I am disappointed about that—on which the Select Committee has asked for Government action. Leasehold reform is a major issue across the House; 700 pieces of evidence were submitted to our Select Committee inquiry. The Government's intentions are set out for new properties, particularly for new houses not being leasehold, and restrictions on service charges and other costs on leasehold flats. However, we still have not got a clear commitment to legislate for existing leaseholders who have been mis-sold leases and ripped off by service charges and other permission fees. That is simply not acceptable. I think that we produced a very good Select Committee report, which was widely welcomed by Members across the House. It is disappointing to see no reference in the Queen's Speech to leasehold reform.

The other area that is not mentioned is the private rented sector, but again there seems to be cross-party support from Members on both Front Benches for reform of section 21 provisions to ensure that there cannot be no-fault evictions. Where is the legislation to deal with that and to tackle rogue landlords who abuse the situation and exploit their tenants? It is very disappointing that there is no reference to the private rented sector in the Queen's Speech. The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government will come before the Select Committee in the next couple of weeks. I am sure that we will push him further on that point.

There is no reference to fracking in the Queen's Speech. Perhaps that is a good thing. One constituent asked me the other day, "Does that mean that the Government have given up on fracking because they are not referring to it?" We have been waiting 18 months for a Government response to our last inquiry into fracking, in which we opposed the Government's proposals to extend permitted development rights and to include fracking in the national infrastructure arrangements. There is still no answer from the Government. I said to my constituent that perhaps the most significant thing is not the lack of mention of fracking in the Queen's Speech, but the fact that Cuadrilla has now pulled out of its arrangements and exploration in Lancashire. That probably means that the commercial sector is reaching a view that fracking is no longer viable. Why do not the Government accept that and transfer that funding into more renewable energy investment, which is surely what we all want?

Just before the Queen's Speech, the Government announced that they would put up the cost of borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board, which particularly affects local authorities, from 0.8% to 1.8%. That is more than doubling. It is one of the things that are supposed to have no consequences. The Government tucked away the announcement on a Friday afternoon before the Queen's Speech. However, the cost of that borrowing will fall particularly on housing revenue accounts, and all the good work that the Government have encouraged by lifting the housing revenue account cap will be undone by the extra cost of borrowing,

which will distort and put back all the business plans that local authorities have to build more council homes. It is a backward step. I want Ministers to explain why they have done that and whether they had any understanding of the consequences.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I trust that, as usual, the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) will pepper his oration with philosophy, poetry and prose, or conceivably a combination of all three, thereby satisfying an expectant audience.

1.47 pm

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I certainly would not want to disappoint you, Mr Speaker, so I must rise to the occasion and fulfil your aim for my speech. Like you, I believe it is a politician's duty to inspire. But I would go further—it is our mission to enthrall, but at least we should try to inspire. Too much of modern politics has become peppered with dull managerialism.

G.K. Chesterton said:

“For fear of the newspapers politicians are dull, and at last they are too dull even for the newspapers.”

Any Queen's Speech is therefore welcome because it sets out a series of measures that we can debate and consider. Indeed, it has enlivened a discussion today that could not have taken place had the Government not set out such a series of measures. The least that can be said of the Queen's Speech is that it does just that: it is bold, it is fresh and it is evidence of an agenda. Whether it could be said to be a coherent mission or—dare one say?—evidence for a vision is more debatable, but at least it is a fresh start. Many of the measures are necessary, and most are desirable.

The Home Secretary is herself, as I noted when I intervened on her, a breath of fresh air. I am going to say some very nice things about a former Home Secretary in a minute, just in case she was worrying that I would not. The Home Secretary said that many of the measures are to address freedom from fear. Fear and doubt pervade too much of Britain. In too many places, too many people we represent live lives of fear, and crime perhaps strikes the greatest fear in our constituents' hearts. The continuing threat of terror is the apex of those fears, and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), who earlier made such an impressive contribution to this debate, mentioned in her final Prime Minister's questions, at the Home Office I was able to introduce measures to tackle terrorism, but I could not have done so without her guidance and leadership. There is no one more resolute in their determination to tackle that threat than my right hon. Friend.

The fear that people feel daily, however, is the fear of disorder, and many of the measures in this Queen's Speech are welcome because they begin to address that kind of disorder. The daily experience of lawlessness blights lives, diminishes communities, damages and sometimes destroys individuals and families. The figures that I looked at in preparation for this debate are stark. The year of my birth was 1958—I know that hon. Members are wondering how that could be so, but I was indeed born in 1958, and you probably know the date, time and place, Mr Speaker, given your approach to

these things. In that year, there were 261 murders or manslaughters. In 2018, there were 732. In 1958, there were 1,692 robberies; in 2018, there were 82,566. As far as arson is concerned, the numbers have gone from 722 to more than 25,000. There is no doubt that crime of all kinds has grown at an alarming rate over my lifetime. It has to be said that unfortunately most of the snowflake elite who run too much of Britain are in denial about that and about how to deal with it.

Richard Drax: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best way to combat this level of fear is the sight of a police officer on the beat?

Sir John Hayes: Absolutely. The Queen's Speech and the spending provisions that the Government have made allow for more police officers to be on the beat to tackle crime, to reassure potential victims of crime and to solve as well as to anticipate the incidents that cause so much misery.

The denial that I described is as plain as this: there are many people, including, I am sad to say, some people in this House, who simply will not face the fact that many of the people who commit crimes are cruel, vicious, heartless thugs and villains who deserve to be caught, deserve to be convicted and deserve to be locked up for as long as possible. That is what our constituents would say, and the fact that we do not say it frequently enough creates a gulf, at least in their perception, between what the people affected by these things, who live on the frontline, know and what people in this place think.

Jim McMahon *rose*—

Sir John Hayes: The hon. Gentleman might be about to reassure me that he takes as hard a line on crime and disorder as I do.

Jim McMahon: I can certainly reassure the right hon. Gentleman that I have never been called a snowflake. He must accept that if he was to look back at the 1800s and at the type of crimes being committed then he would see just how many were done by people stealing to survive—stealing clothes to wear and food to eat. Accepting how much of today's crime is driven by poverty and absolute desperation is not being a snowflake; it is understanding the underlying social causes that lead people to commit crime.

Sir John Hayes: Crime is caused by many things, but the idea that crime is an illness to be treated rather than a malevolent choice made by certain individuals has been the pervasive view of those dealing with crime—criminologists and so on—throughout the period I have described, and that view is out of tune and out of touch with what most people in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and mine know and feel.

Of course there are many causes of crime. Earlier, I heard the shadow Minister describe her working-class credentials. No one in this Chamber could trump my working-class credentials, and on the council estate where I was brought up most people were law-abiding. It was ordered. I do not remember much vandalism, and there was certainly not much crime. People lived in relative safety. If we went back to that place now, I suspect none of that would be true. There would be a high level of drug addiction, a high level of family breakdown, a lot of lawlessness and all the symbols of

[Sir John Hayes]

disorder. That is just the stark reality, and it has to be addressed. This Government are trying to do so in the measures they have introduced in this Queen's Speech, and those measures deserve support because they strike a chord with the sentiments of the people we represent.

I was delighted to follow the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), who is always a thoughtful contributor to our considerations. He exemplified what was once taken as read: that the duty of people in this House is to make a persuasive argument, to attempt to offer a thesis and then to advance their case. I have to say that the shadow Minister stood in sad and stark contrast to that principle. It is not enough simply to string together a series of exhortations with a beginning and an end. That is not what proper consideration of measures in the Queen's Speech or elsewhere should be about, and it does nothing for the quality or life of this Parliament.

The immigration Bill is also welcome, although I share some of the doubts expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead. A points-based system is good in theory, but regulation and enforcement was certainly a challenge and we will need to look at that very closely. What is absolutely clear, rather as with crime, is that the liberal establishment in this country is out of touch with the views of most of our constituents. Most people in this country, in every poll taken on the subject, think that we have had too much immigration for too long and that it needs to be controlled. It is not contentious to say that; it is not controversial. It simply reflects what most people feel and know. Having said that, all advanced countries enjoy immigration because it is necessary sometimes to bring in people because of their skills and for other reasons.

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that many valued members of the NHS, doing valuable jobs, have come from other countries?

Sir John Hayes: I will conclude my remarks by simply saying this, Mr Speaker. Chesterton also said that at the heart of every man's life is a dream. Queen's Speeches should be about fuelling dreams, and my dream is of a better future for our nation.

Mr Speaker: Sadly, we have no further time either for Chesterton or, indeed, for the right hon. Gentleman.

1.57 pm

Dame Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Good, well-funded public services are the lifeblood of a decent society. They are absolutely vital in allowing people and communities to develop their potential. At the beginning of today's debate, we heard the Home Secretary talk about the importance of good local services to prevent vulnerable young people from becoming engaged in crime, yet this Queen's Speech does not contain any firm commitment to reversing the savage cuts to local services that have been perpetuated on local councils since 2010.

Liverpool City Council has lost 63% of its Government funding for local services. This is particularly traumatic in a poor place such as Liverpool, where a 1% increase in council tax will raise only £1.75 million; in leafy

Surrey, a 1% increase in council tax will raise £7.28 million. The more that the Government reduce this commitment to poorer areas, the greater the problem of poverty will be.

Mayor Joe Anderson, together with Liverpool City Council, has performed miracles, both in protecting the people of Liverpool from the most savage consequences of the cuts and in regenerating the city of Liverpool. It is through that regeneration that we have seen jobs and businesses prosper, and the Government have cut back on local services. This year, the city council and the people of Liverpool are facing a major crisis. There are more cuts staring them in the face and nothing in the Queen's Speech or in the recent financial statement for next year that gives any confidence whatsoever that there will be any reduction in those cuts or their consequences for the people of Liverpool. I call on the Government to engage with Liverpool City Council and the people of Liverpool to find a way to deal with this very critical situation.

Richard Graham: As a former civil servant from a family of teachers, I strongly agree with the hon. Lady about the vital importance of really good public services and the funding for them. Does she agree that the extra funding for the police, education and the NHS is really important, and that, despite cuts in local government funding, places such as Gloucester City Council have achieved extraordinary things by doubling the number of play areas over the past decade?

Dame Louise Ellman: I agree that the hon. Member makes important points, but Merseyside police force has lost 1,100 officers since 2010 and the Government's proposals are to replace only 70 of them. That is hardly addressing the problem.

I now want to turn to the scandal of the unfinished new Royal Liverpool hospital, which was due to open its doors in March 2017. Now, two and a half years later, the hospital has not been finished and there is no date for it to open its doors. First, there was the collapse of the PFI as Carillion went under. Following that, there was the new scandal of the major demolition of key parts of the new building that was put up by Carillion, which is, of course, now defunct. Major parts of the new building, including beams, had to be demolished because they were unsafe. All of the cladding on the new hospital needed to be replaced, because it too was deemed unsafe.

This deplorable situation demands an inquiry into how that took place. Even more than that, it is absolutely essential that funds are made available quickly to complete the building of the hospital, and that the funds are not taken from other health budgets that are equally important to the people of Liverpool. The people of Liverpool need their hospital. Vital health services are required. Although the current staff at the Royal Liverpool hospital are excellent and work extremely hard, they are battling against a failing building. The new hospital should be taking its place on the campus, together with the new Clatterbridge cancer centre, to bring top class cancer treatment to the people of Liverpool. The new hospital is also part of Liverpool's regeneration and a part of its thriving health and biomedical centre. The hospital, its medical services and its research must work with the groundbreaking international work already done by the

Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine and the Institute of Infection and Global Health, parts of Liverpool University, which are renowned for combating tuberculosis and other diseases—and, indeed, combating poverty—throughout the world. The hospital is therefore absolutely essential to provide top class services to the people of Liverpool and essential to the city's regeneration.

It is absolutely deplorable that we are in this situation. Two and a half years after the new hospital was promised, no end is in sight. I have asked Ministers repeatedly—three new Ministers in the past few months—for an answer about what is happening and for a meeting to discuss the situation. I have not been offered a meeting and I have not been given a proper answer to these key questions. I have been told that a business case is being prepared and that much is being discussed. I would like to make it very clear today that that is simply not good enough. The hospital has to be completed. The funds have to be made available. They must not be taken from any other source, which would create more problems for other parts of the health sector and for the people of Liverpool and elsewhere. It is the Government's responsibility to finish the hospital, and finish it soon. I will persist in asking these questions and I will not be going away, at least until the new hospital is operating.

2.4 pm

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Dame Louise Ellman), who makes a very passionate case for the public services in her constituency. I hope to do the same. Public services go to the heart of this debate and to the heart of my speech. Like the hon. Lady, I will focus very much on my constituency, which is the Isle of Wight.

It has long been argued that the Island needs an island deal that recognises the additional cost of providing public services on an island. Throughout the UK, in order to support islands and isolated communities, the Government have generally provided either a bridge, as in the case of the Isle of Skye, or increased levels of funding, as in the case of the Scottish islands needs allowance. The Isle of Wight has to all intents and purposes been treated as part of the mainland United Kingdom, because we have never had additional support despite the additional costs. In various conversations I have had with the Prime Minister, he has been generous enough to agree the need for an island settlement. He has done so on visits to the Island in June this year, on record in the House on 25 September and in private conversations with me. I therefore hope that this is a discussion on content and not principle, but I am very happy to make either argument to the Secretary of State. I am delighted to see him on the Treasury Bench today.

Jim McMahon: Is not part of the problem the deal-making nature of such conversations, with areas pitched against each other? Does the hon. Gentleman support the Local Government Association's recommendation for an independent body to assess local government need in every area to make sure that everyone gets their fair share?

Mr Seely: I know of no such case, but what I do know is that the Island is the only significant population on an island in the UK that has neither a fixed link nor increased funding. I am not necessarily playing my

constituency off against other isolated communities, but there are specific additional costs that I would like to mention which I do not think have been met structurally by Governments for the past 50 years.

I intend to show to the Secretary of State an evidence-based case outlining what the additional costs are. By way of background, there is a wealth of evidence internationally, relating to the Isle of Wight and other islands in the UK, that shows the extra cost of providing public services on islands to the same extent as the mainland. Multiple surveys have found structural and economic challenges of severance by sea, which is the technical term, including extra costs from forced self-sufficiency and diseconomies of scale—smaller markets, fewer competitors in those markets. There are six, potentially seven, areas that I would briefly like to raise with the Minister and to put on the record now.

First, on local government services, the University of Portsmouth in 2015 estimated that the additional cost of providing good public services to the same standard as the mainland on the Isle of Wight was £6.4 million. Adjusted for inflation, that is now £7.1 million. Three specific factors were taken into account: the additional cost of doing business—for example, it costs 30% extra to build a building on the Isle of Wight because of the importation of materials via ferry; dislocation, with smaller markets and fewer entrants to those markets; and what is known as reduced spillover. A dual carriageway in Southampton does not help us and, vice versa, a dual carriageway in Cowes does not help the folks in Southampton because of severance by sea. We are asking that an agreed formula be devised—I make this speech with the full support of the Isle of Wight Council; we are working on this together—as part of a potential island deal that recognises these additional challenges, which amount to approximately 3% of the funding we receive.

Secondly, on healthcare, we have half the population needed for a district general hospital, yet we need to provide a district general hospital on the Isle of Wight because of the Solent. You cannot give birth on a helicopter; you cannot give birth on a ferry. We need to provide a decent level of care at a district general hospital on the Island, but we lack the throughput, the tariffs per head under NHS funding, to fund that. Our NHS trust believes the cost of 24/7 acute care is £8.9 million, the cost of ambulance services is £1.9 million, and the cost of patient travel to the mainland, of which there were over 40,000 journeys last year, is approximately £560,000. That is a total of nearly £11 million.

Thirdly, on local agriculture infrastructure, the Island is 80% rural and our rural economy is very important to our overall economic prosperity. However, we are again hampered by our dependence on the mainland. For example, under EU regulations—maybe gilded too much by UK officials—an Island abattoir became uneconomic. Livestock raised on the Island is shipped to the mainland for slaughter even if it is then imported back to the Island. That is less humane than local slaughter. It also adds costs and fuel miles. Considering we are trying to become carbon neutral, it is an unnecessary waste of resource.

A few key pieces of infrastructure would help us enormously—we have an Isle of Wight grain collective, so the Island is keen to explore the idea of forming collectives to solve these problems, but we could also do with some grant funding in recognition. These pieces of

[Mr Seely]

infrastructure are an abattoir, tanker and extra milk storage facilities, grain storage and milling facilities and a box erector for vegetables.

Fourthly, on housing, there is the need for an “exceptional circumstance” to be granted. In my opinion, the housing targets given to us meet the Government’s definition of unsustainable. They are bad for the Island and I believe that the methodology is flawed. The targets are nothing more than a projection based on historical trends that do not consider our future desire, first, to produce housing for Islanders and, secondly, as part of a national agenda, to shape a more sustainable and green future.

Developments on the Island, sadly, are too rarely designed for local people, but are instead designed for mainland—very often, retiree—demand. This forces our youngsters off the Island. We also do not have the infrastructure to support those additional homes, because we are an island. Our hospitals are full, public services are under pressure despite the extra funding, which I am grateful for, electricity and sewerage are at capacity and a third of our water comes from the mainland. The Green Book calculations do not serve the Island well. We intend to present an Island plan to Government that will have a significantly reduced figure, which our landscape and population can cope with, but which supports local demand. That is extremely important, and I would welcome Government support and understanding from the relevant Secretary of State and Ministries, so that we can make sure we get this through and help to create a sustainable, balanced demographic and a sustainable economy, and start paying into the Treasury.

Fifthly, on public services, I would like a unique public authority on the Isle of Wight that combines the work of our local authority, NHS trust and clinical commissioning group. Because of the nature of the Island—it is quite small-scale; social scientists tend to love us because we are an island, so we are easily measurable—this could be, along with areas such as Manchester, a role model of how to achieve much greater levels of integration throughout the country. However, we need a small pot of money and a sense of understanding of how this could work to make a success of it.

Lastly, on transport, we have the most expensive ferries in the world. They have very high profit margins, which Islanders, who earn 80% of the national average, have to pay for. My preference would be for Government support to look at different models of ownership and public service obligations.

Before I come to my summation I want to say that there may be additional costs from special educational needs provision. However, I did not want to hold up the letter to the Prime Minister, so they may come additionally.

Hopefully, I have outlined an evidence-based case looking at the additional costs of public services, and I look forward to following this up with Ministers.

2.12 pm

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Like other Opposition Members, I see this Queen’s Speech as a bit of a fraud. It is being used in the most cynical way by those who see Parliament as no more than window dressing for their latest plot. The Prime Minister claims that his proposals reflect the people’s priorities. Some of them certainly reflect the anxiety and damage resulting from Tory austerity and the Brexit chaos that he has created.

Of course, I am pleased that our police will be given the power to arrest foreign criminals, although, in large part, we already possess that power through the European arrest warrant. Of course it is good that we are being offered some new police officers to compensate for the 21,000 that the Tories have cut since they have been in office, but these promises are designed to deflect attention from the fact that the people who caused these problems are sitting on the Government Benches.

I welcome promises of longer jail terms for serious sex offenders and stopping the early release of sex offenders already behind bars, but we do not need new legislation to achieve that. The Prime Minister does not need a Queen’s Speech, nor does he even need a parliamentary majority. He could encourage his Ministers to do that today. We could stop letting out the people we have behind bars.

Then there are the proposals to tackle electoral fraud, based on almost as many allegations of fraud as the number levelled at the Prime Minister in his dealings with his American muse. It is just as well that we cannot change the law based on those allegations or he would be in real trouble. We know that 3.5 million people do not have any photo ID and that the idea has the potential to deprive thousands of the opportunity to vote. It could be an electoral Windrush, although it would be no accident this time; it would be the deprivation of a fundamental right by deliberate design.

If this programme was really intended to reflect people’s priorities, there would be a children’s mental health Bill, measures to address the IVF postcode lottery for those suffering from infertility, and action to address the shocking delays in cancer diagnosis and treatment that are costing lives needlessly. There would also be a recognition that if a five-year-old with cystic fibrosis in Scotland can get access to the drug Orkambi, so should young Jemima in my constituency and every other child like her, the length and breadth of this country.

If this was not fantasy and fraudulent politics, we would have legislation to address the shambles that is social care, but we all know what happened the last time the Tories dared voice their true intentions on this, so this time they are going to avoid it altogether—just like they are avoiding a Bill to provide carers with an entitlement to statutory leave, a promise also outstanding from their last manifesto.

If the Prime Minister really cared what the public thought, there would be legislation to protect private tenants, powers to tackle rogue landlords, and measures to redress the balance between local communities and the rights of developers, especially when it comes to conversions of family homes to houses in multiple occupation and the constant building of inappropriate accommodation against local wishes. Of course, there would also be real help for homeless families, those in the Travelodges, the run-down hotels and the bed and breakfast joints, and an end to the waste of millions of pounds on pointless lottery schemes designed to sell off housing association properties. We could divert precious resources from that silly scheme tomorrow and use it for an emergency programme to get the homeless off the streets before winter bites.

If the Conservative party was listening to my constituents, it would want to do something about the women born in the ’50s and diddled out of their pensions. It would own up to and put right the mess they have made of universal credit, and it would offer a targeted apprenticeship

scheme to tackle stubborn unemployment that means that in constituencies such as Selly Oak unemployment is twice the national average. It would acknowledge the awful violence suffered by shopworkers, and in its approach to serious violence, it would bring in legislation that recognises just how seriously we regard an attack on any person, any worker, simply doing their job.

There is no shortage of things that need doing and no limit to the number of issues where this Parliament could make a difference, but that needs a Prime Minister and a Government who take Parliament seriously, who treat people seriously, and who are determined to tackle injustice and put things right. Sadly, we have a Prime Minister and a Government who seem to revel in creating injustice and care only about the rights that benefit their own. That is why the Queen's Speech is wrong. That is why it is a phoney and that is why it is a fraud.

2.18 pm

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): It is a great pleasure to participate in this Queen's Speech debate and to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe). Although I could not agree with a word he said, it was a good story.

I warmly welcome the content of the Queen's Speech, which has a strong emphasis on the people's priorities. Of course Brexit is paramount and needs to be implemented, but the provision of public services—health, education and policing—is vital to the people of our country, whatever part of the country they live in. It is right to concentrate on these, as the Government have done in the Queen's Speech.

I want to concentrate on education. I was privileged to have a good state education, and subsequently to be a teacher and a lecturer, so I have seen education from both sides, as a worker within it and as a student. I passionately believe that every child deserves the best possible start in life, regardless of their background or where they live, and that access to good schools is essential to building the foundations of success in later life.

While the shadow Education Secretary's speech was powerful in performance, it lacked constructive content. It retained the old-fashioned Labour approach of putting ideology before children's education, though no mention was made of the fact that they want to abolish Ofsted, scrap the free schools programme and abolish independent schools. That was all lacking in her contribution. We should all be proud of what the coalition Government and this Government have done in education since 2010: not only are there more good or outstanding schools—the proportion is now 85%—but 1.9 million children are now in a good or outstanding school, and the attainment gap continues to narrow.

Mrs Main: I listened to the shadow Secretary of State explain her position on scrapping independent schools. Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that there was no explanation of where all these pupils would go within the system, should Labour abolish them and raid their assets overnight?

Sir David Evennett: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I agree totally.

I will return to what we have done in education: the academy programme, which the coalition Government began and this Conservative Government have continued,

has transformed the education landscape, while a record proportion of 16 and 17-year-olds are now participating in education or apprenticeships, which is good news, as, too, is our shaking up of the GCSE grade boundaries and the increasing number of excellent education results in our schools.

Nevertheless, there is still much to be done. Despite the many successes, we need to address social mobility to allow people to dream—as my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) put it, to dream their dreams and achieve their ambitions. That is what education should be all about. We are fortunate in Bexley to have many brilliant local schools, both primary and secondary, and a wide range of job opportunities. More importantly, the number of apprenticeships is going up. We have a diverse provision of different types of school across the borough: grammar schools, Church schools, comprehensives, single sex—really good schools where children from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds are helped to achieve excellent results and are given access to a wide range of opportunities. It is no surprise that Bexley is listed as a social mobility hotspot.

That said, much more needs to be done across the country, and even in parts of our borough, to make sure that every child reaches their potential. Disengagement and lack of aspiration remain issues among certain sections of our school pupils, and we have to do more—I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is a passionate supporter of that. We need to change that and inspire people to achieve their potential. I therefore welcome the commitment in the Queen's Speech to ensuring that all young people have access to an excellent education so that they can unlock their full potential and prepare for the world of work.

Funding, of course, has been an issue—it is always raised when I go round schools—so I welcome the Government's commitment on two fronts: one, making sure the per pupil premium is increased and fair, and two, increasing teachers' starting salaries to encourage the best and brightest people into teaching. It is a great career and a great opportunity to mould and help young people to maximise their life opportunities. I regularly visit schools across my constituency, and I know that there are other issues to address, including behaviour, discipline and teacher retention. The increase in money and support for teachers will hopefully make sure we retain more teachers and give them opportunities and support from parents, governors and the local community, because that is the way to keep good people in teaching. We need them.

Funding is not the only issue. Higher and further education also need to be looked at. I want to say a few words on further education because I know my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is particularly interested in that. Training, opportunities and technical subjects are the key, and funding is an important issue in further education. While we have seen the biggest injection of new money in a single year—£400 million for 16-to-19 provision next year—we still need to do more. This extra money will enable further education providers to strengthen their provision and provide students with more options, but our country will need these skills post-Brexit. I welcome the money, but I make this plea to my right hon. Friend: more needs to be done.

The colleges have been rather the Cinderella service of the education world. The universities and the schools have had more funding, but there is a real role for

[Sir David Evennett]

further education colleges. I am passionate about this. Bexley College is part of London South East Colleges, the others being Greenwich, Orpington and Bromley. These colleges are doing fantastic work. The technical and media departments are outstanding. I give that example to highlight how passionate I am about further education and how important it is that we look at our FE colleges and lecturers' salaries, which are not as good as teachers' salaries.

I know that the Government are committed to creating a country where everyone has the same opportunities. From listening to the Labour party one would not think so, but we in the Conservative party passionately believe that everyone across the country should have a fair opportunity. The core of that is the Prime Minister's one nation conservatism, which strongly endorses the belief that wherever people are or come from they should have the opportunities to maximise their potential in whatever they want to do. We need to encourage people from a young age to engage in education and to give them the opportunities they need to develop their talents. [Interruption.] Sedentary chuntering from the Opposition will not get us anywhere; constructive discussion and comment is what we are after.

Education gives us an understanding of the world around us and changes it into something better. It develops our perspective on life, helps us to build opinions and points of view and, more importantly, facilitates the social mobility that can enable us to achieve our ambitions. I strongly support the measures in the Queen's Speech. It should be welcomed across the House as we take positive action to tackle the social and economic divisions in our country and give everyone the opportunities they want, deserve and need.

2.27 pm

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Sir David Evennett). Surprisingly, I found myself agreeing with some of what he said, particularly about further education.

I want to speak about tertiary education, rather than making a distinction between higher and further education. When we are talking about young people, we should be talking about positive destinations and trying to make sure that every young person has the opportunity to go on and be successful, wherever that should be. It gives me great pride to stand here as an MP from Scotland knowing that Scotland has the highest percentage of positive destinations for our young people anywhere in the UK.

The Queen's Speech was full of money promises that cannot be met. The Prime Minister in his speech on Monday referred to a free trading United Kingdom and a high-wage, low-tax economy. That does not add up. It is not possible to continue cutting taxes and have well funded, well resourced public services. A recent "Panorama" programme painted a grim picture of the reality at the chalk face. Since 2015, schools in England have had real-terms cuts, with billions having been cut from school budgets, and this has had a huge impact on teachers and young people in those schools. A recent report from UCL on education reforms was critical of how these changes had fuelled inequality. For example,

high-performing and improving schools are accepting fewer children from poorer backgrounds, and high levels of exclusions and the continued use of off-rolling—a practice not allowed in Scotland—mean that statistics and measures of success are skewed. More fundamentally, young people are missing out on their education.

The success or failure of any school rests with teachers, but with the advent of academies schools can choose to pay teachers at scales of their making. That means that they can bypass negotiated national pay scales in order to stretch budgets further.

We hear politicians talk about our dedicated teachers. Perhaps we should ask them whether they would be willing to teach a class of 30 teenagers on a salary of £24,000 a year. One teacher said to me, "I would be better off working in a supermarket. At least I would earn some overtime." Thankfully, in Scotland we do see teaching as a profession. We have protected and increased teachers' pay. After their probation year, they earn £32,000 a year, £6,000 more than their counterparts south of the border. It is simply not good enough that teachers in England have been treated in this way.

The Government are supposedly committed to science, but university fees in this country are the highest in the industrialised world. Student loans are going through the roof, and it has never really been possible to tackle student debt. We are saddling young people with debt for the rest of their working lives. We now know that much of it is eventually written off anyway, so why are we doing this to them?

The greatest threat to our higher and further education sectors is, of course, Brexit. According to today's edition of *The Times*, a Royal Society report states that funding for Horizon 2020 has fallen by a third, or half a billion euros, since 2015, and there has been a drop in UK applications. Critically, the UK is being seen as less attractive, and 35% fewer scientists are coming here through key schemes.

A hostile environment is the greatest challenge to academia. Immigration systems that talk of skill levels but make no allowance for skill needs cannot work for the sector. Research groups require people at many different levels, from technicians up to professors. We should be looking at skills rather than salaries. The research groups that we are trying to attract to the UK will want to come here in their entirety. If the professors and the leaders of the groups cannot bring their whole teams, they simply will not come. We also know that early-stage researchers—post-graduates—do not find the UK attractive. That affects our public services: it affects our education system, and it affects our NHS.

We welcome the change in the Government's rhetoric on post-study work visas, but we need some details. When will the new system come into play? Has it been promoted? Young people from abroad are now seeing the UK as a possibility. Will the system be for entrants starting in 2020, or for students who are currently here?

A massive concern for us is the European temporary leave to remain visa, which has been described by Vivienne Stern, director of Universities UK International, as an "act of deliberate malice". Why would students consider coming to Scotland if it cannot be guaranteed that they will be able to complete their courses? The same applies to students coming to other parts of the UK for longer courses, such as medical or engineering degree courses. We need those people to come here.

This week, the Royal National Mòd, a celebration of Gaelic music, language and culture, is taking place in Glasgow. However, although Gaelic schools in Glasgow and across the central belt are bursting at the seams, we cannot keep up with the demand for teachers. There are teachers in Canada who want to come to the UK, but we cannot take them here because of immigration decisions made by the Home Office. We cannot get what we need for Scotland. Gaelic authors and singers, including one of my constituents, cannot come to Scotland because that decision is made by Arts Council England. Yes, immigration powers need to come to Scotland, and yes, we need them now.

2.34 pm

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): Perhaps the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) will take an interest in the new immigration Bill.

It will come as a big surprise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to learn that I am an ethnic minority immigrant. I cheer for England in Japan, but I put my money on the All Blacks! I came here as a newly graduated health professional just before the UK entered the common market. I was allowed in on a work permit. That system enabled the UK to encourage the people whom it needed to come here, and they came from a number of countries, most of them in the Commonwealth.

Many of those countries were our kith and kin, and many supported the allies in world war two. Immigrants were selected for their expertise on application from outside the UK. That stopped when we entered the common market, and even visitors from those nations entered through the “alien” gates at our airports. A considerable proportion of the people who might have brought their expertise to the UK transferred their interest to nations such as Canada and America, and we lost out. I hope that we will now broaden our intake to include those countries under the new system, attracting the people whom we need.

Let me now raise a second and parochial point. I am delighted by the proposed boost to research and development funding and the launch of a comprehensive UK space strategy. In Holmbury St Mary, a tiny village in the southern hills of Mole Valley, is the UCL space station. It is hidden in the forest, in an old manor-type house. Just inside the front door is a huge entrance hall, where there are two 20-foot old-fashioned—now—rockets. Behind the manor are modern research buildings enabling world class research to take place. The station has research partnerships across the world, leading space research for the UK, and has been providing advanced, state-of-the-art instruments in many international space ventures. I hope that the Government’s proposed comprehensive space strategy will help that unit to increase the contribution that it already makes to this country.

Also of personal interest to me are the proposed new regulations for internet companies. The main aim—but not the only aim—is to protect children and young people from sexual abuse and radicalisation. Notwithstanding what some Members have said today, the UK leads innovations on child protection. It is one of a number of issues on which Members on both sides of the House, whatever Government have been in power, have worked closely together over the past few decades. For example, in 2002 and 2003 I joined a number of professional

experts working in a team for the Home Office and reporting to David Blunkett, the then Home Secretary, and we introduced the groundbreaking legislation that made it a crime to groom a child for sexual purposes. I hope that the same co-operation will apply when the new regulations are introduced. I also hope that Members with an interest in child protection will be aware of the need to reflect further on some aspects of the serious violence and victims Bills in the context of child protection and care.

In 1994, I was the MP for the then constituency of Croydon Central. In one of the big council estates, a popular, well-liked Metropolitan police officer, Sergeant Robertson, was murdered by Robert Eades. Eades and two brothers, Terry and Christopher Snelling, attempted to rob a local post office on the estate. Sergeant Robertson, on his own and armed with a truncheon, tried to stop the robbery. The three escaped, although they were later caught. As they escaped, they fought with Sergeant Robertson, who was knocked down, and Eades stabbed that gallant police officer persistently with a weapon called a black widow dagger. The police officer died in minutes. He left a wife as a widow, and two small children.

The Snelling brothers went down for 12 years, but at least one of them was released after six. On conviction, Eades was sentenced to life with a minimum of 25 years. That means he can apply for parole next year. Mrs Robertson and her children lost a husband and a father for life—not for six years, not for 25 years, but for life—and for this reason and many others I will be specifically watching the new sentencing Bill with deep interest.

There are quite a number of other Bills in the Queen’s Speech that I am enthusiastic to see through to the statute book either before or with a returning Conservative Government after the election. I suspect that many Members on both sides are in their heart supportive of many of the proposed Bills in the Queen’s Speech and, in the past, whatever the Government, cross-party support has happened.

2.40 pm

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): It is a privilege to follow the distinguished hon. Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) and to be able to say a little in response to the Queen’s Speech on behalf of my constituents in Stalybridge and Hyde, Mossley, Dukinfield and Longdendale.

If I were to begin by saying something positive about the Queen’s Speech, I would say that it is good to have the opportunity to discuss some issues other than Brexit. Brexit is clearly very important, but in itself it does not solve any of the pressing issues in my constituency, and the neglect by Government of other issues in the last few years is now evident. But that is where my praise ends because, as I listened to the Queen’s Speech, I did not feel that this was a serious, considered programme for the future of the nation. It felt like something between a publicity stunt and a response to what people in focus groups list as all the things they dislike about the Conservative party. The last Conservative Government were notorious for being pretty soft on crime and reducing the number of police officers to unsafe levels, so this Queen’s Speech says, “We will recruit a load of

[Jonathan Reynolds]

police officers, even though there is no basic guarantee we will go back to the levels we had before we first came to power.”

The last Conservative Government presided over some of the most miserly funding settlements for the NHS—since 2010, there have been very low funding settlements by historical standards—so this Queen’s Speech says there will be 40 new hospitals, although apparently the number now is barely six.

Many Conservative MPs have mentioned school funding today. The figures for my constituency are very depressing and I have just had an email telling me that 83% of schools in the country will have their funding reduced, effectively, next year, so I am afraid I am not convinced on that point either. I feel that the British people will see through all this.

Of course I recognise, and am pleased, that there seems now to be a recognition that austerity must end and that it has caused real damage, pain and suffering, but I do not just want the Government throwing money around to address their brand negatives; instead, I want it spent on the things that will make a difference, and for me that has to start with in-work poverty.

The number of people in Britain in work who are in poverty is a disgrace. I want us to spend money on some of the burdens that working families have difficulty with, whether it is school meals, uniform costs, prescription charges or in much bigger terms the social care bill when you need support as an older person. If we have money to spend, we should spend it there, and then I want to see us target resources on measures that will raise investment, productivity and wages.

That means acknowledging that the Government’s strategy of cutting corporation tax to the bone to stimulate private investment has not worked. Other countries with considerably higher rates of corporation tax than us have much higher levels of corporate investment. What we have now is a tax base that is simply insufficient to meet the kind of public services that people in this country expect, because we need to invest big money in some areas. For me there is no bigger area than transport. We need new rail infrastructure and subsidies to build urban transport networks that are comparable with what this capital city has—every morning my constituents tweet me pictures of the overcrowding on the railways—but instead of that every day what we get is a daily menu of possible cuts to HS2.

Although I appreciate this is probably unlikely from a Conservative Government, I also think that there has to be an acknowledgment that, while the gig economy has many upsides, for too many people it makes them vulnerable because they have a fundamental lack of power and control over their own working lives. Whenever we on this side of the House propose an increase in employment rights, we are accused of wanting to return to the winter of discontent in the 1970s. I was not yet born during the winter of discontent, but I was a member of the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee when we did an inquiry into the working practices at Sports Direct, and I will never forget the evidence we received in confidence from members of staff: workers not being paid the minimum wage, one woman who had to give birth in the warehouse toilets, and young female

employees explaining that they were promised full-time employment contracts but only in exchange for sexual favours.

I am not in favour of a return to the winter of discontent, but I am in favour of making sure that such employment practices have no place in modern Britain, and that requires fair and independent representation in the workplace.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): This is one of the most shocking abuses I have heard of late. People in my constituency are losing 15 minutes of salary every time they have to leave the floor to go to the toilet. One of my constituents has been deeply distressed as a cleaner because, on emptying a bin, she found it was full of faeces and urine; people were using the wastebaskets rather than lose salary. That has to stop.

Jonathan Reynolds: That is completely unacceptable and I would hope there was agreement across all sides of political opinion on that, but the question I have is: will this post-Brexit free trade world deliver the employment rights that will combat that? At the minute I am, frankly, unconvinced.

I would also like to have seen some action in this Queen’s Speech on absolute poverty. I have no problem with universal credit simplifying the benefits system and I want a system with a taper mechanism that makes it cost-effective for people to increase their working hours if they can do so, but the five-week wait is pushing too many people into a level of destitution that is unconscionable by any reasonable standard. The charities say so, the Churches say so and, frankly, most of us say so, too, and I do not know what more evidence or arguments the Government need to see or hear before they are willing to treat people with the minimum level of dignity they should reasonably be able to expect.

Due to time constraints, I want to make just one more point about something that is in the Queen’s Speech: the proposal to introduce photo ID to cast a vote in elections, which risks being an injustice of significant proportions. It has already been said in this debate that 3.5 million people do not have access to photo ID, and if it is restricted to a passport or driving licence the figure is 11 million.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): If in any such scheme local ID could be produced at no cost to the voter, would that not allay the hon. Gentleman’s concerns?

Jonathan Reynolds: It would, to be fair, go some way to doing that: if the Government were willing to say, “If there is a new standard of proof to be able to cast your vote, we will provide that free of charge to every citizen in this country before this measure comes into effect,” that would allay some of my concerns, but of course the cost of that would be significant and I have not heard anything mentioned that suggests that is possible.

Steve McCabe: It would be a national ID scheme.

Jonathan Reynolds: It would in effect be a national ID scheme, as my hon. Friend says, and that in itself has other implications. That is why the Electoral Reform Society has called this measure “dangerous, misguided and undemocratic.”

Occurrences of election fraud are, thankfully, very rare in the UK and, where they have occurred, they have been disproportionately Conservative party scandals, but that is not the point: the fact is that no one should be seeking to import the voter suppression tactics of the Republican party in the US. Yet it seems that, having failed to gerrymander the constituency boundaries in the last Parliament, this time the Conservatives are going to go straight to gerrymandering the electorate directly. I say to all fair-minded people: please think again.

It is uncertain whether this Queen's Speech actually has a majority in Parliament. It is very hard to predict the future and perhaps we will know more about where Brexit is at after this weekend's sitting, but I believe this country is crying out for a more ambitious agenda, one that rebuilds the basic sense of equity and national solidarity that all successful nations need. That is what my constituents tell me they want and that would truly be a Queen's Speech worthy of the name.

2.48 pm

Anne Milton (Guildford) (Ind): I welcome the measures the Government are bringing in to improve patient safety. I trained as a nurse and worked in the NHS for 25 years, and to this day I remain proud of the training I received at St Bartholomew's Hospital. That training has stayed with me to this day; it was about standards and demonstrating respect not just for the patients in our care, but everyone we work with. It was about an understanding that nothing but the best will do. Therefore, adopting a similar approach, as the airlines do, to safety is not before time. There should be no circumstance where patient safety is compromised in any way at all.

I also welcome not only the measures on mental health but the changing attitudes to mental health that I have witnessed since I was first elected in 2005. I well remember my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Sir Charles Walker) and the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) speaking movingly in 2012 about their own mental health problems. Anything we can do to ensure that we have freely available mental health services delivered in a timely fashion is to be welcomed, in the community, in our prisons and in schools. I welcome all the legislation that will improve this.

While money for hospitals will be welcomed, hospitals are not the whole story as far as our NHS is concerned. The Royal Surrey County Hospital in my patch does an excellent job. It has done a superb job in raising standards of care, and nowadays, rather than receiving letters of complaint, I receive letters and emails praising the staff there. This week, I was at a Guild of Nurses event, surrounded by nurses many of whom were of a similar age to me—really quite young—but who had, in effect, trained on an apprenticeship. I was proud, as the Minister for apprenticeships, to have reintroduced nurse apprenticeships and a pathway for all to train up to the level of registered nurse. The university route might be right for some, but if we use only that route we will miss many women and men who would make exactly the sort of nurses we want to see—caring, compassionate and with a real sense of vocation. I urge the Secretary of State for Education, who is sitting on the Treasury Bench, to continue the apprenticeship programme without restriction and to ensure that there are sufficient funds to do so.

However, money for hospitals is not in itself sufficient. Hospitals rightly grab the headlines because of the phenomenal work they do, but although most of the costs in the NHS are incurred in hospitals, the vast majority of patient contact occurs in the community. I think 80% of patient and people contact occurs in the community, and all our community healthcare services need help. That activity in the community goes on without headlines, carried out by committed and skilled NHS staff, and it is struggling with budgets. I have recently seen some of my local GPs. My local GPs have almost never contacted me. They provide good services, but they are extremely concerned about the crisis they are facing in general practice. It is now almost impossible to recruit new partners. Ten years ago, they would have expected around 100 applicants when they advertised for a new partner; they are now getting no applicants at all. Guildford is an attractive place, and even when other places have had issues with recruitment, it has never done so. This stark reduction in the number of applicants is of note.

The practices can and do employ salaried GPs, but they charge high rates and the GP partners are still left with the problem of who will continue to run the practices when they retire. Younger doctors simply do not want to take on those responsibilities. All this is exacerbated by the limits on pension pots and the taxation changes that make early retirement an attractive proposition. It is high time the Treasury recognised the impact of its policies on public sector staff. My GPs understand that integrating practices is the right thing to do, and they have done it. They take many of the risks but do not get many rewards. This is not just about money; it is about de-risking things such as leases, which would certainly help to demonstrate that the Department understands some of the issues that GPs and other community services are facing.

New technology improves access for many people and saves them time, but it does not necessarily save the GPs time. In fact, many telephone appointments can take longer than those held in the surgery. My local A&E finds the local GP services extremely valuable in reducing the A&E workload considerably. GPs are the place of first, and often last, resort. However, despite all the valid and positive changes that have taken place in the NHS, I am afraid that we are probably about to see the baby run down the plug hole with the bathwater. A surgery in Burpham is probably going to close due to loss of premises, and I have also received concerns from St Catherine's Village Association about primary health care in south Guildford. This is on top of the issues that the university and students have raised with me about new students being unable to register with GPs because they have closed their lists. The clinical commissioning group is working hard to resolve these issues, and it has been extremely helpful, but amid the good announcements and good Bills in the Queen's Speech, I urge the Government to be aware of how much hospitals depend on our community health services.

The mental health of our young people is now well recognised, and the online harms Bill is very welcome. The Government are doing much to improve awareness and support in schools. However, concerns were recently raised with me by a local councillor, Steven Lee, about the real crisis in the health and wellbeing of young people in schools today. I welcome the investment in mental health services, particularly in children's mental

[Anne Milton]

health services, but this is still a long way from getting to the frontline. There is a historical shortage of staff that we have to do something to address.

I welcome the money and I welcome all the measures in the Queen's Speech, including the online harms Bill, the legislation on patient safety and the money going into mental health, but I urge the Government to do everything in their power to ensure that these things become a reality on the ground. They need to move away from the tabloid headlines and put the money where the contact is and where the care is carried out.

2.55 pm

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Guildford (Anne Milton), who I know shares my passion for public services.

We are doing this in the context of a potential general election, and we have to address the elephant in the room: what will happen if we go ahead with a no-deal Brexit, or indeed any Brexit at all. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has said that if we go off the cliff edge of no deal, we will be looking at this country's borrowing rising to a 50-year high. The finances of this country will pale into insignificance compared with even the worst of the financial crash. There is only one way to ensure that we properly fund our public services, and that is to stop Brexit altogether, which is what the Liberal Democrats want to do. We want to do that because we care deeply about our NHS and our schools and about the day-to-day things that make a real difference to people and that save their lives. Unless we stop Brexit, we will not have the money to pay for all that, but I am sure that we all agree across the House that what we want to do is fully fund our public services.

We have a short amount of time today, and it will perhaps be unsurprising that I shall focus my remarks specifically on schools. As ever on such occasions, I have looked at the text of the Queen's Speech. I looked and looked for a mention of schools, but I found only one "motherhood and apple pie" statement about them. Just one, at a time when our schools are going through an incredible funding crisis. I like to judge people by their words, but given that there were so few, let us instead judge this Government by their actions.

Even this year, even now, with all the funding announcements that this Government have made, schools are under enormous financial pressure. They include my own, where I am a governor, and all the others in the surrounding areas. I had an email from Liz from Botley, who is the mother of a child at a local school. She said of the headteacher:

"They have now asked parents to contribute a recommended donation of £10 per month per child. What a disgraceful state of affairs that the education of our young people is just left for parents who can afford it to pick up the bill. This is obviously totally unfair, and if allowed to continue, this will lead to a disastrous two-tier system where parents that can afford the top-up will be 'buying' into better-funded schools. No one cares as deeply as the parents that the education is the very best it can be, so we are unfairly pressured into filling the hole left by central government."

Stephen Lloyd (Eastbourne) (Ind): Does my hon. Friend share my frustration that so many of the Government's policy pledges on education in the past

few weeks appear to be so much more about electioneering than actual meat on the bone? That is certainly the case for education, but also in many other areas.

Layla Moran: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. Yes, as a maths teacher, I have been rather frustrated by the headlines coming out of this Government, such as "£14 billion over three years," when we will not get back to former levels until 2020. In fact, the money that schools are seeing right now is not enough. This year's OECD teaching and learning international survey shows that the top thing that schools spend money on is more teachers. We heard that there would be a welcome rise in the amount of money available to first-year teachers, but that needs to come out of school budgets, as and when they are increased. The state gives with one hand, but it takes with the other.

Importantly, where the state has taken, it has taken from the most vulnerable and poorest areas. According to the National Education Union, the National Association of Head Teachers and the Association of School and College Leaders, 90% of secondary schools in the highest free school meals band will still face a funding shortfall in 2020-21, and funding cuts were above average in seven of the 10 poorest local authorities in England. Schools need the money now, not later. As a result of not providing that money, the Government are failing our children.

Teaching assistants are being sacked, with 50% of schools either considering it or already having done so in the past three years. Cash-strapped councils are struggling to support children with the most complex needs. Education, health and care plans increased by 16% between 2017 to 2018, yet schools need to make up the first £6,000 and so are penalised for doing the right thing. More than 200 schools in England have cut short the school week or are actively consulting on it, including schools in my area. We want and deserve world-class schools, but this Government will not be able to deliver them. They have not done that so far, and even with more money, where are the ideas to do it?

This is not just about funding. In fact, we are above average on the OECD funding table, so why are other countries leaping ahead? This Government are ideologically driven to deliver an education system that may have worked 50 years ago, but it is not based on the evidence of what works now. It is about high-stakes testing with little care for actual learning. We know about the narrowing of the curriculum, and we know that high-stakes tests cause anxiety for our children. In fact, I was written to in May by Aoife, who was in year 6 at the time, and she told me that her school prepares her for SATs with

"huge numbers of SATs practices that I have to do, sometimes up to two a day... since Christmas! I feel as though we often spend more time on practices than we do on actual lessons... Please can you do something in government to try and make the focus more on the teachers and less on us, so that we do not have to do so many practices and can do some fun learning."

I could not agree more with Aoife. In fact, looking across the world at high-performing systems, that is exactly what they do.

The Liberal Democrats demand better. We would let our teachers get on with their jobs, rather than make them have to penny-pinch to buy the basics. We would invest in the most disadvantaged children and give councils the first £6,000 of any EHCP, so that schools are not penalised for taking the children that they want.

We would spend £1 billion to save our colleges. By the way, “Love Our Colleges” badges are in all the Whips Offices, and I hope that everyone will wear them today, because colleges have been the Cinderella service of our education system. We would extend the pupil premium to age 19, because deprivation does not stop at 16. We would scrap SATs and replace Ofsted with an even more rigorous system that puts at its heart what the data is showing drives real attainment and wellbeing. We need a bolder agenda for education—not just paltry funding pledges, but real reform of the whole system, led by evidence, that will make the most of every child in our country.

3.4 pm

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran), but I cannot agree with what she had to say. Indeed, when I look at the positive measures in the Queen’s Speech, it is the news on schools and school funding that shines out and gives me real hope for the future of our country and, indeed, for children in Cheltenham.

I am sure that the House can agree that education is probably the single most powerful tool to drive social mobility. That is certainly essential in Cheltenham, because there is a misapprehension about the place I represent. It may be that hon. Members take the view, perhaps after heading down to the incredibly successful Cheltenham literature festival, that it is a land of unalloyed affluence, but nothing could be further from the truth. Of the 18 wards that I represent, the income per capita in three of them is in the bottom decile not just in Gloucestershire, not just in the south-west, not just in England, but across the entire United Kingdom. This Government realise that schools and education can do the most valuable job of bridging that gap.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Contrary to the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran), does my hon. Friend welcome the fact that schools and education have been put front and centre? I can quote from the Queen’s Speech for the hon. Lady:

“My Ministers will ensure that all young people have access to an excellent education, unlocking their full potential and preparing them for the world of work.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 14 October 2019; Vol. 800, c. 2.]

The Conservatives are putting education front and centre.

Alex Chalk: That is absolutely right because the Government did put education front and centre, and it was rather telling that the hon. Lady did not quote from the Queen’s Speech. I must also take issue with her suggestion that standards are going down when the opposite is the case. How wrong it is not to pay tribute to the fact that 160,000 more six-year-olds are on track to achieve good literacy scores than in 2012. We should be applauding that, not denigrating it. It is certainly the case in Cheltenham where, year after year, our brilliant teachers and headteachers, supported by their governors, are delivering improved literacy, numeracy, A-levels, GCSEs and so on.

The reason I am so pleased with the Queen’s Speech is that the settlement proposed within it addresses two running sores, the first of which is fair funding. Under the decades-old unfair funding formula—generated, I believe, in the 1990s—schools in Cheltenham were treated

wholly unfairly compared with schools in London, Liverpool or Manchester by dint of the fact that Cheltenham sits within the rural county of Gloucestershire, and it was stipulated that we should receive less funding per pupil. The logic went, “Well, of course, these affluent rural counties simply do not have the same social problems.” Nothing could be further from the truth. Cheltenham has its fair share of social problems and challenges, and it was a completely unsustainable injustice that my constituents should have been short changed in that way.

If we strip aside the bluster, what has actually happened? In 2015, when I was elected, secondary schools in my constituency, because of the unfair funding formula to which I have referred, received a little under £4,200 per pupil. If this Queen’s Speech is passed, they will receive a minimum of £5,000 per pupil, and schools such as Pittville School and All Saints’ Academy will receive considerably more. By the way, all that comes before one adds on money for low prior attainment, English as an additional language and so on. All that is a significant improvement, and it has been difficult for people like me to listen to hon. Members—often on the Labour Benches, but not exclusively—complain about the fact that funding per pupil in their urban constituencies was due to go up from £5,500 to £5,600. We were on £4,200 in Cheltenham, and it is this Queen’s Speech and this Government that are addressing that to bring funding justice to my constituents. We should not downplay that; we should celebrate it.

The second issue that the Queen’s Speech addresses is the problem of special educational needs and disability funding. For reasons that are poorly understood, schools and teachers in my constituency have done an extraordinary job in dealing with an unexplained surge in pupil complexity. Whether it is Belmont School, which is meant to deal with moderate learning difficulties, or Bettridge School, which is meant to deal with severe learning difficulties, the truth is that they are having to address need that is far beyond that which existed only 15 years ago. Mainstream schools are having to hold on by their fingertips to children who, in the past, would have gone into special schools, because they recognise that putting those children into a different educational setting could put intolerable pressure on special schools. The schools are doing a magnificent job.

The reasons for the change, as I said, are poorly understood. Some say it has to do with family issues, and some say—this is a difficult point to make, and I do not know whether there is any truth to it—that, because of the marvels of modern medicine, some children are surviving childbirth who might not have done so in past. Thank goodness that is the case, but it is potentially having a knock-on impact. The fact is that schools in Cheltenham are dealing with it.

I finish with an anecdote. I met a teacher at a school that deals with moderate learning difficulties. He has been a teacher for some 20 years and he told me that, when he first became a teacher, the pupil-teacher ratio was in the order of 16:1. In other words there were more teachers per pupil, but that modest increase was there to address the needs that existed. Now he says it is simply impossible because of the level of complexity that exists.

The Ridge Academy in my constituency deals with children with emotional and behavioural needs, and the complexity that is now being presented requires that additional resource. What is this Queen’s Speech doing? It is increasing the funding available in Gloucestershire

[Alex Chalk]

from £60 million to £66 million, a 10% increase. That is an enormous increase, and it means that schools in my constituency can look forward to the future with confidence and that teachers who have done such a heroic job of continuing to go to work, knowing they may face a volatile situation, can do so with the confidence of knowing there is space available in the budget for the additional resources and the additional staff to keep the children safe, and to keep the teachers safe, too.

Of course there is more to do, and of course I would like more funding and all sorts of additional things, but this Queen's Speech sets Cheltenham schools and Gloucestershire schools on a better path. If this House truly believes in social mobility and in ensuring that people go as far as their talents will take them, we have to make sure that the most powerful lever of social mobility is properly supported. That lever is in our schools, and it is this Government who are supporting them.

3.12 pm

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): Schoolchildren are taught that a Queen's Speech follows the election of a new Government and sets out the programme that the Government want to enact. The next time I visit one of my schools, I will have a tough job explaining what exactly we are doing here this week. We have a new Prime Minister elected not by the people but by a diminishing band of Conservatives, a party in government with a majority of minus 45 and a Queen's Speech setting out 26 Bills, few of which have any chance of being passed by the current Parliament, with a general election possibly weeks away.

Steve Double: I am sure the hon. Gentleman did not mean to mislead the House, but what he said is not accurate. A Queen's Speech starts a new Session of Parliament, but it does not always follow a general election. A Queen's Speech usually happens almost every year throughout a Parliament. It is not an unusual occurrence.

Mr Dhesi: I take on board what the hon. Gentleman says, but what is extremely unusual is the manner in which the Prime Minister tried to shut down and prorogue Parliament. I will return to that.

A general election, which is possibly weeks away, would render the whole programme null and void. I note that the Prime Minister's former employer, *The Daily Telegraph*, called it "a pointless exercise". Even Her Majesty must have been wondering, "Is that it? Where are the remaining pages? Perhaps the Prime Minister is too busy trying to mislead me, trying to illegally shut down this amazing, beautiful and historic place and trying to stop hon. Members holding him to account. Maybe that is why he forgot to hand over the remaining pages."

This is Alice Through the Looking-Glass stuff, with nothing how it should be and everything the opposite. What should I be telling those schoolchildren? It is obvious that this was not a Queen's Speech but an election manifesto. If we take away the ermine and the jewels, we can see naked electioneering ahead of a nationwide poll. If any further evidence were needed, consider why, out of 26 Bills, seven are on law and order—the Conservatives' old pre-election favourite, and an automatic headline generator for the Tory-supporting press.

It will not work this time, however. Why? Because, after a decade in office, the Conservatives have surrendered their claim to be the party of law and order. People in Slough and elsewhere have seen reductions in their police and in their police community support officers. The Conservative police and crime commissioner for Thames Valley has raised the precept by over 10%, but the money raised is only plugging the gaps. PC Craig O'Leary, the chair of Thames Valley Police Federation, said at the time that the rise in council tax would "just literally keep us standing still."

Nationally, the picture is the same. Police forces in England and Wales lost 21,732 officers between March 2010 and March 2018, a reduction of 15%, according to the Home Office's own figures. The number of police community support officers patrolling the streets fell by nearly 40% during the same period, from 16,688 in 2010 to 10,139 in 2018. Civilian staff were cut by 21% during the same period. That means the police are stretched to the limit. There are not enough detectives, not enough patrols on the streets and the estates, and not enough support for victims and witnesses.

One type of crime in particular makes us all feel less like things are getting done and more like things are getting out of control, and that is knife crime. In Slough this year we have had the tragedy of the murder of Elton Gashaj. Aged just 15, he was the victim of a stabbing. That tragic and senseless loss of a young man left a family in grief and a community in shock.

The BBC named Slough alongside Manchester and Liverpool as one of the areas outside London where knife crime is a growing problem. Local people have real concerns, which is why I joined Pastor Sola Ogunniyi and the congregation of Redeemed Christian Church of God as they marched from Langley to central Slough with the message, "Stop knife crime." That reminds us of the important role played by faith organisations—churches, gurdwaras, temples, mosques and synagogues—in mending our fraying society, and they are not alone in their concern.

People in Slough want more police, more PCSOs, more probation officers, more prison officers, faster justice and more support for victims, but they want something more. They want youth services, and they want to see the youth centres and the youth clubs reopen. Youth services have been cut by a staggering £1 billion since 2010, and we have lost 14,000 youth workers. People want: thriving high streets and late-night shopping; park and recreation facilities that are safe for families; jobs and apprenticeships for young people; and a strong society in which individuals and families can thrive.

Now we have the pre-election promise of extra police officers. If someone steals £50 from my wallet and then promises to give me £40 several years later, does that count as a £40 increase? Of course not. This Government have abandoned the field to the gangs and the lawbreakers, deserting decent citizens and tearing apart the bonds of community in the process.

Another area that is vital to a strong society, to individual fulfilment and to a prosperous economy is education. This is the dog that did not bark. There are seven Bills on law and order, but where is the equivalent on rebuilding our schools, recruiting teachers and classroom assistants, driving up standards, opening

opportunities, rebuilding our further education institutions and providing lifelong education through nursery, school, vocational qualifications, learning at work and into retirement?

The Government have nothing to say. We are fortunate that my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) has plenty to say about rebuilding our education system, a national education service, Sure Start Plus, lifelong learning and abolishing tuition fees—a truly transformational approach.

Finally, will the Secretary of State for Education address the issue of maintained nursery schools, such as Cippenham Nursery School in my constituency? We cannot build success on uncertainty, yet there has been no promise to continue the £60 million of funding beyond August 2020, to prevent more closures of maintained nursery schools. When pressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), the Secretary of State said that it was “under review”. That just is not good enough. These important schools must stay open and have the funding they need.

The Prime Minister wants to trigger a pre-election debate about the best future for Britain; if this Queen’s Speech is the best he can do, I say bring it on.

3.20 pm

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi), although I am not sure that many Members on the Government Benches will agree with his assessment of the Queen’s Speech.

The Queen’s Speech presented to Parliament this week was an opportunity for the Government to get on with their domestic agenda, focusing on public services and aiming to deliver what the people want us to do. For too long, hour upon hour of Government time—in fact, almost 500 hours—has been eaten up by furthering of the Brexit debate. That time could, no doubt, have been spent on other things, but we continued on around the Brexit merry-go-round while so few recognised that the country wanted to move on. Although the previous Session was dominated by Brexit, we must not forget that more than 70 Bills received Royal Assent in that Parliament—in stark contrast to the 26 passed in the Scottish Parliament. My constituency of Angus had the fourth highest leave vote of any constituency in Scotland, but when I am out on the doorsteps, as I have been almost every weekend since I was elected, people say they want us to get on and get Brexit sorted. They also want to leave the constitutional debate in Scotland to one side—perhaps even for a generation.

Monday’s Queen’s Speech focused absolutely on public services—the issues that matter to everyone’s everyday lives. Although some measures will not affect Scotland, as the chair of the all-party group on eating disorders I was pleased to see a renewed focus on mental health. I recognise that efforts will predominantly focus on those in detention in hospitals and police custody, but we must always increase our ambitions in this policy area. We must never forget that there will be people in this Chamber, across the estate and in every workplace, school and university who are suffering from mental health issues. I want ours to be a more open society so that people can recognise that the support is there if they are willing to come forward and get it.

The Queen’s Speech also mentioned the pension schemes Bill, which I warmly welcome because several hard-working plumbers in Angus were in a defined pension scheme and faced potential financial ruin. They entered into a multi-employer scheme without ever imagining that they would face demands for six or seven-figure sums. I have worked hard to represent their views in this place. That Bill will give those in such difficult situations further support by requiring a statement from trustees on their funding strategy. Although that may not help those in my constituency, it will ensure that similar situations do not arise again.

Two important Bills mentioned in the Queen’s Speech that do affect Scotland are the fisheries Bill and the immigration Bill. The fisheries Bill will enable us to depart from the European Union and allow the fishing industry in Scotland to prosper in a sea of opportunity. No Scottish Member of Parliament can deny that leaving the common fisheries policy will deliver for our fishing industry. It is incumbent on both the UK Government and the Scottish Government to improve infrastructure and support the industry as it enters a new and exciting era.

Of course, the fishing industry will also require labour, which leads me to the immigration Bill. Along with the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), I welcome the two-year graduate work visa announcement, and also the review of the £30,000 annual salary cap—both issues on which Scottish Conservatives spoke up at the time. I want the immigration Bill to ensure that we can bring in the skills and labour that we require as we depart from the European Union. Migrants contribute so positively in Angus and throughout the country. Whether it is in fish processing in Arbroath, manufacturing in Montrose or the agricultural industry throughout my constituency, including the soft fruit industry, they contribute to our local area and to our society. They and their families are welcome, and they are welcome to lay down roots in this great country.

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady not recognise that the previous Queen’s Speech included the Immigration Bill and the Fisheries Bill, which could easily have been enacted without having to have this Queen’s Speech? Not only that, but an enormous amount of time and effort had already gone into the previous Fisheries Bill, which fell because of the Prorogation of Parliament.

Kirstene Hair: Hopefully, when the legislation comes back to the House, we will be able to fast-track it through this place. We will have even better legislation because we will have had that debate before.

A positive immigration scheme is exactly what we want and exactly what Scottish Conservatives have been standing up for. We must never forget that migrants are absolutely welcome to our country and add very positively to our local communities. I welcome the fact that there will be no discrimination based on where they come from, but instead an open and fair system, as operates so well in other countries around the world.

What is most important about the Queen’s Speech is that when the Prime Minister came into office, he said that his focus was on healthcare, policing and education, and now, only weeks later, we see a bold and robust Queen’s Speech that will deliver in all those areas. That is what

[Kirstene Hair]

all those who vote us into this place want to see: they want to see us deliver in the areas that matter to them. That is in stark contrast to Nicola Sturgeon, who this week stood up at her Aberdeen conference, spoke for 45 minutes and did not once mention healthcare or education. Education was supposed to be what her record would be judged on, yet there are now 3,000 fewer teachers than there were in 2007, the SNP has binned the education Bill, and Scotland is way down in the international standards. But of course, that can all wait because independence comes first.

The UK Government have done well to build our economy. We have the lowest levels of unemployment and the highest levels of employment since the 1970s. It is unfortunate that a report out in Scotland today from the Fraser of Allander Institute shows that Scotland has seen one of the biggest increases in unemployment in four years and a decline in employment over the past three months. It is important to recognise that we cannot blame that on Brexit, because we have seen a completely different picture in the wider United Kingdom.

Before I finish, let me mention briefly the importance of the Union, which was also mentioned in the Queen's Speech. The Union is the reason I am here, and it is my absolute priority to stand up for it as a Member of Parliament. It is what my constituents want me to stand up for, and that is what I will do. We know the importance of the dividend we get from being part of the Union, whether that is in respect of finances, security or defence. It is incredibly important that we continue to stress that message loud and clear. While the SNP wants to create barriers at Berwick, we want to ensure that we strengthen our ties with the rest of the United Kingdom.

The Queen's Speech was a clear statement of intent from the Government that the domestic agenda is absolutely imperative—from being tough on crime to levelling up NHS funding, and from ensuring that we have a fishing industry that is ready to prosper to an immigration Bill that will ensure we have the labour we require. These are truly the issues that the people of our United Kingdom care about, and that is—as we must always remember—the reason we are so privileged to sit here.

3.28 pm

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): It is a pleasure to be called to speak in this debate today and to follow the hon. Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair), who made some very important points, although it will not surprise her to hear that we may differ on some of the detail on some of the issues that she raised.

There is a great deal that could be said about public services today, but I wish, in the time that I have, to focus my remarks on education, as so many others have done. It seemed as though, embarking on his leadership campaign, the Prime Minister understood that public services were running on empty, with the public so sick of austerity that his own prospects would be undermined if he did not offer more. The announcement that more money will be made available for schools in his first speech as Prime Minister reflected that and gave teachers and parents hope that the proposed levelling up would bring some much-needed respite to the relentless cuts that have been compromising their ability to educate the next generation. The reality is that the latest funding proposals fail to reverse the cuts that schools have

suffered since 2015, with 16,523 schools set to have less money per pupil in 2020 in real terms than they had in 2015.

I heard the comments of the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), whom I always enjoy listening to, but I have to say to him that, even factoring in the latest funding in Calderdale, 76 of 95 schools have suffered cuts to their funding per pupil, with schools losing out on £39.4 million between 2015 and 2020, which equates to a £215 per pupil loss. The consequences of the lack of funding in our schools is that we have the largest class sizes in the developed world. At schools such as Beech Hill in Halifax, the difference between funding and the amount needed to protect per pupil funding in real terms is £1.1 million, which is £602 per pupil and is the salary of around six teachers.

In our secondary schools, although the levelling up has helped budgets in the two grammar schools in my constituency on a per pupil basis, Trinity Academy at Sowerby Bridge lost out on £554 per pupil between 2015 and 2020, Halifax Academy lost out on £882 and Park Lane lost out on a staggering £1,151 per pupil, which is the equivalent of around 10 teachers' salaries.

Calderdale Against School Cuts, which works tirelessly to defend and restore school budgets, has stressed locally that funding announcements leave schools where they were 13 years ago and that the promise of £7.1 billion by 2022-23 becomes £4.3 billion once inflation is accounted for.

I have heard others mention that Jon Andrews, deputy head of research at the Education Policy Institute, has cautiously said that the Prime Minister's drive to even up cash for schools implies that funding should be equal despite the fact that children's circumstances and opportunities differ. He added:

"Any attempt to crudely level up funding would disproportionately direct additional funding towards the least disadvantaged schools with the least challenging intakes, at a time when progress in closing the attainment gap has stalled, and may be about to go into reverse."

In the cold light of day, the facts are that four in five state schools in England will be financially worse off next year than they were in 2015. The promised £7.1 billion over three years is worth £4.3 billion when inflation is taken into account, and that will not restore funding levels to pay for the quality of education that the next generation deserves, or even the aspiration that is in the Queen's Speech itself. This simply does not make sense, as we all agree that education is one of the most effective routes out of poverty—and we have heard that here today—in terms of social mobility, whether it is in schools or higher or further education.

The outlook for further education is no brighter. Calderdale College in Halifax has been rated No. 1 in West Yorkshire for 16-to-18 achievement. Although the college has aspiration in abundance, it has had to make some really tough decisions due to a lack of funding. It has been difficult to recruit and retain staff in specialist areas. Almost all of its outreach centres have had to close. Adult learning courses, including tourism, sign language, and construction trades have been cut and fallen victim to cuts in the adult education budget, and it has reduced its ESOL provision by 50%.

I wish to mention an email that I received this week from a brilliant head teacher, Mungo Sheppard, at Ash Green primary in Mixenden, saying what a difference

the national school breakfast programme is making to children at Ash Green. Every single one of us should be horrified to hear that at least half a million children in the UK arrive at school too hungry to learn. Family Action, which is delivering the programme with Magic Breakfast, has found that children in primary schools such as Ash Green where bagels are provided for breakfast achieve, on average, up to two months' additional academic progress over the course of a year.

Ash Green is one of 1,775 schools in disadvantaged communities across the country to take part in the programme. Although it is funded by the soft drinks levy, that contract will come to an end in March 2020. With that in mind, I very much hope that the Secretary of State will reaffirm this Government's commitment to the national school breakfast programme so that children at Ash Green and at schools all over the country continue to learn on a decent breakfast.

I have very little time to talk about policing today, but I do very much welcome the inclusion in the Queen's Speech of proposals for a police protection Bill. Having worked so hard on the protect the protectors law—the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018—with a number of colleagues, not least my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), it pains me to say that that Act simply is not working in delivering the protections that we would all like to see for our officers out on the streets. Therefore, I very much welcome the opportunities to discuss further any and all means that we can now use to make sure that police officers are safe, so that they can keep our communities safe, too. I look forward to having those discussions.

In a nutshell, for a debate on public services, there was an awful lot I could have covered. However, learning has the power to transform lives. To invest in education is the surest investment that any Government could possibly make. It is only when people realise their potential that the country realises its potential, and never before has that been so important.

3.34 pm

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch). I welcome her words about protecting the protectors. I hope that the Government are listening. I am sure that she has support across the House on that issue.

We can talk about public services only in the context of considering where the money comes from to fund them. We do not talk enough about a certain group of individuals and teams in our country: the brave entrepreneurs who create the businesses and the jobs that ultimately fund our public services. I do call them brave; we rightly talk about the brave men and women in the armed forces, the police and the emergency services, but it is also brave to leave full-time employment and a secure job to start a business and endure years of uncertainty and financial sacrifice. Sometimes it does not work out, but our entrepreneurs carry on and overcome those hurdles. As a result, they contribute to our society and enrich our country.

We are the party and the Government who back entrepreneurs, so we have a fantastic Queen's Speech with a number of measures. I am proud that we have some fantastic entrepreneurs in Redditch; I have time to pick out only two. Nik Spencer invented the HERU, a machine that will process all our household waste into

products that can be used to power our household electricity and gas—our heating and lighting. That fantastic innovation will ultimately contribute to solving the climate emergency. Another friend, Sobeia Irfan, has started a firm of solicitors that provides services all over my constituency. Those are two entrepreneurs, but there are many more. We have a great heritage in Redditch, but we are always looking to the future.

The work of those people and many others means that we have funds to spend. As hon. Members might expect, I will first touch on our Alexandra Hospital. I announced today that, thanks to the fantastic work of our Health Secretary, we have secured the money that we need to put the business case to improve our local hospital. That has been a long time coming; I have been campaigning for it since the day I first set foot in Parliament. I have met the Health Secretary and the trust at every opportunity to make sure that the money is there.

The Government pledged the money but, unfortunately, the trust delayed putting forward the business case. In that time, the costs went up, so the business case could not be put forward, which meant more delay. Finally, the Health Secretary has agreed to increase the funding so the business case can be put forward. The money will go forward so we will start to see improvements on the ground to the hospital that serves our community in Redditch. That will mean improvements to our theatres, our endoscopy services and children's out-patient services. That is brilliant news for our local hospital and it goes to show that when a local MP stands up and fights for their local hospital, they can achieve real change on the ground. I warmly welcome that and I thank the Prime Minister and the Health Secretary for all their support.

When I meet my constituents in the streets and they come to see me in my surgeries, they often talk about law and order. I am surprised by how negatively Opposition Members have talked about the fact that there are so many Bills about law and order. I welcome that; our constituents want to see more officers on the street. The work and investment that the Government have put into the police mean that we will be able to recruit 93 more officers in West Mercia, on top of the 215 officers who were already coming onstream. That will mean more police on the street—more bobbies on the beat—in Redditch to tackle issues such as antisocial behaviour, to keep people safe and to continue our work to unlock Redditch.

I was delighted to see the focus on youth services. As I have said, antisocial behaviour often happens because there is nowhere for young people to go. We need to focus on those services in our local communities so that there is somewhere constructive for people to go. We have some fantastic services in Redditch. We have a wonderful boxing academy that takes young people off the streets and teaches them fun, useful and constructive skills. That is a great initiative, but we need more like it across the town.

I am delighted that Redditch, and Herefordshire and Worcestershire more generally, are included in the pilot for local community mental health services because of the fantastic proposals put forward by the local clinical commissioning group. That means that there will be more community mental health nurses on the ground working with GP surgeries, able to provide the services that are needed when people approach their GP with a mental health crisis.

[Rachel Maclean]

I do not have time to go into all the other Bills, but it is important to recognise the Government's acknowledgement that there is a social care crisis in this country—something I have often spoken about. I would like to see more detail on what the Government are proposing. From my extensive work with all-party parliamentary groups and my constituents, and from my own experience of the social care system with my mother, I can see that it is not where it needs to be. We desperately need to fund it and reform it. That cannot come soon enough for me.

To finish where I started, I say thank you to those people who have created jobs in our country. This country has record levels of employment, thanks to the Conservative Government's record. I am absolutely delighted to see this Queen's Speech, and I shall support it.

3.41 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) and to take part in this debate. It gives me the opportunity to pay tribute to public sector workers for all they do in keeping us safe, nursing us, educating us, caring for us, keeping the streets clean, running Government Departments and everything else in between.

Since we had the Home Secretary at the Dispatch Box—I think for the first time—I want to focus on one particular group of workers: the migrants in the public sector workforce who serve us day in and day out, and in particular the EU nationals who currently live with the uncertainty of Brexit hanging over them. The immigration Bill that was mentioned in the Queen's Speech but largely ignored by the Home Secretary today will have a profound impact on them, as well as on the future workforce of our public services.

During the referendum the Home Secretary, along with the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, made an unconditional promise to EU nationals who were already here: that if Brexit happened, their rights would continue automatically, so there would be no need for any application—in other words, a declaratory system. The question is why the Home Secretary seems set to renege on that promise, when failure to keep that promise inevitably means that, even with the Home Office pulling out all the stops, tens of thousands, or probably hundreds of thousands, of EU nationals will miss the cut-off date for settled status applications, and will end up in this country without any legal status at all and liable to removal, as the Minister for Security confirmed last week.

No application process of this type ever gets close to 100%. Getting even to 90% would be an achievement, but that would still leave hundreds of thousands of people in an even worse situation than that of the victims of the Windrush scandal—not just without proof of their status, but without any status at all. When that disaster unfolds, the Government cannot say that they have not been warned. It would be much better if they listened to the calls of the 3 million and the unanimous view of the Home Affairs Committee now, rather than trying to clean up the mess after the event.

The arguments put forward by the Home Office about why it does not want to go down that road simply do not add up. There would still be every incentive for

citizens to apply for proof of their status, given that they would face the hostile environment if they did not obtain the necessary documentation. On the question of documentation, I urge the Government to think again, to ditch the “digital only” nonsense pursued by the Home Secretary's predecessor and to allow EU citizens applying to the scheme to have a physical document to prove their right to remain in this country.

On Monday, the Prime Minister said that EU rights would be somehow confirmed in the new immigration Bill, but it was not absolutely clear to me what he meant by that. Insofar as he plans to put the rights that EU nationals of settled or pre-settled status will have into primary legislation instead of the easily amended immigration rules, that is a small step in the right direction and something that we sought to do through the previous immigration legislation. However, assuming that people still need to apply, it does not amount to the automatic extension of rights that the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister promised in the referendum. Indeed, if they are planning to cement in the Bill the cut-off date for applications, they are making matters infinitely worse, reducing any flexibility to extend the deadline when we inevitably realise that hundreds of thousands have not applied and are not going to apply in time.

Let me also raise concerns about the number of EU citizens who are being awarded pre-settled status rather than settled status. There are strong reasons to believe that many thousands are being awarded the more precarious and limited rights of pre-settled status when in fact they should be receiving settled status and permanent residence. That has consequences not only in terms of their having to make yet another application to protect their position but by limiting the rights and entitlements that they have in the meantime. A simple but powerful good-will step would be to scrap pre-settled status altogether and allow all EU citizens who have been living here to have permanent residence from day one. That is what the Scottish Government have suggested to the UK Government, and I hope that the Home Secretary will listen to that.

Turning to the future system, is it not symptomatic of the chaos that is Brexit that we are here, more than three years after the EU referendum, without any real clue as to what more the Government intend for our future immigration system than the supposedly magical promise of an Australian points-based system? As the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) pointed out, we had a points-based system introduced by the previous Labour Government, but it was slowly whittled away by the Conservatives. So I call on the Government, even today, just to give us a broad outline of what exactly they intend to put in place. Can the Government at least confirm that they are finally ditching the requirement for a £30,000 salary before anyone can come to work here? Such a threshold would be a disaster for many of the jobs in our public services. It should not be tweaked; it should be abandoned altogether.

As the right hon. Lady also said, a newspaper report at the weekend suggested that a new system could be used, as it is in Australia, to encourage migrant workers to go where they are most needed. That happens not just in Australia but in countries such as Switzerland, New Zealand, and, probably most famously, Canada. Can we please put Scotland at the front of that queue, because, as I hope the Government appreciate, all of

Scotland's projected future population growth comes from net migration? Our economy and public services need it, especially if free movement is to come to an end. Contrary to the slightly fantastical claims made by the hon. Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair), at the end of the day, ending free movement, regardless of what is put in its place, is going to reduce access to the labour market for employers in Scotland rather than increase it.

If there is no deal, will the Home Secretary listen to the calls made by universities and by my hon. Friends today and accept that the proposed system of temporary relief for three years is an absurdity for students who are coming to study for four years—the vast majority of undergraduates in Scotland as well as those on a number of courses throughout the UK?

Our migrant workers make an immense contribution to public services in this country. Sadly, I fear that the immigration policies of this Government will continue to do them, and those services, a massive disservice in return.

3.47 pm

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): Public services are, I believe, the bedrock of a civilised society, and I am very proud of the public services that we have in the United Kingdom. They enable work through good transport systems and through a good internet. They enable good health, which we all need, through a world-leading NHS and through social care provision, and they support communities to stay safe through good police forces and education.

I welcome the many Bills that the Government have put forward in this Queen's Speech—in particular, overarchingly, the environment Bill, because that has implications for every single Government Department. However, today I would like to focus on rural communities and their specific needs, because historically we have not really paid attention to the specific challenges that they face. I certainly welcome the internet commitment—full speed ahead!—but I would like to see a focus very much on a commitment to address the needs of rural communities that have absolutely no internet as a priority, rather than focusing just on improving the internet facility that our urban areas already have. I would like to see 5G rolled out first in rural communities, because at least we will then have the internet, albeit through another route.

There is much that we could do to improve transport in rural areas. We would like to see a green agenda, so why do we not invest in bioethanol buses? It is not very practical to have electric buses in rural communities, and given the number of bioethanol units in rural areas, that seems to be a sustainable way forward. In terms of the rail services in my part of the west country, we effectively have one line in and one line out. If we are to have a sustainable community, we need a sustainable rail service that works. If we are going to reduce the number of cars on roads in rural communities, we need to reopen some of the stations that remain closed.

The contribution of the community and voluntary services to transport, taking people to doctor's appointments and hospitals, is vital. One of the challenges we face with the EU is its ruling that our local volunteer services have to compete on the same basis as commercial providers. That will mean retraining, which is unaffordable for many. The flipside, bizarrely, is that that will put up the cost of local services, because our local authorities

rely very much on those services to get children back and forth to school, and if they cannot use voluntary services at a subsidised rate, the commercial cost will be prohibitive.

With regard to the NHS, we should look at how we can reconfigure training and primary care so that it meets the needs of rural areas, which often have a disproportionate number of ageing residents. We need more generalists and fewer specialists to deal with the complex comorbidities that we face. We need individuals who have experience of rural working, because it is not the same as working in an urban area. That is understood in Australia, which is clearly a much bigger country with a much bigger problem, but there are things we could do differently here, because a one-size-fits-all system simply does not work. When it comes to trying to get social care and healthcare to work together, there are all sorts of regulatory barriers and duplicate reporting lines, and unless we fix that, it will be very difficult. We have a good example of how to do this well in Devon, but we are currently doing it despite, rather than with, support from Government.

In rural areas, it is not always possible for services to be available, so we need to create sustainable communities. North Devon was cut off the last time we had snow, and but for the community working together, they would have been very vulnerable, leaving elderly residents with no means of accessing social care or getting support from GPs. That is all in the context of very poor broadband connectivity. We must look at that route.

The use of technology would hugely improve services in rural areas. If we could use technology to diagnose and treat people in their homes, it would revolutionise the delivery of services in local areas. We also need to look at how we can reconfigure acute and urgent care. In parts of Devon, there is no point calling an ambulance because you will not get one. We have to look at a way of effectively triaging, whereby we use local GPs and other clinicians in rural areas to go out and deal with urgent situations.

In education, again, we need a level playing field. I am pleased to see the Prime Minister's commitment to a level playing field, but this is not just about fair funding; it is about delivering aspiration, opportunity and parity of esteem between technical education and academic education. T-levels will be very welcome, but we need to ensure that they are seen as being as important and valuable as academic studies. We ought to mandate our universities to support primary and secondary schools in the roll-out of technical education, as the Russell Group has done.

We need to make this happen. If we are to see university technical colleges and others succeed, we need a proper aptitude test. They cannot be a dumping ground. They are like grammar schools—they are special schools, for those who can deliver the technical skills that we need. We know that digital skills are the way forward; it is the revolution that we cannot stop and we must embrace. That must be part of our training programme. In terms of our current workforce, these changes are coming so fast that proper thought needs to be given to how we deal with them. Our police force covers a larger area, and in Devon we have asked for further support for tourism, rurality and isolation. I hope the Minister will consider delivering that.

[Anne Marie Morris]

I welcome the investments that have been offered. I hope they will be invested wisely. I hope that we can look at improving systems and not just finances, and we need to recognise that local government in rural areas needs more funding than in urban areas.

3.55 pm

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to contribute to the debate and to follow the hon. Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris).

Today we are talking about public services. I was an NHS worker for 33 years, so it is a subject that is very close to my heart. Working in the NHS, I saw for myself the improvements that a Labour Government brought about, most notably the introduction of “Agenda for Change” terms and conditions for NHS staff, which ensured that they were adequately remunerated for their work, with recognition of their roles, responsibilities and training.

Following the general election and formation of the coalition Government in 2010, I saw “Agenda for Change” being eroded. The coalition refused to accept the recommendations of the pay review bodies, which were a linchpin of the “Agenda for Change” agreement, and NHS staff began to see their wages stagnate, with pay freezes, or below-inflation pay rises for the lucky ones.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for making some excellent points. Does she agree that it is not just NHS workers, but the police who are desperately in need of better pay and conditions so that we can retain the police that we have and train more, particularly in areas where we have more crime on our streets and desperately need those bobbies on the beat?

Liz McInnes: My hon. Friend makes the important point that all our public sector workers need to be adequately remunerated for their vital work to keep our communities safe and healthy.

The coalition Government also introduced the disastrous Health and Social Care Act 2012. It was supposed to reduce bureaucracy in our NHS, but instead resulted in the almost complete fragmentation and privatisation of services and myriad boards, commissioning groups and advisory groups, thereby increasing rather than reducing bureaucracy. The coalition Government were warned about those problems at the time, but they chose to carry on regardless.

This Government removed the nursing bursary, which impacts on not only those who wish to train to be nurses, but allied health professionals, including radiotherapists, who provide vital treatment for cancer. Again, despite being warned that this would lead to a reduction in applicants for training, the Government carried on regardless, with the inevitable consequence that numbers applying for nurse training have fallen. Cancer treatment centres are crying out for specialised staff, with 6% of therapeutic radiography posts currently unfilled, a 23% drop in those starting the courses and one out of 10 training centres for therapeutic radiography being forced to close. Nothing in the Queen’s Speech addresses that or puts right those wrongs. It is difficult to see how the NHS long-term plan will be met without addressing the urgent training needs. That training is

required to provide the staff who are needed to fulfil the long-term plan. The Queen’s Speech was an ideal opportunity for the Government to announce a reinstatement of the bursary scheme. With 40,000 nurse vacancies, there is no time to waste.

I welcome the Government’s commitment to continuing with the Domestic Abuse Bill, but that in itself places demands on our public services that the Government must adequately resource if the measure is to achieve its desired aim of providing protection for victims and survivors. The Government must put the necessary funding into legal aid, support services such as mental health, and education and housing.

On mental health, recent research has found that women who suffer domestic abuse are three times more likely to develop a mental illness such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. The nature of domestic abuse, whereby partners might discourage attendance at mental health appointments, means that it can be extremely problematic for sufferers to access the care they need. Within the Bill, the proposed advisory board to the domestic abuse commission must include a representative from mental health services; this is supported by the Royal College of Psychiatrists. The mental health needs of victims and survivors and, indeed, of perpetrators must not be forgotten.

The Home Secretary said that she wanted to see tough sentences and justice for the victims of crime. She said that she wanted to see sentences that fit the severity of the crime, so I am very grateful to the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) for highlighting the absence from the Queen’s Speech of tougher sentencing for causing death by dangerous driving. She, like me, has had a terrible case in her constituency. She spoke about the tragic death of Bryony Hollands and the derisory sentence given to the driver. In my constituency of Heywood and Middleton, my constituent Joseph Brown-Lartey was killed by an uninsured, unlicensed driver who ran a red light at 80 mph in a 30 mph zone, crashing into Joseph’s car and killing him outright. The impact was so great that it split Joseph’s car in two. The police said that it was the worst crash that they had ever seen on an urban road, yet Joseph’s killer received a sentence of just six years, of which he served just three, while Joseph’s family are serving a life sentence at the loss of their beloved son.

This Government announced two years ago that they would increase the maximum sentence for causing death by dangerous driving from 14 years to life, and that was as a result of a consultation that received more than 9,000 responses. There was a clear vote in favour of it from the public—this would have been a vote winner for the Government—yet two years on the changes to the legislation have not been made despite numerous requests, and the Government have missed the opportunity to include it in the Queen’s Speech. I and many other MPs wrote to the Prime Minister recommending that he did so, but he declined. We are all extremely disappointed not to see it there as this was a golden opportunity.

If the Home Secretary is serious when she says that she wants to see punishments that fit the crime, it is incomprehensible that this measure has not been included in the Queen’s Speech. It lets down the Brown-Lartey in my constituency, it lets down the Hollands family in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Maidenhead—I

nearly said in the Prime Minister's constituency—and it lets down all the brave bereaved families who have campaigned so hard for so many years to get justice.

4.3 pm

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): I welcome the focus today on public services and, in particular the recent announcements about funding for the NHS, education and the police. We also have to acknowledge that increasing funding is possible only if we have prudent financial management, which is what we have seen over the past 10 years. We must never lose sight of the fact that a strong economy underpins all our public services. That is why I welcome things such as the deficit now being down and under control, debt falling as a percentage of GDP, unemployment being back to figures that we last saw in the 1970s and the existence of growth in the economy.

Quite clearly, the greater the growth in the economy, the more we have to spend on public services. However, the provision of public services is not all about money. It is also about standards and ensuring the provision of quality services. It is about innovation, new ideas and ensuring we do things in a different way that might be better and more modern. It is also about productivity and ensuring that we actually can get value for the money that the taxpayer is putting into our public services. Ultimately, it is about outcomes that really matter—better healthcare, less crime and improving education. Specifically, I am pleased to hear the Government's intention to tackle the long-standing issue of adult social care. It has been a long time coming and definitely needs to be addressed.

I want to concentrate on one aspect of the Queen's Speech: the reference to a White Paper on unleashing regional potential in England by enabling decisions that affect local people to be made at a local level. I believe that this has the potential to be transformational. It is about devolution and infrastructure investment. We must remember that many public services are provided by local authorities and local government up and down the country. Sadly, we are a heavily centralised country. Many local decisions are in fact made in Whitehall rather than in our localities. Carlisle is a case in point. Recently, there have been significant decisions about road infrastructure, garden villages and so on. Although they are very important locally, those decisions are being made in Whitehall rather than in the town hall.

The northern powerhouse initiative has started to change the narrative in this regard and it is very relevant to my region. We have had what I would call our own northern powerhouse—namely, the borderlands growth initiative. This brought together councils, MPs, Ministers and officials at both local and national level, all working in a positive manner. I would specifically like to thank the Minister with responsibility for the northern powerhouse and also the former Secretary of State for Scotland, my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell), for all their hard work in ensuring a successful outcome to the growth initiative. It demonstrates what can be done. I would like to think that the White Paper could be an opportunity to truly transform our regions and our local government system, and thereby deliver public services in a better and more efficient manner.

At present, if we are honest, our local government system is unbalanced. It is disorganised, with too many different structures, and it lacks the real power to make

a difference in the locality. The proposed White Paper is therefore a huge opportunity. It gives us a chance to move towards unitary authorities. It gives us a chance to have proper structures with more power and more responsibility, and greater expectations of our local authorities. To some extent in the north, we have started that journey with the northern powerhouse, but in my view it needs to be accelerated and it should be as radical as possible. I therefore have one suggestion to make to the Government. There would be no harm in their revisiting the Redcliffe-Maud report from the 1960s, which I think is as relevant today as it was then.

Any approach the Government have with regard to a White Paper must involve proper consultation and discussion with local government. In my view, there should be no vetoes that would allow one council to hold up change in a particular area, as has been seen in Cumbria. Such reforms also need to be balanced with an economic programme to help to rebalance the national economy. The key drivers to achieve that are clearly infrastructure investment—rail, road, air and technology. Let us also see incentives that can help to develop particular parts of the country, utilising ideas such as freeports or altering the tax code.

Carlisle is a very good example of where we are starting to see some real change. We have a really good story to tell. If we are to achieve our true and full potential, it needs continuing help from the centre, but we also need to release local talent, which can then drive positive change. Such change will drive the local economy, produce greater tax receipts and provide the opportunity for better public services.

The headlines from the Queen's Speech may be about proposed Bills, law and order, and Brexit. However, it is often the small print that can lead to the greatest change. I very much hope that the introduction of the White Paper will lead to something truly radical and transformative that will really change this country for the good.

4.8 pm

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): I would first like to commend my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes). I agree with all her speech, but in particular the part about dangerous driving. The family of Violet-Grace Youens, aged four, and the community of St Helens, will be deeply let down by the lack of action following the Lord Chancellor's commitment relating to death by dangerous driving. We will not cease until the law is changed, and we want that to be done quickly.

I welcome the uplift in police funding, but it will barely begin to fix the damage caused in the UK by austerity and the symptoms that that has created. We must, could and should provide more. I applaud local police and the National Crime Agency for the UK's biggest ever drugs operation recently, in which we saw countrywide dawn raids and arrests from London and Manchester to St Helens. They smashed the UK's biggest ever drug-smuggling gang and seized the largest ever drugs haul. I commend those public services.

That leads me to what we can do in this House to make things better and how we can help to attack the rapid expansion of the complex issue of county lines drug gangs. The financial inability of public service departments to provide necessary early interventions to

[Ms Marie Rimmer]

struggling families, prevention services and distracting and diversionary safeguards, such as youth activities, is another factor. Drug gangs are empowered by these underfunded public services, as they feed on families suffering from income poverty and its physical and mental strain. These strains on families and insufficient local resources have led to an expansion in the number of children who have been placed in supported living—an unregulated provision not monitored by Ofsted—and children being placed out of borough.

The resources available are not meeting the needs of children—as shown in the shortage of adoptive parents and fostering parents and the lack of resources for looked-after children and supported children—and that has driven up costs and led to a lack of specialist provision and the expansion of unregulated private children's homes. A system that was designed to be flexible and used in extremes is now used to plug a hole in the system. Supported children are at serious risk of exploitation by drug smugglers, county lines operators and gangsters.

Management and staff are not trained to the level required to adequately support these children, who are going through the difficult transitional years from childhood to adulthood. There are no minimum standards set out in law for unregulated 16-plus provision. Compounding that issue is the fact that these children are classed as self-sufficient. They manage their health and finances and may leave accommodation as and when they please, as they are deemed autonomous. We are seeing more and more of these children being sent to north-western towns, where housing costs are well below the national average, with some hosting authorities having as many as 300 out-of-borough children. The corporate parenting responsibility is the home borough's.

In St Helens alone, there are roughly 25 unregulated children's homes, hosting up to 120 out-of-borough children. The management and staff of these homes do not have the authority or skills to prevent these vulnerable children from going out into the hazardous world, where gangsters target them and promise them status and money that they have never seen before trapping them in a world of intimidation and fear, where they get locked into criminal activity, trafficking drugs across county lines. Essentially, these are apprenticeships into organised crime.

I reiterate that we have vulnerable children who have been moved miles away from homes, families, friends and neighbours—essentially, any positive support structure that they might have had—to an area that they do not know, into an unregulated private accommodation system of inconsistent quality. Is it any wonder that we have seen the travesty of county lines drugs gangs expanding? It is completely unacceptable. We are failing these young people. We are responsible for their hope, safety and future. The system and procedures are not safeguarding these vulnerable children. We must safeguard them and stop exposing them to criminal exploitation by these 21st-century Fagins.

I implore this and any future Government to implement regulations and oversights for private children's homes and supported children, as well as procedures for placing a child out of borough. We need to increase the resources for care, education and safeguarding activities. Basically, we need to invest in children.

I applaud St Helens and Whiston Hospitals, which are among the nine most outstanding hospitals, but they suffer from recruitment problems and nursing shortages for the very reasons my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton mentioned in her speech.

We must safeguard our children and invest in our public services—for children, adults and children in need of care—and in adult social care and health. We in St Helens have integrated adult social care and health, and it is superb, but we could do far more with just a little extra funding in social care. It needs to go there as well as health. It is superb. Please invest more in public services.

4.15 pm

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in this Queen's Speech debate and to follow the hon. Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer). I listened to her very carefully, particularly to her comments on vulnerable children and those in care. I want to mention Home for Good in my speech. I encourage her to look at that charitable organisation, which is doing so much good work in this space.

Opposition Members have asked whether we should be having a Queen's Speech, in contrast to calls from Labour Front Benchers, who have been asking for one for at least a year, since July 2018, and almost weekly since May 2019. We finally give them what they want and they still find cause to complain.

Of course, they could have put all this to rest by agreeing to a general election, which would have fallen this week. The Leader of the Opposition has called for that not just weekly or monthly but for years, yet when he has the opportunity to vote for one he ducks it. Perhaps in this sense only he is like St Augustine of Hippo: Lord give me a general election, but not yet. But here we are. They may have a chance to vote for one in the next few days.

There are several excellent measures in the Queen's Speech, but two in particular caught my eye. I am delighted that the Secretary of State for Education is in his place, because, as several hon. Members have, I will devote the first part of my speech to education. Given that the theme of today's debate is public services, it is an apt place to start.

It is hard to overstate the importance of education when it comes to opportunity, life chances and the next generation. One of the most enjoyable parts of being an MP, for me, is visiting schools and when schools visit Parliament. Madam Deputy Speaker, you know that Mr Speaker is proud of the education centre in this place, and rightly so. Several schools in my constituency come back year on year and find it a source of education as well as fun.

The fact is, however, that historically Dorset and Poole have been significantly underfunded. In contrast to what the shadow Education Secretary said, when Labour was in power, both Dorset and Poole were among the lowest funded areas in the whole of the country, yet Labour, when it had the opportunity to do something about it, failed to do anything at all. We have begun to right that wrong with the new funding formula. In particular, I say to the Secretary of State that I welcome the requirement on local authorities to pass on

the minimum per-pupil funding levels to schools as the first step towards a hard national funding formula. That, in particular, will be welcome in my constituency.

It is not just about funding of course; it is about standards, as other hon. Members have mentioned. I welcome the fact that in the international literacy rankings, for example, our country is improving. Ofsted is hugely important. It is about levelling up. It is the ambition of Conservative Members that all our schools be levelled up to the best, rather than the best being dragged down.

The 12% increase in funding for special educational needs and disability is hugely welcome, but I should like to hear from the Secretary of State whether it will be bedded down for future years, because I know that that would help schools not just in my constituency but throughout the country.

Let me now turn to the issue of families. In the House of Commons the word “family” is barely uttered—it is hardly ever cited as either a potential contributor to poverty or a solution to it—and when Members do raise the issue they often do so apologetically or are dismissed and shouted down. The fact is, however, that ours is a country in which family breakdown falls disproportionately on poorer children, and that inequality should be taken just as seriously as any other injustice that Members seek to address in this place. I hugely support a measure—the divorce, dissolution and separation Bill—which will encourage couples to undergo counselling that may help to prevent their divorce. It will also seek to address conflicts within the families of divorcing couples, which is hugely important.

I have mentioned vulnerable children, and I will do so again. I will be encouraging Ministers to look at the fostering and adoption charity Home for Good, and, in particular, at its new five-star campaign, which is all about securing the very best care for our children so that they can be truly looked after. It is not about five-star hotels, but about five-star care.

Finally, I turn to Brexit. It would be impossible, especially today, to fail to mention the subject. It is often said in this place that repetition is not a novel phenomenon, but over the past three and a half years we have heard the same speech from the same characters sitting in the same places. Those who were in favour of Brexit are still in favour of Brexit, and those who were against Brexit are still against Brexit. However, there was a referendum. The issue has been resolved. There was a vote, and that vote must be followed. Not everyone in my constituency voted to leave, but I have been contacted by so many who voted to remain, who respect the result, and who say that we need to get on with it. We are in an addled state. We are in a state in which we cannot move on from the subject of Brexit. It seems that there are those in this place who are opposed to no deal, are opposed to voting for a deal, and are determined to ensure that we remain.

Today’s debate has shown us how many other things we can and should be discussing, but we need to get Brexit done in order to discuss them properly.

4.22 pm

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson), although some of our opinions may differ.

This Queen’s Speech was an immense disappointment. Some have already said that it was really a Tory party manifesto in waiting, but it was also a huge missed opportunity. The Prime Minister could have used it to set out a vision for a fairer country and a pledge to eradicate the poverty that is rampant across this great nation, the fifth richest in the world. As we know from a recent poll, that is exactly what two thirds of Britons want. They recognise that poverty is a political choice, and they reject it.

The Prime Minister could have committed himself to helping the 4.2 million children who are living in poverty—one in five of them live in persistent poverty—and lifting them out of the mire, the endless hunger and cold that they and their families experience. As a consequence of that poverty, this country has the highest rate of childhood mortality in western Europe. With every 1% increase in child poverty, for every 100,000 live births nearly six more babies die.

The Prime Minister could have recognised the isolation, humiliation and destitution that so many of our sick and disabled citizens face as a result of his Government’s social security and social care policies, with more than 4 million living in poverty. He could have recognised the plight of women, and older women in particular, who, after a life of caring for their children and doing two or more jobs at any one time as well as caring for their elderly relatives have started to see their own longevity decline, while the Government slowly but surely persist in pushing back their state retirement age.

This Prime Minister and his Government have decided not to make these fundamental issues their priority; they have made different choices, and while over the last 10 years the poor have grown poorer the rich have grown richer. By whatever measure we use, we are seeing increases in inequalities in income, wealth and power. Last year, the poorest fifth of the population saw their income contract by 1.6% while the average income of the richest rose by 4.7%. The richest 1,000 people in the UK have a wealth estimated at £724 billion, and it increased £66 billion in just a year, which compares with the wealth of the poorest 40% whose combined assets were worth £567 billion. This year’s “fat cat Friday” exposed that top executives are earning 133 times more than their average worker; the ratio was 47 in 1998.

The consequences of these inequalities are the flatlining of life expectancy across the UK as a whole, declining longevity in the poorest areas and for women and the increase in infant and child mortality. Like poverty, inequality is not inevitable; it is a political choice. These shocking trends in our health—our death rates—can be reversed, but that has bypassed this Queen’s Speech.

Brexit is tied up with this, perpetuating poverty and inequalities. As Professor Danny Dorling’s excellent book, “Rule Britannia”, brilliantly expounded, it is maintaining these inequalities and driving up the wealth and power of the super-rich elite that has driven the leave campaign. They have absolutely no regard at all for all the credible evidence that shows what no deal, and even a free trade agreement such as proposed now, will do to the economy and the livelihoods of ordinary people—our constituents—with estimates of declines in GDP of up to 10% lasting for 15 years. For constituencies such as mine, in the north, it will be absolutely devastating, far worse than we will see in London and the south-east, as has been the trend over the past several years.

[Debbie Abrahams]

It is this and the powerlessness that too many of our citizens experience that are driving political extremes on the left and right, just as we saw in the 1930s. The knock-on impact on the decline in growth will be job losses, falling tax revenues and, of course, cuts to public services. We need to avoid no deal at all costs. We need to have a confirmatory vote on whatever credible deal is proposed, and we need then to rebuild the social fabric of our society.

Not only is there a moral imperative to act now to address the poverty and inequality, but the survival of our democracy depends on it. The 1942 Beveridge report was the basis for a new welfare state after the second world war, and we established the NHS in 1948, expanded our education system, undertook a massive house building programme and extended our social security system. It was heralded as a revolutionary system that provided income security for its citizens as part of a comprehensive policy of social progress. But since then our society has changed: the pressures from globalisation, automation and an ageing society mean that we need to develop a new sustainable social security system—one that we can all be proud of. We should be encouraged that last year's British Social Attitudes survey revealed that the public are ready for a far fairer public spending settlement.

We need a new Beveridge report for the 21st century, defining a new social contract with the British people, and addressing the poverty, inequalities and indignity that millions are enduring. We need to end the fear and blame that this Government perpetuate, and that was rampant throughout this Queen's Speech, and bring hope to a new generation, as we did 77 years ago.

4.29 pm

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams). My only point on the second referendum she is calling for is that I am not quite sure anyone in this country would believe that that would be honoured either, bearing in mind that the first has not been honoured for three and a half years.

I welcome the Queen's Speech; it contains a raft of domestic measures that for too long have not been given the attention they should have been, not because we have not wanted to give them attention, but simply because Brexit has consumed all our energy and time. However, from the end of March this year, that should not have been the case. The fact that it has continued is down to the antics of MPs from all parts of the House who have done, and continue to do, their utmost to prevent our departure from the EU. There is, of course, a handful of exceptions who genuinely wish to leave with a deal, but let me tell them that we all want to leave with a deal. However, we voted to leave the EU, deal or no deal, and that must now be done on 31 October.

It is the shame of the House that the so-called surrender Bill was passed, and with such undue haste. A pernicious piece of legislation, its aim was to undermine Brexit and our negotiating position, which it has done. The Prime Minister has called on the Opposition parties to throw themselves on the mercy of the electorate and, unsurprisingly, they refuse to do so. They bang on about democracy, but they are terrified of it. That is the truth.

As I have said, the Queen's Speech touches on many important areas. We heard from my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary this morning that we will take a far more robust approach to crime. I applaud the proposal for an additional 20,000 police officers, having argued for them for many years. Dorset's share in the first year is 50, and it is vital that we get the extra 120 in the following two years if the formula is to be followed. I would like to pay tribute to Dorset's police officers, all of whom do great credit to their force. I know for a fact that these extra officers will be welcomed and are desperately needed.

I would be failing in my duty if I did not mention our prison officers, who often feel like the forgotten army. They must not be forgotten by this Government, and we must continue to ensure that they have the support and numbers they need to do the job.

While talking about those in uniform, I want also to pay tribute to our armed forces. A former soldier myself, I welcome the new Office for Veterans Affairs, which is aimed at better co-ordinating care for our veterans, many of whom need our help. I pay special tribute to the former soldier Andy Price, who has established a help centre and garden in Weymouth. It has been hugely successful, and Andy is now considering applying for charitable status.

I was concerned that there was no measure in the Queen's Speech to stop the ongoing witch hunt against our veterans, especially those who served in Northern Ireland decades ago. However, I was encouraged by the reply that the Prime Minister gave to my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) on Monday. I remind the Prime Minister that we are not asking for a statute of limitations. We simply want there to be a presumption against further prosecution when a case has already been investigated and when there is no new evidence. I attended a rally in Parliament Square recently, and there is genuine anger among our veterans and their families that this injustice has still not been resolved. It must be. I am glad to read that the defence budget will continue to meet NATO's 2% requirement. There is no doubt that more money is needed, not least to ensure that our brave men and women are housed properly and decently.

The national infrastructure strategy and plans for a White Paper on how to unleash regional potential are welcome announcements, and nowhere is the former more needed and the latter being more promoted than in South Dorset. A new business-led panel that I initiated has been taken on by Bill Reeves, the chief executive of Portland Port, to whom I am most grateful and owe so much. Under his dynamic leadership, more and more people are getting involved in the panel's aim to create and deliver a strategy that attracts more investment, more businesses and better jobs. Coastal towns such as Swanage and Weymouth, and the island of Portland, cannot do it on their own. We need at least a fair slice of the infrastructure cake, crying out as we are for better road, rail and broadband connectivity. Our biggest drawback is that our conurbations are relatively small and often do not meet the Government's criteria, but those guidelines must change if coastal resorts are going to survive, as they should and must. I should like to thank the Minister for the Northern Powerhouse and Local Growth, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) for responding so

rapidly to my invitation to visit us recently. Rest assured we will be chasing him and his Department in the months ahead.

I would be failing in my duty if I did not mention farmers, and I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I meet farmers every quarter, and there is genuine concern about Brexit and the effect that it will have on them. There is an appreciation that public moneys will be available for public good. There is also a need for support in the face of possible punitive tariffs. We would all be grateful—I note that the Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) is on the Front Bench—if the Government fleshed out exactly what support will be available, particularly in the event of no deal. The fishing community is also worried about its future, and the sooner we take back control of our waters, the better.

Affordable housing is a pressing issue in South Dorset. We have seen imaginative new housing developments where house builders use a range of materials to lower the cost. “Affordable homes” is not a popular phrase in my constituency, because they are simply not affordable, so we must deal with that issue. While on housing, can we please look at density? All too often there are too many houses and not nearly enough green space. More money for health and education is to be welcomed, of course, but we cannot ignore the shortage of nurses. We need more home-grown nurses, who are essential for the future of the NHS.

There are many more issues that I would like to cover, but my time, regrettably, is running out. I will end where I started by saying that if some MPs have doubts about the direction of travel in this place, let us trust the people and let them decide in a general election.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Everybody will get equal time with a six-minute limit.

4.36 pm

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): The Government must act to restore victims' and survivors' confidence in the justice system. Since 2010, the Government have systematically gutted the criminal justice agencies, police numbers have plummeted, Crown Prosecution Service funding has been slashed and, as a result, justice has been harder to achieve for victims. Despite the Government's blatant electioneering in this Queen's Speech, the public and survivors know that the freshly promised cash is only a plaster on a deeply wounded justice system.

I have been working directly with survivors to develop reforms that would prevent attrition as their cases progress. The reforms will improve survivors' experiences of the justice system. One in five survivors do not report to the police because they are afraid of further violence from the perpetrator. It is a scandal that victims do not have the confidence in the police to keep them safe, and that was not helped by the 2017 bail reforms. My freedom of information requests revealed that the number of suspected child abusers released with bail conditions actually dropped by 56% in 2017-18 alone. Will Ministers agree to reform the law to introduce a presumption of bail conditions in all cases of violent and sexual offences?

I am pleased that the Government have signalled their intention to take up my recommendation of a police pledge card, which will provide survivors with crucial information about the criminal justice process and a single point of contact. Will Ministers now set out plans for its formal roll-out?

The Government say that they plan to publish and consult on a revised victims' code and a new victims' law in early 2020, but that promise was first made in 2015, and victims have endured delay after delay ever since. Why are the Government proposing to postpone it yet again? I am also concerned that the Government are only going to be consulting on it, not actually rolling out this vital law. Reform of the criminal injuries compensation scheme, which continues to discriminate against victims of childhood abuse, is also long overdue. When will the Government finally reform the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority so that victims with unspent convictions and those wrongly deemed to have consented to their own abuse can actually claim?

Child sexual abuse is a crime that, according to the Office for National Statistics, has over 2 million victims in this country. There was little in the Queen's Speech to persuade me that that shocking figure will be halted or reversed under this Government. I am also disappointed that we discovered today that the Government are not progressing with age verification for online pornography.

A strategic cross-departmental response is required to prevent child abuse, secure convictions and support survivors. The Government must invest in sexual violence and abuse services that will support survivors to play a full role in society and, indeed, the economy. The Government should immediately fund the minimum number of services as recommended under the Istanbul convention, combining it with a mechanism to ensure that funding rises to match demand.

The all-party parliamentary group for adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, which I chair, has found that 89% of survivors say that the abuse they suffered negatively impacts their mental health. Not surprisingly, survivors also report that the abuse affects their relationships, their career and their education. If the Government are serious about addressing the country's poor mental health, they must train practitioners to recognise and respond to the trauma of child sexual abuse. Following the example of Scotland and Wales, the Government should create a national trauma strategy that encompasses all forms of early-life abuse and adversity.

The Home Secretary talked in her speech about the rehabilitation of sex offenders. I am extremely concerned that the Government's existing programme is actually shown to increase the likelihood of sex offending upon release, and I am more concerned that the Government held back the report for five years. I hope this Government will do all they can to address that in the forthcoming legislation.

My final ask is that the Government legislate to end the abusive practice of child marriage in the UK. Victims, usually girls, are pressured and coerced into marrying adult men, and they face increased risks of social exclusion, domestic and sexual violence, and limited educational opportunities. The UN has called for the elimination of child marriage worldwide, yet it is still legal right here. It is appalling that this illiberal practice is still sanctioned here, with more than 800 victims since 2015. The Government must recognise that child marriage is child

[Sarah Champion]

abuse, and they must legislate to protect the childhood and education of children by criminalising all marriages of anyone under the age of 18.

The Sentencing (Pre-consolidation Amendments) Bill, the Prisoners (Disclosure of Information About Victims) Bill, the serious violence Bill and the Domestic Abuse Bill all present an opportunity for the Government to do something that will genuinely improve the lives of the survivors of childhood abuse and sexual abuse, and to prevent others from falling victim to it. Will the Government please act?

4.41 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion). I have great respect for her and for her work to speak up for some of the most vulnerable people not only in her constituency but across the country.

I rise to speak very much in favour of this Queen's Speech. I have been listening closely to the debate, and I am slightly puzzled by some Opposition Members' complaining as though this Queen's Speech is, somehow, a pre-election announcement from the Government when, of course, they could have stopped that happening. They twice had the opportunity to vote for an election, and we would then not have had a Queen's Speech until after that election. I am still puzzled by why they did not take that opportunity.

Michael Tomlinson: The election would have been on either the Monday or the Tuesday of this week, and there would have been no Queen's Speech this week. If the Opposition had their way, they could well have been in power.

Steve Double: My hon. Friend makes the point well that the Opposition had every opportunity to ensure that the Queen's Speech was presented by whichever party won the election and formed the Government. It suggests Opposition Members did not support an election because they were not confident that it would be them presenting the Queen's Speech.

I support the Queen's Speech, and I welcome the many Bills that have been announced. Its overall theme sets out the Government's agenda that, once we leave the European Union, they are determined to level up across the country and address some of the regional inequalities that have long existed in our country. I represent the great constituency of St Austell and Newquay, and there will be few places in the country where that message is more warmly welcomed than in Cornwall because, for decades, the people of Cornwall have often felt a very long way from Westminster, not just geographically and physically but even in the thoughts of our leaders and our Governments.

Cornwall, as well as being an incredible place that contributes to our nation through food production and in so many other ways, faces a number of unique challenges that genuinely no other part of the country faces. A peninsula on the edge of the country, with a very rural and sparse population, a growing elderly population and 600 miles of coast to look after, the challenges we face in Cornwall are unique.

Successive Governments have rarely given Cornwall what it really needs to address those specific challenges, but in this Prime Minister and the agenda he has laid out for this Government we see an opportunity to address the underfunding issues we have had and to level up the investment in Cornwall for which we have been waiting for so long.

We need funding for our police: Devon and Cornwall police currently receive 15% below the national average per head of population funding despite facing many unique challenges.

We need funding for our schools: historically, and for a very long time, Cornish schools have been underfunded. Although he is not now in his place, I very much welcomed the Secretary of State for Education coming to Cornwall just last week and announcing extra funding for Cornish schools. That will begin to level up and address underfunding. We need funding for our NHS and very much welcome the Government's commitment of £450 million towards a new hospital in Cornwall.

The Government are starting to address the underfunding issues, but it is not just in our public services that we want to level up; we want to level up in our economy as well. Just this August, the Prime Minister came to Cornwall, and we were all so encouraged by his words:

"Cornwall has incredible potential."

He said:

"My ambition for Cornwall and for the whole country is levelling up."

He continued:

"We will ensure that Cornwall does in no circumstances have less money coming in from all resources, so, whether it's UK funding or wherever, there will be the cash to support infrastructure, technology and education."

And he also said:

"We want to see a very dynamic Cornish economy. We want people to have the confidence not just to improve their lives here but to invest in business here and have babies here as well."

Those words were hugely welcome, because we want Cornwall no longer to be considered the poor part of the UK, and actually to play its part in contributing to the national economy. We are ambitious: one of the announcements in the Queen's Speech that we very much welcomed was that of a national space strategy. I am sure many Members will not be surprised to hear that we are right ready to start to launch satellites into space from Spaceport Cornwall at Newquay airport, and we really welcome the Government's ongoing support.

We welcome the announcements on the environment and the Government's commitment to continuing to improve our environmental credentials and to introducing a new regulator. Cornwall is already playing a significant part, but it is keen to continue to play a part. Just this week, we announced funding for a second geothermal drill in Cornwall. In the near future, that will start to produce geothermal energy—another source of renewable energy.

We continue to pursue lithium extraction, which will secure a UK domestic supply of one of the most important metals for renewable energies, enabling the production of batteries for storage and electric vehicles. Cornwall is ready to fulfil its potential. We need the Government to continue to invest and support the Cornish economy.

Finally, on the shared prosperity fund, we were encouraged when the Prime Minister recently made clear on the BBC his commitment to the inclusion in the shared prosperity fund of a dedicated fund for Cornwall that will be comparable to the money that we would have received through the European Union—I say through the European Union and not from the European Union, because it is the UK taxpayers' money that is given back to us. We really need to see measures on the shared prosperity fund come forward quickly so that we have that in place in the very near future. In that way, we can continue to support the Cornish economy so that we can fulfil our ambitions and play our part in the national economic growth.

4.48 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): I want briefly to cover a range of subjects relevant to my constituency of Inverclyde. Despite devolution, it is always important to remind constituents of the influence that Westminster and the UK Government continue to exert over public services in our community. My constituency of Inverclyde has been particularly hard hit by the UK Government in recent years. Our coastguard station was closed, with the loss of 31 expert jobs. That decision was taken at a UK level, and against the will of local people and the experts who said that safety would be compromised as a result of the closure. Likewise, in Port Glasgow, the jobcentre closed in 2017, despite Inverclyde having some of the highest rates of poverty and deprivation in the United Kingdom. Clients of this service must now rely on a single office in Greenock, which covers a wide geographical area from Langbank to Skelmorlie, both of which are outside my constituency.

On broadband, it is time for the UK Government to take notice of Scotland. Telecoms is reserved to Westminster, yet the UK Government are contributing £21 million to the Reaching 100% programme—just 3% of the total. That is in stark contrast to the £600 million that is being provided by the SNP Scottish Government to ensure that all homes and businesses across Scotland have superfast broadband.

The UK Government could also support the delivery of health services in Scotland by taking two specific actions. First, they could support those parents of severely epileptic children by making it easier for them to access medical cannabis. Last year, the Government made all the right mood music, but then failed to provide. In March of this year, I was one of the 80 MPs who delivered a petition with almost 600,000 signatures on that subject. The UK Government have made some minuscule steps forward, but there is no point in legalising certain medications if no one can have access to them. I should clarify that: I said that no one can have access to them, but if a person can afford to pay for a private prescription and has the tens of thousands of pounds per year, then they can access medical cannabis. If the UK Government are unwilling to take the necessary action to help those families, they should accept the call made by the Scottish Government in 2018 and devolve the necessary powers to Holyrood.

In that same spirit, it is time for the UK Government to allow a drug consumption room—a safe drug consumption facility or an overdose prevention room, whatever you want to call it—to be established in the west of Scotland. The Scottish Government and Glasgow

City Council, with cross-party support, want this measure to progress because the UK Government refuse to let go of their failed and outdated policy on drugs.

Scotland is facing an unprecedented drug crisis; some 1,187 people died last year in Scotland. The UK Government will not allow anyone to try something new, based on rational, evidence-based policy. DCRs across the world, with the correct medical supervision and Naloxone on hand, have seen zero deaths—not one person has died in a DCR. The UK Government must open their eyes to these possibilities.

Alison Thewliss: Does my hon. Friend share my frustration that Glasgow's plans for a DCR have been in place for three years now? The Home Office has not even bothered to come to Glasgow to see why they are so needed.

Ronnie Cowan: It is symptomatic of the fact that these people will not look at the evidence placed in front of them. They want to reinvent the wheel at every opportunity. The NHS in Greater Glasgow, Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Government all want this to happen. If people want to visit Glasgow and other areas, they can see the problem at first hand. We are offering a solution.

I tried to intervene during the Secretary of State's speech, but she refused to take my intervention. She was talking about county lines. I encourage the Government to approach the police and ask them to stop recruiting young people. They are approaching young kids and young vulnerable men and women on county lines and using them as police informants. That is an extremely dangerous policy to pursue, and I ask the Government to revisit it.

In conclusion, much of Westminster's stewardship of public services can be boiled down to a policy of blocking, stifling or closing public services, which might otherwise act in the public good. Scotland deserves better, but it cannot expect it from the current Prime Minister and his impotent UK Government.

4.54 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan), who made a good case for his constituency and for Scotland as a whole.

The Gracious Speech has released a whole series of opportunities for the country and for my constituents in the post-Brexit world that I look forward to. I will touch on a couple of those important aspects.

On the Bill on voter ID, the reality is that there have been allegations of impersonation in a large number of constituencies up and down the country. The proposal will end those challenges and end the way the electorate have been fooled in certain places. When I was elected in 2010, a series of people came to me to say that they were recorded as having voted, but they could not have done so because they were in India at the time. We have to take this matter seriously.

On health, I have the honour of representing the seat that contains the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital. For 30 years before I was elected, it was promised that it would be redeveloped. I am delighted that we now have the first phase of redevelopment. In coming years, I look forward to the further phases of redevelopment and to advancing the case for our hospital to receive the money from the Government as we move forward.

[*Bob Blackman*]

I note that the Gracious Speech did not mention the prevention strategy on health-related matters, for which the consultation ended on Monday. I am looking forward to the Government making further proposals for smoking cessation and to assist people to live longer and healthier lives. I also look forward to the eventual release of the adult social care Green Paper, so there can be an end to that challenge across the piece.

On education funding, I ask the Secretary of State for Education to look at how schools receive per pupil funding. It is often a year after the count is done that they get the increased funding as a result of an increase in the number of pupils on the register. That means that a school is required to employ more teachers and more staff, but does not get the funding until a year later. That has a big effect in my constituency, where a large number of people come to the country for a short period; they bring their children into school but then move on.

One area that is unfortunately not mentioned in the Gracious Speech, but is desperately important across the country, is housing. We have a desperate need for a proper social housing programme to build housing units that people can afford to live in. Given what I did on the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 to assist people who are threatened with being homeless through no fault of their own, I am rather angry that we still have the challenge of local authorities not being able to provide homes for those people to actually live in. We have rightly put the responsibility on local authorities to assist people who are homeless, but we must ensure that there are homes for them.

A huge number of consultations conducted by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government over the years have never been brought to fruition. It is about time that some of them came forward. One such area, leasehold reform, was mentioned earlier. This is a Parliament with a minority Government, where there needs to be support from across the House. There is clearly strong support for leasehold reform, so the Government could bring it forward and get it on the statute book—albeit with revisions, as appropriate—on an all-party basis. I was party to a Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee report that recommended a series of measures that could be quickly legislated for.

As the 2017 Act has been in operation for some time, by next March we will have full figures on what local authorities have done. We put the provision in the Act that, if local authorities do not abide by the spirit as well as the letter of the law, the Secretary of State can introduce a statutory code by which local authorities will have to operate. I think we may have to implement that.

The use of public land is another issue that I will address in the brief time available. We have to move away from the position whereby we sell public land to the highest bidder, get overpriced housing developed, charge exorbitant rents or exorbitant prices, and then pay housing benefit to subsidise housing that people cannot afford. That has to end. We have to get to a position where we take the cost of land out of housing development, and then charge rents and property prices that are affordable, to ensure that people have the dignity of being able to fund their own housing costs. That would save the Treasury a great deal of money

and needs to be brought forward. I think we need a comprehensive housing Bill so that many such proposals can be introduced for the benefit of this country.

5 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman). Opposition Members will agree with a lot of what he said, particularly on housing.

We are here to debate a legislative programme, set out by a minority Government, that we are all under the impression has little hope of being delivered. Whether we see it more as a pre-election broadcast by the Conservative party, or as a serious proposition, the question for me remains the same: what does it do to help my constituents with the everyday struggles they face? On that basis, the Queen's Speech is, in my opinion, a failure. It does nothing to undo the damage caused by a decade of cuts to council funding and other public services. It does nothing to help the most vulnerable or those struggling to make ends meet because of a callous and inhumane benefits system. It does nothing to help our struggling schools, our GP surgeries, the local transport network or the failing housing market.

On the subject of housing, I am very much more concerned with what is not in the Queen's Speech than what is in it. My constituents, whether those who are hoping to become first-time buyers, renters who want stronger rights, families who are stuck on the council waiting list or those at risk of being homeless, are getting the message loud and clear from this Queen's Speech that housing and their concerns about it are not a priority for this Government. Where is the plan to tackle the chronic shortage of affordable and council housing in this country?

Let us not forget about the leasehold scandal. Although the Government said a lot in the build-up about what they would do on leasehold reform, with heavy social media plugging, the heavily trailed policies of peppercorn ground rents and a ban on leasehold houses did not feature in the Queen's Speech. I say this just about every time I speak on leasehold and I make no apologies for saying it again: there are thousands of people who are stuck with leasehold houses that were sold to them with a paucity of information at best or, at worst, as part of a systematic deception. Those people need legislation now. The Westminster Hall debate last month revealed a great deal of support across the House to do something. I would have hoped that the governing party, which does not have a majority, wanted to show that it is on the side of ordinary people and that it can make a difference to people's lives. There is a high degree of consensus on the way forward, and legislation is needed to help existing leaseholds out of the vice they are in.

Only this week, some of my constituents have had a reminder about the pitfalls of leasehold. They have received notification that they are beholden to a new freeholder called Landmark—the new owner of their property. A nice letter came through informing them that their ground rent was going up, of course, but there was also a schedule of fees that they had not seen before that included, outrageously, a £100 charge to obtain consent to have a pet in their own home. How can we allow these rip-off charges to continue? Legislation is needed desperately.

The Government consider law and order to be a priority, with about half a dozen Bills in the Queen's Speech that fall roughly within that area. What is the point of having so many new laws to deal with criminal behaviour when the police do not have the numbers to deal with existing laws?

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his powerful speech. Does he agree that we would have been much better off on policing if the Government had not cut 20,000 police officers over recent years?

Justin Madders: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I will go on to explain why the Government have a damn cheek, frankly, to argue that what they are presenting is something new and exciting.

In recent times, I have come across situations in various forces around the country that show just how starkly the cuts have affected frontline policing, such as when the police said they would not investigate a fraud complaint because the amount at stake was less than £15 million; when the police said they would not look at CCTV footage in relation to a theft because it was longer than 20 minutes; or when recently in my constituency the police said they might not have the officers available to close the road for a Remembrance Sunday parade. I think that tells us we have hit rock bottom. Fortunately, we have managed to get agreement from the police that they will support the parade this year, but the fact that they were even having to consider that should surely send the clearest message to Government Members that austerity has gone too far and that 10 years of cuts have led us to the edge of the abyss. I am glad that this message does now appear to be getting through, with the great fanfare on 20,000 new police officers, but of course, as we have said, it does not replace those we have lost in the decade of austerity we have just had. In Cheshire, we will go back to two thirds of those we have lost since 2010, so I do not believe that the fanfare is warranted. Only the Conservative party under its current leadership could have the audacity to present having fewer police officers serving than when it came into office as some sort of triumph. You couldn't make it up, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Let me briefly talk about schools. Again, when we get past the headlines, the detail is not quite as impressive. Every school in my constituency has faced cuts since 2015. New data shows that, over the five years from 2015 to 2020, £78.9 million will be lost from west Cheshire schools—an average loss of £403 per pupil. I should make it clear that my wife is the cabinet member for children and young people at our local authority, so I hear first hand on regular occasions how damaging this all is, but I also know from talking to parents, pupils and teachers just how far these cuts have impacted on education. We hear time and again from parents coming to our surgeries how they have to battle to get their child's special educational needs recognised. Education is a fundamental right for every child, and parents should not have to fight the system just to get the education support that their child deserves.

I want to talk about a few things not in the Queen's Speech that we should be looking at. There is nothing on low pay, insecure work, child poverty or pensioner poverty. There is nothing on scrapping the benefits freeze, the benefits cap, the bedroom tax, the two-child

limit, the rape clause or punitive sanctions. There is nothing on universal credit. Week after week in my surgery, I hear from people who are living in poverty and struggling to survive because they face a continual battle with the benefits system, which is actually supposed to be there to support them. I hear about overpayments, underpayments, long initial waiting periods, inaccessible and complex online forms, lack of support for put-in claims, cruel disability tests, and unfair and unreasonable fines. Universal credit is not working and, worse, it is driving people into poverty, debt and rent arrears. It is forcing many more people to turn to food banks just to survive. There are no plans in this Queen's Speech to scrap this failed, cruel policy, and that just shows us where the priorities of this Government lie.

Finally, I want to express my disappointment that once again the WASPI women have not been mentioned. It is a source of shame that the Government continue to ignore that campaign in the face of overwhelming evidence of the injustice that has been served on them. In fact, I have just come from a drop-in session where there were probably more Members than there are in here. That shows that across the House there is genuine support for doing something for the WASPI campaigners.

5.7 pm

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders).

I am deeply concerned that the relentless increase in hardship, struggle and poverty means that we have become dangerously acclimatised to it. Just imagine for one moment that we had woken up after the 2010 election and could see with fresh eyes the world that we have created around us. How shocked would we be to see that the number of people waiting over 18 weeks in the NHS has gone up to 4.4 million and that a recent report on adult social care said that people are being pushed into inappropriate care settings that do not meet their need?

The scandals keep coming over and again. We hear that 81% of our mental health trust leaders say that they are unable to meet the needs of their children with mental health problems. There is an unprecedented—I quote, “unprecedented”—rise in infant mortality. Since 2010, rough sleeping has increased by 165%; education spending has been slashed by over £7 billion; knife crime offences are at the highest ever level; there has been a 27% increase in the number of people being home educated, indicating the lack of faith that many parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities feel in the current schools system—and so much more.

We have a creeping normalisation of poverty and struggle. We retreat and speak only to those who act and speak like us. Our social media reinforces the views of those we already agree with through the algorithms that they use. We have become conveniently blind to the reality that so many people face. Channel 5 puts out its poverty porn programmes every single week. We are building this narrative that there is somehow a difference between the deserving and the undeserving poor. We look down on the undeserving poor as people lacking aspiration and having a poor work ethic, until the moment it happens to somebody we love, and they hit the rocks—until life happens.

[Emma Hardy]

I think of the family in Hessle who told me that they had all along believed that if people play by the rules, work hard and pay their taxes, they will be rewarded later on, until their mother had a stroke. They lacked the stroke rehabilitation services that she needed. There was no care package waiting for her when she left hospital, and because she was left on her own without adequate care, she fell, broke her hip and ended up back in hospital, where she deteriorated further. I think of the parents of children with special educational needs who, at a meeting with me just last week, broke down in tears while telling me about having to remortgage their property to go to a tribunal, because they cannot get the services that their child needs—because the resources are rationed and simply not available.

It appears in society right now that it is only possible to cope under this Conservative Government if people can guarantee that they and the people they love will never be in need. The Conservatives have ripped the heart out of our public sector, and this Prime Minister is fooling no one with his grab-bag of populist pronouncements masquerading as a Queen's Speech. Like the leader of the Liberal Democrats, he was an enthusiastic member of a Government who chose cuts over investment. They have destroyed the social contract—the promise that if we work hard, the state will be there to help us when we need it—because hard work no longer guarantees a decent standard of living when one third of children in my constituency are living in poverty, many of them in working families.

It is time for Hull West and Hessle to have its fair share. It is time to enable our children to reach their potential and to have their needs met and their talents realised, and that will only happen when we have a Labour Government introducing our fantastic national education service. People need skilled, secure work. Labour's pledge to a green new deal will give 11,000 jobs to people in my area in the offshore wind industry. Families need help with the cost of living. We need to look at reducing utility bills, with companies that act in the public interest, not the shareholders' interests, and we need to increase the minimum wage. Most importantly, we want to say to everybody in our country: when life happens—when you fall down—the state will be there to pick you back up, with free NHS prescriptions, free hospital car parking and free adult social care, to treat everyone with the dignity and respect they deserve.

It is time for us all to break out from our bubbles and truly see the unequal UK that the Government have created. Unlike the right hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Sir David Evennett), I am not just aspirational as an individual or for individuals in my constituency; I am aspirational for my city and my country. I believe that the UK has a brighter future, but that brighter future does not exist under this Government. Our Labour values of equality, justice, fairness and compassion mean that only Labour will put the heart back into our public services and ensure that we can all rise together.

5.12 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the powerful and passionate speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy). I listened to this debate

from the beginning, because I wanted to get a sense of whether Conservative Members and the Government have any sense of what has gone wrong in our country. Twenty years ago, the Labour Government came to power with the slogan, "Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime." This Government are tough on crime, but I listened to the Home Secretary to find out whether she understood the causes of crime, and she was careless of those causes—in fact, I would say she was possibly clueless about them. The Conservative party may have slung out its one nation Members, but it has been a one nation party in one sense, because the entire nation has been made more vulnerable, more at risk, more insecure and more miserable by this Government's policies.

If I had been asked a few years ago what I would choose to talk about in a speech on public services, I would not have imagined that I would be talking about crime and policing. But in my constituency of Cambridge, which many people would imagine is a prosperous place, I am hearing more and more concern from across the city about the state of our country. Every week, we read in our local newspaper about stabbings in our city. Every week in my surgery, people come to me saying they are concerned about seeing open drug dealing on our streets and the level of disorder. That Labour Government were obsessive about tackling antisocial behaviour. This Government seem to be completely careless of it, and that wrecks the quality of people's lives.

A few years ago, I had friends down from the north of the country, and they expressed pleasure and surprise, because in some parts of the country they did not feel safe even then. They told me, "It's wonderful in Cambridge. I can go anywhere, any time." Last week, a young student told me that at times she no longer felt safe walking in our city without being accompanied. That is a terrible indictment of the Government. Despite all the effort by an excellent city council and many local agencies, we find ourselves in that position.

What has gone wrong? Like many Members, I talk to my local police and agencies and ask what has gone wrong. Three issues keep being brought up. The first, of course, is the decline in the number of people in the police service. I talk to neighbourhood police, who a few years ago were in their neighbourhoods, out talking to people, but who now have much bigger patches, and often have to stay in their cars to try to chase around the city to keep up with what is going on. Secondly, other agencies have often withdrawn from services. Sometimes the police have to support the accident and emergency services, which is the place of last resort for so many people. Thirdly, as well as the increase in the workload, the work has changed, with cyber-crime and online crime. There are many more things for the police to do, but resources have been cut.

Some of the statistics are chilling. In 2012, there were 604 incidents in Cambridgeshire, yet in September 2018, there were 1,553. The figure has tripled. Knife crime has doubled since 2013, and of course 139 police officers and 83 police community support officers have been lost during the Government's time in office.

Perhaps most telling of all is that I am told that, in addition to more police officers, those early interventions that stop people turning to crime in the first place are needed. That is where the insidious cuts over the past decade have made such a difference to all those community services and youth services. The massive cuts to county

councils mean that the police have to deal increasingly with the end of the process. Frankly, that was entirely predictable and what we said a decade ago. When I talked to some PCSOs the other day, I found it shocking that they have barely any interaction with the probation service. It has been reduced to a tick-box exercise. We know what is wrong, and it could be dealt with, but I do not get any sense that the Government will do it.

I want to comment on one other issue and give an example of what the Government could do. There are worries about safety in the taxi and private hire trade. I have campaigned on that for the past couple of years. The Government had proposals ready to go. The right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) worked with me on this. I had a private Member's Bill and the Government set up a task and finish group. Professor Mohammed Abdel-Haq made strong recommendations about what needed to be done, and we were told that measures would be in the Queen's Speech. Yet this morning, when I tackled the Transport Secretary at the Transport Committee, he told me it was not going to happen.

The warnings are absolutely clear. We will have more cases of drivers moving from one authority to another because of the inadequate licensing system. There will be more violence, and I am afraid that the responsibility lies entirely with the Government. The previous Transport Secretary promised me that a measure would be in the Queen's Speech, yet it is nowhere to be seen. I hope tonight we hear that the Government will think again.

The Prime Minister is clearly willing to use the police as a photo op, but my sense is that he has no sense of what needs to be done, and no political will to do it.

5.18 pm

Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner). Like him, I want to concentrate on levels of crime. In my constituency of Coventry North East, draconian cuts to police budgets have had a terrible impact on local communities. Although I welcome the fact that the Government now seem alert to the damage they have caused, my Opposition colleagues and I have been warning for years about the problems their policies create, yet all our warnings have fallen on deaf ears. To listen to the Government over the past few weeks, we could be forgiven for thinking that the problems are new and have emerged only in the past 12 months. However, when this Government took over in 2010 and started imposing their austerity measures on communities across the country, crime, particularly violent crime, also began to rise. On this side of the House, we have always understood the reasons for that, and have always been committed to investing not only in the police service but in all the ancillary support and community services needed to give young people and others the opportunities they lack, and to give offenders the support they need to prevent them from reoffending.

The real question my constituents are now asking is why they should trust the Government to tackle crime and violent crime when it has skyrocketed on their watch. In the west midlands, we have one of the highest rates of violent crime, homicide and sexual crime in the country, with rates of violent crime rising by more than a third in the past 12 months. In addition, we have the third highest rate of knife crime in the whole of England and Wales. In Coventry over the past 12 months, children's

lives have been shortened because of knife crime, police officers have been severely injured, and the communities are slowly losing faith in the ability of the police to respond to their needs. This has all happened on the Tory Government's watch, and it is questionable to think that this Tory Government can ever put it right.

As a result of the Government's abject failure to tackle crime and their ideological refusal to invest in our public services, the people of Coventry simply do not trust the Government to deliver. The Conservative party is no longer the party of law and order; it is the party of crime and disorder, and the people of Coventry have no faith in its ability to reverse the rise in violent crime seen on too many of the streets on which our friends and families live.

References have been made in this debate to tougher penalties for causing death by dangerous driving, promised in the last Parliament. I myself have asked questions about this after two little boys in my constituency were killed by a speeding driver high on drugs who received a paltry sentence for his crime. I share the concern that these measures have not been included in the Queen's Speech.

This Government have an appalling record on crime, and however hard they might try with the measures in this Queen's Speech, my constituents in Coventry will not forget about the damage that they have caused.

5.22 pm

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): It is an honour to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher).

Never has a Government agenda looked so hollow. Everything on this Prime Minister's wish list, masquerading as a Conservative party broadcast, being read out by Her Majesty in Westminster, was utterly dependent on what was happening in Brussels with Brexit. Brexit, not this Government, will dictate fiscal strategy. It is clear to me that the Prime Minister is refusing to listen to the voices of those on the frontline of public services who are telling him and all of us how damaging his Government's reckless strategy will be.

The Prime Minister is pretending and telling us that his Government are the guardians of law and order when it was his party that slashed police officer numbers. Under the austerity agenda, for the last decade, his party has systematically under-resourced the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and legal aid. It has also closed courtrooms, including in my constituency, Bedford, leading to delays of years in cases coming to trial.

The Home Secretary claims that a law billed as a crackdown on foreign criminals would make the UK safer, but this dog-whistle policy, which is estimated to cost the taxpayer about £100 million a year once it kicks in, would apply to only about 10 people a year. Terrorism, cyber-crime and other serious and organised forms of crime have no borders. We rely on working with our European counterparts and joint working with EU police forces to keep our country safe. That is where the Government's focus needs to be in order to keep the public safe, not on vanity projects that appeal to populist sentiment.

For years, Bedfordshire police begged the Government for more funding. I will not forget that only a year ago the former chief constable of Bedfordshire police told

[*Mohammad Yasin*]

me and this Government that in his 35 years as a police officer he had never seen such high demand on his force, yet he had to deal with a surge in serious violent crime with fewer officers than he had in 2010 and with a £47 million budget cut. He simply could not find enough officers to attend all 999 calls. Since then the Bedfordshire police force has received more funding, the brunt of the cost of which will be shouldered by taxpayers through the council tax precept. They will see only 54 new officers in the next two years, but that will not even replace those lost or those who will soon be retiring. It falls very short of the 440 police officers and 80 detectives that the Conservative police and crime commissioner for Bedfordshire says our county force needs.

It is a similar story with the hollow promises for our NHS. NHS England has made it clear that core treatment targets cannot be met within the funding settlement offered by the Government. How many more times will this Tory Government promise to bring forward proposals to improve social care and then produce absolutely nothing? We need urgent action, not empty words, reviews or vague proposals. The Tory cuts have hit funding by an average of 9% per person since 2010, leaving the social care system close to collapse. Social care services cannot continue to be the victim of political turbulence. Hundreds of thousands of older people, many living in poverty and loneliness, have already suffered years of inaction and broken promises.

The Prime Minister cannot be trusted on the NHS. His grand announcements collapse under scrutiny. The Prime Minister promised 40 new hospitals but will deliver only six new buildings or refurbishes—and that is only if they win not just this election but the one to follow. It is totally unclear what criteria were used for which hospitals would receive extra funding, but in the Bedford, Luton and Dunstable merger Bedford Hospital got nothing from the £99.5 million proposed investment. Next to nothing is being done to address the severe staffing crisis at all levels of the NHS. Bedford Hospital had to recruit 237 nurses from the other side of the world to fill vacancies that were largely left by EU nurses leaving because they feared for their future in the UK.

The Prime Minister's hints at rail reforms also have a hollow ring for my constituents, who have experienced a severe reduction in services. Thousands of my constituents who moved to Bedford because of the fast train services to London and the north have been let down. Commuters from Bedford face almost daily misery because of unreliable services. Rail privatisation has failed completely. No one is fooled by a commercial model. What is needed is an integrated system run by the people for the people.

The Queen's Speech is a sham. Much of it is not even new policy. There is no plan, no vision and no honesty about the state of crisis in our public services. The Prime Minister may want to distract us from Brexit by trying to focus on fixing the public services that his Government decimated, but it is his Government who are making a mess of everything.

5.27 pm

Stephen Lloyd (Eastbourne) (Ind): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin). One area on which I certainly agree with him is that I think the Queen's Speech was clearly a party political

broadcast for the Conservatives. I was inclined to think, as I read it, that perhaps Her Majesty should bill Conservative central office for services rendered.

There are three areas I would like to touch on, and which I was disappointed were not covered in the Queen's Speech, even though I am quite sure that after the election there will be a completely different one.

The first area relates to the WASPI women. As has already been said, some are in Parliament today talking to a number of MPs. I have been very involved with the issue ever since my re-election in 2017. We all understand the challenges and the issues around the extension of the retirement age. We understand the rationale behind it. I was just disappointed that the Government did not use the opportunity in the Queen's Speech to at least come up with some compensation and money that could perhaps assuage the frustration, anxiety and anger that a lot of WASPI women feel. I have been pressing the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman for nine months or so to conduct an inquiry into maladministration. I will keep pressing, but I regret there was nothing in the Queen's Speech that recognised the frustration and anger felt by many millions of WASPI women around the country.

There are two more areas that I would like to concentrate on. I have been here since the beginning of the debate—a joy of six hours—and originally the Home Secretary was on the Front Bench. I am very disappointed that two areas in particular that are covered by her Department were not touched on in the Queen's Speech: the first is to do with injustice and the second with the public's lack of trust.

Colleagues may not be aware that a British citizen who is affected by an act of terror does not automatically get the support from the Government, either legally or otherwise—including through legal aid—that a French citizen would. If someone is a French citizen, the French state immediately moves in to look after and protect them and provide legal aid, so that as they go through the coroner's inquiry they are absolutely supported. We do not get that as British citizens and that is an anomaly. As we saw recently in the London Bridge and Westminster attacks and the Manchester bombing, British citizens who are affected by an act of terror often have to crowdfund so that they can be represented adequately and properly at the inquiries. That is completely wrong.

I have been pressing this issue for a while, including through an early-day motion—I thank many colleagues across the House and across parties who supported it—urging the Home Secretary and the Ministry of Justice to ensure that British citizens who are affected by acts of terror should be properly looked after and protected, both legally and otherwise. I am also well aware that many hundreds of thousands of people have supported this campaign on change.org. I was disappointed that such a measure was not in the Queen's Speech. After the election, when there is another Queen's Speech, I urge whoever is in government to look at that. Who knows? Maybe it will be the Lib Dems—I am one of nature's optimists, folks.

On the lack of trust, I appreciate that the Home Secretary talked about the additional funds that were promised in the Queen's Speech, but, again, I will believe that only after the election, because I think that that is just flannel at the minute. None the less, there is an understanding across the House that we need more police. It has now been around 60 or 70 years since

the last police royal commission—since there was an independent exploration by a royal commission of what we want our police to do. Policing has changed hugely in the intervening period. Every Government tweak things here and there, cut this, expand that, promise the earth and often do not deliver, and I believe that it is time for another royal commission.

I offer the Government that suggestion in the spirit of optimism, because I think it makes for good politics. I say to both Front-Bench teams: the public no longer trust politicians on policing—I mean all parties, and I am not casting any particular aspersions. They have lost that trust, so I urge both Front-Bench teams to implement a police royal commission. It would be independent—I would have no politicians or tabloid press on it, and I would have it properly exploring exactly what policing should look like and how it should be funded for the next 40 or 50 years. Then, whichever Government are in charge should implement that report, and I believe that that would improve policing and the public's trust in the police.

5.34 pm

Thelma Walker (Colne Valley) (Lab): My speech is short, but after 34 years as a teacher and headteacher, it comes from the heart.

The “I have a Dream” speech has already been owned by someone far greater than me, but what about beginning by asking everyone to imagine—with thanks to John Lennon? Imagine a future national education service whose central aim is to reduce inequality and which delivers Sure Start Plus and gives every child and their family proper support in the critical early years. What about no formal education until the age of seven so that children can play and explore, which we know enables them to become powerful learners and problem solvers while doing wonders for their wellbeing and resilience? Imagine adequately funding education and training at all ages and all levels. Imagine if that education and training was free at the point of use and throughout life.

Imagine ensuring learners with special educational needs and their families were adequately supported throughout their lives. Imagine a curriculum that is rich, exciting and prepares every child for work and relationships. Imagine ending high-stakes testing in early years and primary schools, ending selection through the 11-plus and removing charitable status and other tax perks for private schools. Imagine ending the academy and free schools programmes and restoring local, democratic accountability in education. Imagine school and college buildings that are purpose built, low carbon and energy efficient. Imagine reforming the current accountability system, including the current Ofsted inspection regime. Imagine how much happier and less stressed teachers and children would be. Imagine if teachers' professional opinions were respected. Imagine if they were trusted to be the professionals they are.

Instead, what do we have? The Queen's Speech reduced the Government's plans for education to a single line:

“Ministers will ensure that all young people have access to an excellent education, unlocking their full potential and preparing them for the world of work.”

Great—but how? How will the Government achieve this, when they are unwilling to spend the money, unwilling to listen to professionals and unwilling to reform the failing system? In my constituency, only two schools

have not experienced a shortfall in funding since 2015. Over two thirds of schools have seen a funding cut of more than £150 per pupil since 2015, with seven schools having lost over £400. These schools need funding urgently.

In the spending review a few weeks ago the Government promised a £7 billion funding increase. Of course I welcome this increase, or any increase, quite frankly—we'll take what we can—but it is not enough. Not every school will see a real-terms rise, and even with the extra cash, the School Cuts coalition has found that four in five state schools will still be financially worse off next year than they were in 2015. So forgive my scepticism. The Government are not doing enough to make a difference.

You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope others will join me so that our education can be free and equal for everyone, as part of a truly comprehensive future—a national education service that we do not just imagine but which under a Labour Government we deliver.

5.38 pm

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): I want to start by placing on record my respect and appreciation for Her Majesty the Queen. She has conducted herself with professionalism and as always has given the country stability. So imagine somebody with that ethos being abused in such a way by this British Prime Minister. He misled her into proroguing Parliament by sending the Leader of the House up to Scotland to mislead and direct her and then used her for what was essentially a party political broadcast, knowing full well that after turfing out over 20 Tory MPs, he did not have the majority to get the business through anyway.

The Government will say, “It's not about politics; it's about policy, so why not get behind these important ideas?” They are so important that their Benches are empty. Where are the Conservative MPs? I can see two on the Back Benches, but I am guessing they are from the Whips Office or Parliamentary Private Secretaries. *[Interruption.]* They are PPSs. This is so important—it is their radical programme for Government—and not a single Back Bencher is here to support it. There are reasons for that: first, because of the chaos outside, as the Prime Minister ducks and dives his way around the country; and secondly, because they know, as we do, that this is pie in the sky. There is no way that it is going to happen.

The Queen does not, of course, give her personal views on Prime Ministers, but I wonder what she would make of her 14th Prime Minister, and how he might compare with the first, Winston Churchill. They are polar opposites, in terms of status and the way the country is being led in very difficult circumstances.

The Queen's Speech could have been an opportunity to set out the state of the nation and the issues that are affecting it. Let me begin with local government. It is not possible to build decent public services if the very foundations on which they were based are, in many cases, broken beyond repair. We cannot escape the fact that more than 800,000 members of local government staff have been sacked on the watch of this Government and the previous coalition, thrown on to the scrapheap as if they were not important and did not add value. We cannot ignore the fact that 60p in every pound has been taken from council spending, or the fact that adult

[*Jim McMahon*]

social care is in crisis, with a million people not receiving the home care that they need and deserve. We have seen neighbourhood services taken to the brink—and the Government wonder why the public are angry. They have a right to be angry when their youth and community centres are closing, knife crime is going through the roof and libraries are shutting.

Let us talk about crime. The Conservatives will say that they are the party of law and order. Well, that is interesting. Let us look at the facts. Twenty thousand police officers have been lost nationally, and in Greater Manchester 2,000 have been taken off the streets, as have 1,000 support staff who helped them to do their job. Police stations have closed in Chadderton, Royton and Limeside. A town of a quarter of a million people now has not a single custody cell. The magistrates court was demolished last month, and the county court has been closed. So what about law and order? We have a crisis in magistrate recruitment in Greater Manchester. Even if we employ those extra police officers, where are the police stations that they will work from? Where are the vehicles that they will drive? Where are the custody cells in which to lock up the bad guys, and where are the judges to make sure that justice is served? They just do not exist. It is all pie in the sky.

Let us look at schools. If we want Britain to thrive after Brexit, which is what we are told by the Government, surely the foundation for this country is critical, and what more foundation could we have than our young people? But when we see how much money has been taken away from early-years, primary and secondary education, from education for those with special educational needs and from sixth-form and other colleges, we see the truth of this Government. They want the country to be run on the cheap, because they do not value the people who live here. Young people who are growing up in Oldham deserve a better lot than is being offered by this Government. Ministers can laugh and they can scoff, but let them look at the unemployment levels in my town, look at the economy of my town, and look at the high street along which the people are walking. Shutters are down and there are boards on the windows, because this Government have no plan for this country. The high street is so important, and it was not even mentioned in the Queen's Speech. Housing is so important, and it was not even mentioned in the Queen's Speech. There is no vision for this country; it is all about electioneering.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): Why don't you want an election, then?

Jim McMahon: Because I care about the economic foundation of this country. I have seen what a decade of austerity has done to my town. [*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. It would be better if the hon. Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) intervened. Then, the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) could reply. That would be absolutely fine. Jim McMahon.

Chris Green *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton must give way first.

Jim McMahon: I will give way.

Chris Green: If the hon. Gentleman is so concerned about economic governance, why is he so resistant, and why is his party so resistant, to the idea of a general election? Does he even want to come into Parliament for another debate on Saturday? The impression I get is that the Opposition do not want that either.

Jim McMahon: We can say Saturday, we can say Sunday, we can say for the next two years as far as I am concerned. We are here to do a job of work, and we will not be shy. One thing about the working classes is that we know the value of work and the importance of work, and it does not matter to us if we turn up on a Saturday or a Sunday if it means getting the job done. As for the reason why we do not want an election, we do not trust this Prime Minister any more than the Queen could trust this Prime Minister. We cannot afford, in my town, the economic damage of crashing out without a deal, but that is what we are facing today. We have heard promise after promise that a deal will be coming, and where is that deal? At the eleventh hour, there is still no deal, and the Conservatives are still pushing for a general election in this chaos of their own making. It is absolutely scandalous and a failure of government for this country.

Chris Green *rose*—

Jim McMahon: I need to make progress now. The Parliamentary Private Secretary has earned his place; I am sure there is a promotion on the way very soon, and rightly so as he deserves it.

What about rebuilding our economy in a fair way? What about having a co-operative economy where those who create the wealth get to keep the value of what they have created, rather than it being sent offshore to tax havens and shareholders that have no stake in the community where that money is being generated? There was not a mention of co-operatives or mutuals; not a mention of trying to reset the economic and social contract of this country. There is no vision, there is no Government—and actually I do want a general election, but let's get this nonsense out of the way first.

5.45 pm

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the passionate speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), and he is right: this is not a Queen's Speech that has been written for the good of the country; this is a Queen's Speech that has been written by pollsters for a Government who are governed by pollsters, not by the people.

When the Prime Minister talks of the people's priorities, how has he divined them? It is by going out and assessing the state of the country—the needs of our communities and the needs of people who need Government most. It has been done by polling; it is Cambridge Analytica brought to Government. The priorities that he claims are the priorities that people have identified off lists from commercial organisations who are polling them. It is not about what is going to fix our country; this Queen's Speech is about what makes headlines.

But there are two very serious problems with that. The first is that even where the priorities are identified, there is no substance to the promises behind them, and

the other is that if something does not come up on the list—if it is not popular enough to make headlines—it is forgotten. These include things like poverty; that was not mentioned once in the Queen's Speech. When we brought it up with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions at the Select Committee this morning she denied that Government policy has an impact on poverty; this is a Government in denial. There is a whole list of important issues that Members from across the House have raised this afternoon that this Government should be acting on—homelessness and housing and the leasehold scandal that is facing my constituents. This Government have all the information they need to act, but they have not done so. Why not? Because it is difficult; it is a difficult problem to tackle.

That is why I am so proud that Labour has put together a manifesto that is built on costed policies. It is built on raising income tax and corporation tax where we need it—not on £9 billion of tax cuts for the richest 10% of the country and then pretending we can fiddle some money into public services on the side. It just does not work; we know it and the people know it.

So even where policing is highlighted, with extra police coming in—we all agree with that: Derbyshire has seen 300 police officers cut from our streets and over 400 PCSOs and support staff that we desperately needed—what have we got? This year we have 85 police being recruited. That is great, but it takes a long time to recruit police these days. At the end of three years we are not even going to see the same numbers of police that we had in 2010, let alone all those PCSOs and support staff. This is happening at a time when the lack of police has helped to let county lines gangs run wild around all our streets. Even in my rural area of High Peak that is happening to our young people. We are seeing crime rising—burglaries, crime from across the counties. Criminals are coming in and our police do not have the manpower and resources to tackle it.

The Prime Minister has said that schools will get more funding, but the £2.2 million of cuts that the 50 schools in my constituency have seen over the last four years are not going to go away; at the end of another four years they are still going to be in the same position. Yes, the tables will have been slightly jiggled around. Yes, some of the smallest five schools in my constituency, the smallest 10%, will have seen a small increase, but 99% of their children will be at a school that will see its funding cut yet again.

On the health service, we have been told for over a year that the Government are going to be putting £20 billion into our NHS and into supporting local health services. In Derbyshire, we are seeing £320 million cut from our clinical commissioning group. Every single health service will be affected, from mental health to GPs, primary care, walk-in centres and hospitals—everything is being affected by those cuts.

This is just about headlines; there is no substance to it. All the important things that keep the fabric of our society together—early years provision, youth workers, libraries and buses—are being cut as if they do not matter, because they do not matter to the Government. This Government do not rely on buses. They do not seem to need to take their children to a nursery or a Sure Start centre to support them through poverty. Health visitors have been cut to the bone, as have school nurses, who are supporting our young people when they cannot get access to child and adolescent mental health

services because the waiting list is a year long, and that is only for those who have tried to commit suicide. That is the level of cuts to our public services.

The Government must invest in those areas as a priority, rather than making headlines based on polling or sitting there pontificating and calling for a general election based on rhetoric around Brexit. We want an election that is based on policy and on what we are going to do for this country. That is why the Government will not have a people's vote on Brexit or an election on what really matters.

5.51 pm

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the powerful speech from my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Ruth George).

A considerable number of media and political commentators have waxed lyrical about the nature and content of the Queen's Speech—an opportunity for the Prime Minister to put forward a bold and ambitious programme for Britain, and to unite our brilliant country and focus on the bread-and-butter issues that matter to our constituents. It has been a failure on both counts. It has been a cynical exercise, using our constitution to peddle hollow soundbites and recycled Bills that will be exposed as froth in the thick of a general election. This stuffed parrot Government with a minus 45 majority have made a hollow wish-list to create a miracle and bring the dead parrot Prime Minister to life. It will not do that; it will never be delivered.

From Prime Minister Cameron to Prime Minister May and now Prime Minister Johnson, the Tory civil war on Europe that used to be a minority obsession has been inflicted on the nation and divided the people with the fog of Brexit. Yet when I visit, as many people in this Chamber do, local pubs, cafés, schools and employers, I find that they would like a different conversation. They would like to see a Government who are on their side, with an agenda that offers hope to current and future generations. They want to see a Government who will start to repair the real damage of nine failed years that have seen our public services devastated by cuts—the political choice, the Tory choice of austerity.

I wanted to see measures in the Queen's Speech that would—[*Interruption.*] Does the Under-Secretary want to intervene? The hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) should stand up if he wants to intervene! Stand up! I will start again.

I wanted to see measures in the Queen's Speech that would transform public services right throughout Weaver Vale. Instead, I have seen brilliant schools such as Helsby High School in my constituency have its funding cut by £1.6 million by 2020. One school—£1.6 million! Parents have seen the letters, and hard-pressed teachers and staff have felt more than a financial pinch as posts are left unfilled and support services are cut. It is not quite the same story for Weaverham High School in the Northwich part of my constituency, because things are even worse. Beyond the hollow spin of this Government in name only, the reality for this great comprehensive school is £2 million-worth of cuts by 2020—shameful. This is not an agenda of education, education, education, but cut, cut and cut again.

Turning to policing, the Government's record is, quite frankly, criminal: 21,000 police officers cut, over 6,000 police community support officers cut, and 600 police stations

[Mike Amesbury]

shut down. What will be the impact of the measures outlined in the Queen's Speech on my constituency? The whole of Cheshire will have a new target of 90 recruits. This is the same force that has seen frontline police officers cut by 149. Fewer police and support staff equals more crime, and that is according to the Government's own figures. A Prime Minister who tells porkies to the Queen is telling porkies to the electorate—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I do not want to make too much drama out of this, but it will be better if the hon. Gentleman rewinds 30 seconds and rephrases what he said was said to Her Majesty.

Mike Amesbury: A Prime Minister who is economical with the truth with the Queen and with the electorate is a Prime Minister who is going to pay the price sometime soon.

How does the newly proclaimed Tory love affair with the NHS play out in my constituency? This is the same party that voted 22 times against the founding of the NHS. Halton General Hospital is on its knees, and this Government have twice turned down capital funding for its dilapidated building while trying to privatise the urgent care centre. Moving over to Northwich, the Victoria Infirmary is equally in need of capital investment. However, neither hospital will be the beneficiary of the minimal national programme of six promised rebuilds—not a jot, not a penny from this sham of a Queen's Speech.

In preparation for today, I spoke to two council leaders in my patch. With all the talk of austerity being over, they told me that funding is not coming their way any time soon—60p in the pound cut. It is time for a change. It is time for a new Government. It really is time for Labour.

5.58 pm

Lisa Forbes (Peterborough) (Lab): There are few issues more pressing for my constituents than the state of their public services after a near decade of austerity. This summer, I heard from too many parents struggling to access one of the most basic public services: education for their children. It is a free service, but it carries costs, such as the spiralling costs of school uniform and gym kit, which can leave parents facing a three-figure annual bill. Single suppliers can exploit a lack of alternatives and are driving up prices. For example, adding a logo to school trousers can raise the price by 75%.

It is now four years since the previous Chancellor promised to tackle such practices by issuing statutory guidance for schools on uniforms, yet there was no sign of such a Bill in Monday's speech. The Government also referred to the school uniform grant, which is advertised on the Department's website, but it is for local authorities to decide what they offer and to foot the bill at a time when they are barely funded enough to run their core services.

Ministers have admitted to me that they do not even collate data on where the grants are provided, so this summer I decided to do their job for them. I conducted a large-scale research project surveying every first-tier local authority in England to assess the availability of the grant. Some 99% have now responded and the results are, frankly, quite shocking.

Over 80% of first-tier local authorities now provide no school uniform grant at all. The scheme was legislated for by a Conservative Government in 1980 and is still advertised by this Government as if it is nationally available. In truth, it is now available to just a small minority. Just 27 of 149 councils now provide grants, and a third of those only do so in emergency situations such as a fire or flood. Only three councils now offer a grant to low-income children in all school years and in all situations.

Even among councils that still offer the grant, there have been drastic declines in the number issued and the amounts provided. Lincolnshire County Council, for example, issued only three grants last year, totalling just £153.68. The number of grants issued has fallen by 71% since 2010, and spending is down by 68%.

Time after time, I heard that the cuts were the cause. It is no surprise that two thirds of councils that recorded having ended the scheme did so after 2010. No council in the north-east now provides a grant. A grant is provided by just one council in the whole of the south and the east of England, and by only three in the midlands. The average grant offered in 2018 was less than a sixth of the average cost of a uniform. Just one council, Islington, offered the full £150 that is often promoted as the standard sum.

The school uniform grant is meant to be a lifeline for families across the country who are struggling to meet the rising cost of sending their children to school, but the cuts have left the vast majority without that support. Quite simply, it has been abolished by stealth.

The Children's Society recently found that nearly 2 million children now attend school in badly fitting, unclean or incorrect clothing, and that one in 10 families report getting into debt to buy school clothes. It is just not good enough to fob us off, as Ministers have done, with the suggestion that schools should stockpile second-hand clothes for pupils.

Families are being squeezed between rising costs and the lack of support to help them, and both lie directly at this Government's door. They will not step in to tackle private sector providers that exploit parents. They have dragged their feet for four years, and this week we have seen the announcement of yet another legislative programme with no sign of the suitable opportunity for which they say they are waiting.

As I have shown today, it is on the Government's watch that struggling parents have lost the lifeline that once existed to help them. Parents have waited long enough. This Government must bring forward a Bill, and it must become an Act by next summer because it is acts, not words, that count.

6.3 pm

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): It is a real pleasure to speak in this rolling debate on the Conservatives' latest taxpayer-funded party political broadcast. Let us be clear that that is what Monday was about. It was not about bringing our public services back from the brink after nearly a decade of Tory austerity; it was not about, at best, putting police numbers back up to pre-2010 levels; and it was not about investing in our communities that have been shown nothing but neglect under the Prime Minister and his two immediate predecessors. No, it was about the Prime Minister using Her Majesty the Queen to give us a sneak peek at the Conservative party manifesto.

With an ever diminishing majority at minus 45 and a sterling record of success on winning votes in this place, the only thing of which we can be sure is that we cannot trust the Prime Minister to deliver anything he promises in this Queen's Speech.

If we set aside how we have reached this farcical point—if we forget all the procedural quirks and parliamentary game-playing that has led us here—there is one thing the Prime Minister has forgotten: the people. He says that the Queen's Speech sets out the people's priorities, yet when we look behind the headlines and the bluff and bluster that seems to surround everything the Prime Minister does, what are we left with? A set of pie-in-the-sky priorities that I have no doubt will not be delivered by our resident wolf in sheep's clothing. A Government with a majority of minus 45 will promise the earth and get re-elected. The magic money tree, so lauded as a stick to bash Labour with at every opportunity, has received the JCB-full of fertiliser that it needs—not to start rebuilding our country, but to keep the Prime Minister in power.

My constituents in Ogmore, the people of Wales and the communities up and down our United Kingdom deserve better than the self-serving behaviour we are seeing from the Prime Minister. It is not even a matter of my disagreeing with the whole content of the Queen's Speech; instead, it is a matter of trust. My communities in Ogmore know that the Prime Minister's pledge to put 20,000 extra police on our streets is worth as much as the £350 million a week that he promised for the NHS on the side of his big red bus, or even the 40 new hospitals in England that have turned out to be just six. The list goes on and on.

The fact is that the thin slices of funding that Wales has been given to invest in public services since 2010 have rapidly become crumbs, and now, despite a sea of warm words and vacuous promises, even those crumbs are running out. My constituents were told more than a year ago that austerity was over, yet they continue to see prices rising while their wages are stagnating and their local services are pushed to breaking point. The Welsh Government, under the leadership of both Carwyn Jones and Mark Drakeford, have used every lever at their disposal to counter the Tories' raid on our public finances, but nearly a decade on, and four years after David Cameron's original austerity drive was meant to have ended, Welsh public services and the communities we serve are still feeling the full brunt of the Government's economic incompetence.

Even if the recently announced funding is delivered, the Welsh Government's budget will still be £300 million lower than it was in 2010, and that is even with the additional funding that the Government have now announced. So, even by 2020, the Conservatives would still not have put budgets back to the levels they were at in 2010, a decade ago. That is the truly astonishing part of all this: this pre-election distraction will not lift our country back to where it was on public service funding under the previous Labour Government in 2010. That is aside from any long-term economic plan for delivering public services. It is not just a number on a spreadsheet; it is £300 million a year less to spend on public services than we had in 2010—in Wales alone.

When we take into account inflation, our ageing and growing population, and the new challenges that our digital economy brings, we can see that our communities

have been left to wither on the vine, while tax cuts for high earners railroad their way down the tracks. That has an impact on just about everyone in my Ogmore constituency: the 1950s women who are having to reach out to food banks; the families who have been made homeless because of universal credit; the young people who are seeing the strain on their local services; the public sector workers who have been given minuscule pay rises; and the leave voters who were promised that sunlit uplands would somehow emerge from the relentless downpour of austerity.

Optimism in politics is sometimes in short supply, but I fear that for some Government Members realism is stretched to its extremity. People have really suffered over the past nine years, and no amount of window dressing, viral social media ads or propaganda in *The Telegraph* should allow us to forget that. [Interruption.] Nor, indeed, should rants from the Under-Secretary of State for International Trade, the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart), who is sitting on the Government Front Bench.

I turn specifically to crime and policing. The flagship of the Prime Minister's premiership so far has been his plan to recruit 20,000 more police officers. I have to say that this pledge would have made even the likes of Alastair Campbell blush, because when it comes down to it, it is just spin—and thin spin at that. We know that the Conservatives have taken around 21,000 police officers off our streets since 2010, yet now we are supposed to be grateful for a gradual rise back to the peak under Labour. I do not think so. Frankly, the pledge is an insult to the victims of crime who have been left high and dry by this Conservative Government, who were hellbent on accusing the police of crying wolf rather than dealing with the issues they have been facing. The people of this country do not believe the Government and they do not believe the pledges they are making. They know that they are false promises and they know it is time for change.

6.9 pm

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore).

It is extremely odd for Members to be discussing a Queen's Speech presented by a Government with no majority and a Prime Minister who has no public mandate, yet we find ourselves here. We are debating a Queen's Speech that was essentially a party political broadcast. The empty Government Benches speak volumes. There is seemingly no interest in debate, leaving Conservative Front Benchers to chunter from a sedentary position.

It is shameful that, in the light of the Grenfell disaster and the Government's hesitant acknowledgment that fire regulations are not up to standard, the Queen's Speech has not announced any additional funding or support for the fire and rescue service. I find it appalling that it was not even mentioned once by the Government.

The Government's austerity agenda has led to fewer firefighters, fewer fire appliances and fewer fire stations, as a result of which the average work load per firefighter has risen, which means that there is less time for training and preparation, but increased strain on their mental health. Despite the severe strain on resources, the past few years have seen firefighters respond courageously to the Grenfell Tower fire, moorland fires and the Beechmere Care Home fire, to name but a few. These fires represent

[Karen Lee]

an immediate life-threatening risk to our communities, but rather than strengthening our fire and rescue service, central funding was cut by 30% between 2010 and 2015, with a further cut of 15% to be delivered by 2020.

The Government's reckless approach to public safety includes their delayed response to reforming the failed building regulations that led to Grenfell. The only action taken to improve the day-to-day safety of those living in unsafe buildings is a ban on combustible cladding on select buildings. Otherwise, the regulations are the same as they were before Grenfell more than two years ago. An effective programme to reform building and fire regulations needs to address the whole system, not just one component. Our community safety is not a priority for this Conservative Government. Labour will always put public safety first by supporting the fire service and implementing rigorous fire regulations, while this Government choose to spend public money on cutting tax for the super-wealthy.

Similarly, yesterday's speech offered nothing sufficient to confront the problems in the education system. It is this Government who reversed the progression made under the previous Labour Administration—a Government who have cut school budgets and increased class sizes.

Both Lincoln University and Bishop Grosseteste University are in my constituency, and they need support if they are to continue to attract talented students. The Government failed to announce any form of additional support for the poorest students, who leave university with huge sums of debt. The Conservatives have priced aspiring students out of a university education and cut the adult skills budget by around 40% since 2010. They are not the party of opportunity or social mobility; instead they are the party of the rich and the status quo. The Government must take Labour's lead and scrap tuition fees while providing opportunities for everyone to learn, irrespective of age or family income. There are nearly 400 nursery schools facing closure in England over the next 10 years, including Kingsdown and St Giles nursery schools in Lincoln. Although the Government have accepted that nursery schools' funding is insufficient, they have not committed to a long-term funding plan to secure their future beyond 2020. That is causing real concerns in my constituency.

As an ex-nurse, I find it totally reprehensible that the Government claim that this Queen's Speech represents a huge investment in our NHS. Their destructive agenda over the past nine years has created the NHS and social care crisis and put many of our constituents' welfare at risk. Before 2010, long-term funding increases in the NHS were 4% per year, and yesterday's unfunded commitment is just 3.4% and comes after eight years in which NHS budget increases have averaged just 1.4%. Analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies suggests that this uncoded commitment will barely maintain current service levels. Believe me, people are struggling now. I meet my former nursing colleagues monthly and I know what is going on in the NHS.

In Lincoln, we need investment to improve the standard of provision after the damage that years of austerity have done to our frontline services. Monks Road walk-in centre is closed, Skellingthorpe doctors surgery is going to close, and United Lincolnshire Hospital NHS Trust is in an estimated deficit of £80 million. A bit of money has been thrown at Boston but everybody else is struggling.

As a nurse, I saw the consequences of cuts right on the frontline. I find it absolutely shameful that, while staff work tirelessly to ensure that people are cared for, the Government do not ensure safe staffing for those who work in our NHS. Again, I get that right from the people on the frontline, once a month. Austerity has crippled the healthcare available to my constituents. We cannot tinker around the edges. We need a transformational plan, not a defence of the status quo.

We must scrap the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and end the undermining of our public health service by opposing privatisation. We must reinstate the nursing bursary—that is an absolute must—and safe staffing levels in hospitals to ensure that a full-strength workforce can work safely and efficiently, and, actually, cost-effectively. Trained nurses who work on a ward regularly are much more cost-effective than agency nurses, but nurses are not being trained because the Government have taken away the bursary.

I could go on for hours highlighting the areas that the Government have neglected, but the Queen's Speech basically enumerates their entire strategy. It is not about improving people's lives, addressing social injustices or reducing inequality. It is a pre-election broadcast for the Conservative party that is full of unfunded, focus group giveaways that the Government have no intention or means of delivering.

6.15 pm

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Like many hon. Members, I am bitterly disappointed by the Queen's Speech for a number of reasons. For a start, it has nothing to offer on education. Despite making various pronouncements, such as on the schools level funding formula, there is no new legislation or policy to improve our education system. Although any future schools funding is welcome, there is a serious funding crisis now.

In my constituency, 22 schools and academies have faced extreme budget cuts in the last year under the Government's plans. For them, austerity has not ended. Headteachers, governors and parents contact me regularly to tell me that extracurricular activities are being cut. Parents are being asked for money, teachers and support staff are dipping into their own pockets to pay for supplies, and staff are being made redundant or are not being replaced if they leave. Do the Government realise that there is a teacher recruitment and retention crisis, with demoralised teachers leaving the profession in droves as a result of the lack of investment?

Support for children with special educational needs and disabilities is being slashed and local authority funding has been severely reduced, which affects schools' key support services. A Labour Government will not neglect education. It will be at the heart of our programme in government as we deliver a national education service for the many, not the few.

Another area of great concern to my constituents is policing. As all hon. Members know, the police and preventive public services have been slashed in the last nine years under the Tories, while violent crime has soared. Meanwhile, cuts to youth and other services are linked to the shocking violence that has led to the loss of too many young lives. My constituents know the impact of that only too well, so why are the Government not looking at long-term preventive measures to tackle

youth violence, instead of punitive measures? Every week, in my surgery, someone raises the issue of increasing crime in the area. Is that any wonder, when we are reduced to three police officers per 10,000 in each of the seven wards in my constituency?

The funding promised by the Government—if it materialises—will only start to reverse the extreme cuts that have taken place on their watch and put us back to where we were in 2010. It will not be enough to repair the damage done through crime that has blighted lives in my constituency and beyond, nor the damage to morale among police officers and to the trust and confidence of the public.

The Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill, which has rolled over from the previous Session, does not deal with the areas that really affect my constituents, such as leave to remain applications that take months and months, during which people are left with uncertainty while they work. Another problem is the settled status scheme, which is causing irreparable damage to the daily lives of many of my constituents, as they have to pore over documents to prove that they have been here for a number of years. More money needs to be invested in the Home Office to deal with those issues, rather than that punitive Bill being introduced.

The Queen's Speech offers scant comfort on the Windrush scandal. The tortuous process for setting up a compensation scheme for its victims has added insult to injury. The scheme is wholly inadequate, the compensation is paltry, and some injuries, such as being unlawfully excluded from the country, have not been compensated for at all. Meanwhile, there are hardly any interim hardship payments, even though elderly Windrush victims are dying.

One of my constituents has been caught in the Kafkaesque situation created by the Government. She has lived in the UK since she was a child and now, in the latter part of her life, is suffering from dementia. As a direct result of the hostile environment policy, she was denied any benefits at all for three years. Having been told that her benefits would be backdated only to last August, she now has to embark on the arduous task of submitting a claim for the loss she has suffered. That is insulting and is not good enough for my constituent, or for the many others in situations like hers.

This Queen's Speech is nothing more than a thinly veiled manifesto pitch. It does not address the impact of the serious erosion of our public services, it does not provide any detail on the publicly announced key commitments and it makes no rational sense. Some might say that the proof of the pudding is in the eating; it seems to me that this pudding is an Eton mess.

6.20 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): May I start by welcoming the Government's proposals to ban trophy hunting imports? Personally, I would like to go further and ban trophy hunting, but we would need some kind of international agreement to do that. I believe there is something profoundly disturbed about people who take pleasure from killing animals. I welcome the Government's proposals.

I do not welcome the Government's proposals on requirements for people to show ID when they vote. That is simply voter suppression, and I will oppose it.

The Queen's Speech started with, and much of the debate this week has been dominated by, the madness of Brexit. I remain convinced that the best deal available is the one that we currently have as a member of the European Union. Any Brexit would have a worse effect on the economy and our ability to pay for the public services that we are debating today.

Jonathan Portes and Anand Menon demonstrated earlier this week that income per capita would be 1.7% lower under the May deal, 2.5% lower under the current impression of the Johnson deal and 3.3% lower in a no-deal, WTO scenario. When they added in the effect on productivity, which amplifies those hits to the economy, they suggested that income per capita would max out at 8% lower in the event of a no-deal Brexit.

We have been hearing this week, as the negotiations continue, that the Government want further regulatory dealignment. That does not just mean a hit to workers' rights and environmental protections; I have been given credible reports this week that the Government plan to move away from alignment with EU aviation, and automotive and chemicals regulations, meaning that manufacturing in those sectors—all major contributors to the UK economy, particularly in my area—would be obliterated. For example, it would take 10 years for the Civil Aviation Authority to get up to capacity and capability to certify and regulate the UK aerospace and aviation sector to the required international standard, by which time the industry simply would not exist any longer in the UK.

Frankly, I think that Professors Portes and Menon are being a little too cautious in their warnings about the hit to the economy and the effect on the livelihoods of ordinary folk, although of course some billionaires, including several backers of the Conservative party, would see their income increase by hundreds of millions as they short sell the pound for a hard or no-deal Brexit—money that would then, of course, get laundered back into the coffers of the Conservative party.

I raise that issue because those sectors—aerospace, automotive and chemicals—raise about £90 billion a year for the economy. Without those sectors, which seem to be facing divergence in the current discussions, the question is raised how we pay for the public services we are debating. It might be that we have an increase in borrowing from the Government, which would not surprise me because this Government have borrowed more than every Labour Government ever put together. It might be that there is an increase in tax, although not, I suspect, for Amazon, Google or the billionaires with their offshore trust accounts. The third possibility is that the Government are simply trying to hoodwink the public.

The Home Secretary opened the debate, so let us look at criminal justice. My Opposition colleagues have all rubbished the claim of an extra 20,000 police officers—a number that does not get near to replacing those who have left. In Cheshire, we might get 90 new officers, which is about half to two thirds of the number we have lost. It is not just police officers; police community support officers, forensic and scientific officers, and crime scene officers have all been lost, and capacity and capability have therefore been reduced.

The probation service has been trashed by privatising it. Personally, I do not think that criminal justice is an area where profit is a relevant motive. JP numbers have fallen from 32,000 to just 13,000, and courts are running

[*Christian Matheson*]

at 50% capacity. Although we have seen recent headlines about sexual assault allegations and hate crime allegations going up, which is a good thing because it means that people feel more confident to report them, convictions are at their lowest level ever.

Money is being saved by closing courts, centralising work and digitalising work, without any evidence to show that it has worked anywhere else in the world. In a further inconsistency in criminal justice policy, the Government want to do away with short-term custodial sentences, despite the fact that they admit that the probation service is a complete mess because of the privatisation that they introduced.

Attempts to con the public with promises of new police officers do not tell a fraction of the story, and they will be exposed. Those attempts to con are hardly a surprise from a Government led by a Prime Minister twice sacked for lying and who would, it would seem, mislead Her Majesty the Queen about the reasons for a dodgy Prorogation.

This is not just about the police and justice services. My hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee) talked about fire services. In Cheshire, Chester is being forced into a scramble with Ellesmere Port, Macclesfield and Crewe as the location for the redeployment of a fire engine, as we had to make a choice between rural areas, historical and heritage sites or major chemicals sites.

On housing, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), there are cuts to local authority budgets for drug and addiction services, so there are more people on the streets, more social disorder and more of a sense of people not feeling secure because they are concerned about the sight of the homeless as well as the plight of the homeless. This Government's strategy has always been to cut local authority budgets and then blame that local authority for the failure to deliver the services. They will not get away with that con. This is a Queen's Speech full of promises they know they will never have to keep. They are presenting cheques that they know the public will never have to cash. When the time comes, I shall vote against this Queen's Speech.

6.26 pm

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) and all the other excellent contributions from Members of this House over the past seven hours.

Having a secure place to live is absolutely fundamental to the ability to lead an enjoyable, law-abiding and productive life, yet there is nothing in this Queen's Speech to deal with the housing crisis. Britain's housing crisis is at the root of the failure of this wealthy country to be the country people want it to be—not just the most vulnerable but a growing proportion of working people who can hardly afford their private sector rents and do not expect ever to be able to afford to buy their own house.

If a person is homeless, they will have far worse health and will cost the NHS far more than the average housed person. A homeless person is less likely to hold down a job, will have to rely on benefits and will not be paying taxes. Homeless people are more likely to fall

into addiction to drugs or alcohol or both and to commit petty crimes to feed their addiction. Then, if they are convicted and imprisoned, they are far more likely to be thrown back out on to the streets than in other European countries. It is no coincidence that the lack of a comprehensive and coherent housing regime for ex-offenders goes hand in hand with one of the highest rates of reoffending in Europe. Unless we are willing to house ex-offenders, we are most certainly not being tough on the causes of crime.

Councils across Britain are spending more than £93 million a year on emergency bed-and-breakfast accommodation for homeless households—nearly 10 times more than in 2010. The massive increase we have seen in homelessness under this Government is a direct result of their policy decisions—in particular, the freezing of local housing allowance since 2016. Now, in 97% of England, including Ipswich, even if someone receives the maximum LHA, it will not cover all their rent and they will have to make up the difference using money meant for food, heating or clothing.

Being made homeless is a devastating event for families. Being placed in so-called bed-and-breakfast accommodation seriously limits a family's ability to live their lives. Children cannot study; parents cannot relax; very often visitors are not allowed; it is like being in prison.

I am immensely proud that Ipswich Borough Council has built its own temporary accommodation for more than 80 households, in two main purpose-built units, built since Labour took control of the council in 2011. They are high-quality, safe flats with support and counselling, and staff are on site 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, giving residents help to get back on their feet and find permanent housing. That is clearly better than leaving families to rot in bed and breakfasts. I found it particularly shocking that Conservative councillors in Ipswich tried to stir up local opposition to the more recent of those units being built. Campaigning against accommodation for homeless families is, alas, not the only action that Conservatives have taken against Ipswich Borough Council's attempts to deal with our housing crisis.

When families are homeless, what they need is a permanent home. Unless and until we build at least 1 million homes with affordable rents and a landlord who is democratically accountable to both the tenants and the wider community—in short, council homes—far too many young families will continue to struggle, with huge proportions of their income disappearing into ever increasing private rents, or end up camping in their parents' homes, often having to share a bedroom with their children or sleep on a sofa in the living room.

Labour will build those homes. Labour councils such as Ipswich are already building some of those homes, but the current Government are not facilitating that building programme—far from it. Not only have they kept housing allowance down, reducing the rent income available to finance more building, but they have now increased the Public Works Loan Board rate by 50%, which will knock a huge hole in the business plans of all the councils that are trying to build homes. What was the point of removing the HRA borrowing cap with one hand, if they then make it too expensive to borrow with the other?

Even when Ipswich Borough Council has found the land and the finance to build some of those homes, the Government have found other ways to stop it. There are

97 families in Ipswich who do not have the good-quality, affordable rented homes that they would have had if my Conservative predecessor had not called in the development of that estate because he thought there was too much affordable rented property. Even now, the most recent proposed council housing estate in Ipswich will have fewer homes for rent and will have to include houses for sale that are almost certainly too expensive for the families who most need them, just to meet the private sales quota set by this Government.

Housing is a human need. The Government will never be able to deliver all the other public services people need if they do not also deliver good-quality housing for all. It is disgraceful that there is nothing in this Queen's Speech to deal with it.

6.32 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I would like to begin by saying how pleased I am to speak from the shadow Front Bench in this important debate on our public services. Outside of time of war, there is no more important subject for our constituents. In fact, there is not much difference between the constituents of Members of all parties in what they want from their public services and the desired outcomes. The difference is in the how.

We should always remember, when discussing public services, that it will not be enough to try to score party political points. For our constituents, families and friends, it is at the most vulnerable time of their lives that they look to public services—illness, death, pregnancy, fire and flooding. However they vote, people look to the public services, so this is an important debate and I am glad to take part in it.

I would like to thank all the Members who have spoken in this excellent debate, and a few in particular. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Dame Louise Ellman) drew on her distinguished service in local government and reminded us that Liverpool has had a 63% cut in its funding since 2010. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) reminded the House that the Queen's Speech is phoney and a fraud; I will return to that.

I would also like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds); my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi); my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch); my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), who spoke from her personal experience in the NHS; my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams); my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), who had very important things to say about support for victims; my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders); my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Sandy Martin); my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson), with whom I entirely agree about trophy hunting; my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous); and my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee), who talked about cuts to the fire and rescue service.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmere (Chris Elmore) talked about issues to do with the Welsh people. My hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Lisa Forbes) spoke about school uniforms—[*Interruption.*]

Members on the Treasury Bench are talking among themselves, but if people live on benefits, or do not have a big income and are unable to pay for proper school uniforms for their children, that is quite humiliating for the children, so my hon. Friend raised a serious matter.

My hon. Friends the Members for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury), for High Peak (Ruth George), for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) and for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) made valuable contributions. My hon. Friends the Members for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) and for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) talked about crime. Last but not least, my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Thelma Walker) talked about education and her baleful gaze swept the Chamber, showing the headmistress she once was.

At the heart of the debate is what a Government are for. The Opposition believe that the answer is not playing tricks on the public or embarrassing the monarch by getting her to deliver a party political broadcast on behalf of the Tory party. The programme of governance should not be a Santa's wish list of soundbites to please some of our less thoughtful tabloids. The purpose of a Government should be to offer a vision and a detailed set of proposals, but this Government have done none of that. They have presented a Queen's Speech that is all about electioneering. They want power without responsibility.

Almost none of the announcements in the Queen's Speech will be delivered. Its authors do not even intend them to be delivered. It is not even clear that the Queen's Speech will win the support of the House. Furthermore, Conservative Members refuse to take responsibility for the actions of a Government that most of them have been members of since 2010. Conservative Members wringing their hands about the need for more police officers when they have been part of a Government who cut the numbers of police officers, and voted for that policy, is the grossest hypocrisy.

John Redwood: Will the right hon. Lady tell the House which of the many good Bills in the Queen's Speech Labour Members do like in principle?

Hon. Members: Trophy hunting!

Ms Abbott: Trophy hunting—I have already said that.

It is clear from the Queen's Speech and, possibly more important, the media briefing about it, that the Conservative party intends to run in the forthcoming election as a law and order party. Who said satire was dead? The Government have tried to ignore Parliament. The Prime Minister's principal political adviser has been found to be in contempt of Parliament. The International Trade Secretary has been obliged to apologise three times for illegal arms sales to Saudi Arabia. Let us not forget that the Government as a whole—all Ministers, including the Prime Minister—were found to have acted unlawfully by no less an authority than the Supreme Court in a unanimous decision. However, the Conservatives tell us that they are the party of law and order.

The Government slashed more than 20,000 police officers, and it is no good Conservative Members pretending that it is nothing to do with them—they voted for it. Furthermore, the Government made cuts to the courts, so cases come to trial sometimes years after the offences. Is that the action of a law and order Government?

[Ms Abbott]

That is not justice. It is not as if the number of arrests and charges are increasing, even for the most serious offences. There were almost 60,000 police-recorded rapes in England and Wales in 2018, but fewer than 2,000 convictions. Is that the record of a Government of law and order?

I would argue that the Conservative party is not the party of law and order. Tell the victims of crime throughout the country that it is the party of law and order. Tell that to people who wait an hour, perhaps longer, just to get a police officer to come to the site of a crime. Tell it to the police officers who have lost their jobs or all those who are feeling stressed and overworked. Tell it to the court officials and judges who sit at home on full pay because the Government close the courts to save money. Tell us again how you are the Government of law and order.

The Opposition have always argued that austerity was unnecessary, that growth through investment was the answer and that cuts have terrible consequences—We have heard about some of them this afternoon, for example, the crisis in magistrate recruitment. The truth is that if police numbers, community policing and youth services are slashed, if school exclusions are increased, and mental health services are cut, the consequences are predictable and were predicted—you cannot keep people safe on the cheap.

Mrs May: I have listened very carefully to what the right hon. Lady has been saying about consequences. If that is what she believes, perhaps she could explain why in 2015-16, when Conservatives in government were protecting police budgets, the Labour party's position was that police budgets could be cut by 5% to 10%.

Ms Abbott: I have a great deal of respect for the right hon. Lady, and I would have hoped that she would do better than that. It was not enough money. That is why we did not vote for that measure, and we have said that over and over again. I must say that I am a little surprised to hear Government Members talk about a new broom at the Home Office, someone who is going to really stand up for the police; I think that in a way that dismisses the right hon. Lady's record.

The Prime Minister told this House on Monday, channelling a former Prime Minister whom I knew, that he was going to be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. I have to ask how, coming from him, that can be taken seriously. The Prime Minister has no intention of making good all the public services that Tory or Tory-led Governments have slashed—and of course we have not forgotten the role of the DUP and the Lib Dems, who facilitated Tory austerity, but the organisers of this entire failed project were the Tories.

The Government talk tough on crime, but that is all talk. They made all the causes of crime worse and cut all the public services trying to tackle it. Let us take the Domestic Abuse Bill. There are good things in the Bill, and Members on both sides of the House worked hard on it. But where is the money? Where is the funding for the police, NHS workers and social workers, and the funding to improve their training? Where is the funding for women's support groups, information campaigns and women's refuges? The Government have cut all

of them. The money simply is not there. Without the funding, however good the text or the wording of the Bill are, they are just another wish list.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Ind): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Abbott: I need to make progress, because I must leave time for those on the Treasury Bench.

The Government need to understand just how disappointed and frightened the Windrush victims are. It is almost as if, because they are an elderly cohort, the Government feel that if they string this out—[*Interruption.*] That is what they feel; go and meet some of them—[*Interruption.*] The Home Secretary is not dealing with it quickly enough, and I think that only a Labour Government will give justice to the Windrush generation.

I was interested to hear the Home Secretary talk about protecting our borders, because if we leave the EU we will lose the European arrest warrant and access to some very important databases of criminals and missing persons, as well as the level of co-operation we get as members of the EU. I would not talk so much about protecting our borders when we are losing some of the elements and instruments that would help the Government keep the people safe.

Before I conclude my remarks, I want to say a word about the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign, because I am a WASPI woman—I was born in the 1950s, and I was very disappointed that there was nothing about the WASPI women in the Queen's Speech. We spent most of our adult lives assuming that we got a pension at the age of 60, and when these women understood that they would not, for most of them it was too late to change their working arrangements and arrange their pensions and their insurance. You have left a cohort of women who helped to build this country helpless and frightened, and I think that is a shame.

In conclusion, it is not enough to make wish lists of what you want to do with the public sector, because the public will find you out. The public know how long it takes to get a hospital appointment. The public know how long it takes to get a policeman to come to the site of a crime. The public know about the public sector and what the result of the statements from the Government are, because it is part of their lived experience. You will be found out. You will be—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. The right hon. Lady must not say you; will she please just say they?

Ms Abbott: The Government will be found out. It is because I am confident that the public will understand how they have been failed on public services that I am confident Labour will win the forthcoming general election.

6.45 pm

The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson): I would like to say how much I enjoyed the tone at the start of the speech from the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) when she praised the work of public services. We all feel, on both sides of the House, that it is important they deliver for everyone in our country.

It is an honour for me to close this debate. I thank Members on all sides who have contributed to it. They made many passionate points, raising issues that are important to them and to their constituents. As we all know, the Government are working hard to deliver Brexit and honour the will of the British people when they voted for us to leave the European Union. However, our ambitions do not end there. At the same time, we are pursuing a bold programme of domestic reform that will protect and improve our public services, from strengthening our beloved NHS and making our streets safer, to giving our primary and secondary schools the biggest funding boost for a decade so that our children have the world class education that every single one of us in this House always wants to ensure they receive. The Gracious Speech is a contribution to, and a part of, that approach.

Let me pick up on a number of the issues raised by hon. Members. The hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) raised relationship, sex and health education. The Government are absolutely committed to it. It has our full backing and we want to be there backing schools. We recently announced a £6 million fund to develop a programme of support for schools. We very much want to ensure that all schools teach about Britain as it is today.

Jim McMahon: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Gavin Williamson: I would like to make some progress, if I may, because time is short. I will take interventions later.

The hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) raised the national school meals programme. That is a very important programme, which we are very proud to have introduced. We will very much be supporting it going forward.

I would like to pay tribute to my right hon. Friends the Members for Maidenhead (Mrs May) and for Guildford (Anne Milton), but especially my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead. She has always done so much in the area of mental health, ensuring that it was a centrepiece of what the Government do and ensuring that we talk about it, not just in this Chamber, but much more widely in society. They have both played an important role in making sure that it is addressed in schools. We remain committed to doing that.

I highlight the points raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead, and the hon. Members for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) and for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher) on death by dangerous driving. They spoke from the heart. We have all seen the consequences of dangerous driving. It rips families apart and destroys so many lives. I will certainly reflect the comments that were made in this House to the Secretary of State for Justice.

There was much in what the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) said that I agreed with on the importance of closing the attainment gap between those from the most disadvantaged families and those from more privileged families. We have been doing that in both primary and secondary schools. That is because we are reforming how we teach and deliver education, and the children from the most disadvantaged families are benefiting.

The hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) talked about raising standards. That has been at the heart of everything that this Government do, because we recognise that continuing to raise standards in every single school for every child is how we give them the very best opportunity in life. I will give a bit of advice to the hon. Gentleman: scrapping Ofsted is not a way to raise standards in our schools.

Mr Dhesi: On raising standards, will the Secretary of State use this opportunity to reassure maintained nursery schools that their funding will continue and that they will not be faced with imminent closures?

Gavin Williamson: We have already explained that we have secured an extra £66 million for early years in the Budget. We will make further announcements on how we do this in the near future and we will address the issue of maintained nurseries, which we recognise play such an important role. However, I say to Labour Members that if they want to drive up standards in every one of our schools, ensure that children are safe in council care, and that the very best is delivered for our children, getting rid of the independent inspectorate that delivers those high standards is not the way to do it.

Charlie Elphicke: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the shadow Home Secretary's speech does not add up—not for the first time—not only on scrapping Ofsted, which has been instrumental in ensuring that there are improvements in 27 schools in my constituency, but on police numbers, because Labour went into the previous election saying that there should be cuts in the police, whereas this Home Secretary has been supporting more officers on our streets?

Gavin Williamson: It is fair to say that there is a lot that does not add up from the Labour party. Put simply, the concept of getting rid of Ofsted to drive up standards is absolutely farcical. We need Ofsted; it plays a vital role in ensuring the very best for our children.

Emma Hardy: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Gavin Williamson: I will make some progress, thank you ever so much.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair), who raised the issue of post-study work visas. Conservative and Unionist MPs from Scotland have been raising that consistently, as have MSPs, and we are very glad to be able to deliver on it.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Sir David Evennett) spoke eloquently about his time working in further education and on the importance of technical and vocational education. Both main parties in this country have recognised that for a long time. We will deliver on it and make sure that we deliver the type of change that is needed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) spoke about how important it is that we level up funding, raising it especially for some of the areas that have been persistently underfunded. This has been talked about for 20-plus years and we are delivering on it, thanks in no small part to his campaigning to make sure that it happens. He also spoke about the importance of

[Gavin Williamson]

special educational needs funding. I had the great privilege of visiting the hospital school in his constituency and seeing the important work that is done there.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) highlighted the fact that his constituency was one of the areas that always had some of the lowest funding. We are changing that and delivering more money for every single school in this country.

What can I say about my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes)? There is so much I could say. He spoke with passion about giving youngsters ambitions and dreams and delivering on them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson) has done so much to deliver the borderlands deal for not only his constituents, but many constituencies in England and in the Scottish borders. It will deliver prosperity and employment on both sides of the border.

It would be remiss of me not to thank the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd). I particularly liked his bringing some levity into the Chamber with the prospect of a Liberal Democrat Government. It was an opportunity also for Labour and Conservative Members to unite in the thought of what a dreadful idea that would be.

I am also grateful for the clarity that the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) provided in confirming that the Labour party supported a trophy hunting Bill. That is good news, particularly for the hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson), who is always trophy hunting the head of the leader of the Labour party. It was disappointing, however, that she could not make it clear that Labour would also support the Windrush Bill, the police protections Bill, the extradition Bill, the Domestic Abuse Bill, the serious violence Bill and the foreign national offenders Bill.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has set out ambitious plans for transforming law and order. Her exciting plan to get 20,000 more police officers on to our streets will deliver for every part of this country. It is also positive that she understands that she needs the money behind her to deliver those extra police officers, and that is what she has secured from the Treasury. She understands, too, that 20,000 more police officers will cost more than £30,000. In addition, we recognise the importance of defending victims and ensuring the legal framework to support the most vulnerable in society, and that is what the measures in the Queen's Speech will do.

Another service that our whole nation relies upon is our wonderful NHS. We are doing everything we can to protect this great national institution, which for 44 of its 71 years has been under Conservative stewardship.

The Government have committed to a £33.9 billion per annum increase in the NHS budget by 2023-24. We want to make sure that this extra money makes a real difference on the frontline by bringing down hospital waiting times, reducing the time it takes to get a GP appointment and saving lives.

Jim McMahon: Lots of people in the NHS say that they want to see the funding go to adult social care, because the pressures that build in the system when the funding is not there has an impact on the NHS, so where is the Green Paper and the funding for our hard-working councils so that people can get the care they need?

Gavin Williamson: As the hon. Gentleman will know, we outlined extra funding for that in the spending review.

Young or old, we are all increasingly dependent on the internet, and people of all ages across the UK will benefit from one of the greatest eras of infrastructure investment, starting with legislation to help accelerate roll-out of full-fibre broadband right across the country.

As we exit the EU, it is vital for our country's future that we deliver the world's best education system. Our reforms over the last nine years, initially done with the Liberal Democrats, have seen standards rise across the country. We are doing better and delivering more for every single child. It is concerning, therefore, that the Labour party seems willing to scrap free schools and academies—schools that deliver the very best. Just last week, I visited Everton Free School in Liverpool, where a football club had decided it wanted to put something back into its community, working with teachers who wanted to deliver something better. It is shocking that the Labour party wants to get rid of that. We want to deliver the very best. In technical education, in vocational education, in every single school, we are driving standards ever higher. We are putting the money behind it. We have delivered the reforms that are required. It is a shame that the Labour party has such a lack of ambition for every single child in the country. We are the party that wants to deliver for every child—to level up, not level down as the Labour party wishes to do.

I very much commend the Gracious Speech to the House.

Ordered, That the debate be now adjourned.—(Rebecca Harris.)

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

DEFERRED DIVISIONS

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply to the motion in the name of Secretary Julian Smith relating to the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act.—(Rebecca Harris.)

Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 Section 3(5)

7 pm

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

That this House has considered the Report pursuant to section 3(5) of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019, which was laid before this House on Monday 14 October.

On 9 October, the Secretary of State published a report updating information on progress on Executive formation, transparency of political donations, higher education and a Derry university, presumption of non-prosecution, troubles prosecution guidance, and the abortion law review. It is the second report published on those issues in line with our obligations under the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019.

I believe that the shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd), has raised some concerns with the Leader of the House about the availability of the report. I apologise for any confusion, but I can confirm that it was available online on gov.uk on 9 October. Copies of the report were also available from the Vote Office on 14 October, the first day on which the House sat following its publication.

Let me first take this opportunity to welcome the inclusion of the Bill on historical institutional abuse in the Queen's Speech. I was personally very pleased to note its inclusion, having heard the poignant testimonies of victims and survivors shared by Members on both sides of the House. I look forward to working with colleagues across the House to ensure that the Bill is passed, so that we can begin to see redress for the victims of this awful legacy.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): The Minister will be aware that victims of historical institutional abuse in Northern Ireland were very disappointed on Monday when the Bill to provide them with compensation did not feature in the Queen's Speech itself, but was tucked away on page 113 of the background briefing notes. However, in fairness to the Minister, victims' spirits will be lifted today by the First Reading of that essential Bill in the House of Lords. For the benefit of the victims, will the Minister outline the timetable for the completion of the legislation in the House of Lords and in this place?

Mr Walker: I think we can all welcome the fact that the Bill is being introduced and is moving forward. I am afraid that I do not have the full details of the timetable, but I will seek to consult colleagues in the Lords and, perhaps, write to the hon. Lady. I join her in paying tribute to the victims groups, about whom we have heard a great deal from Members throughout the House, and who have waited so patiently for redress and worked so constructively with those involved in the Hart inquiry, and with officials and politicians.

Let me now turn to the talks. The House should be in no doubt of the strength of our resolve to get Stormont back up and running. In the weeks since the first report was published, the Secretary of State has intensified his work with the Northern Ireland parties—particularly

the two largest parties—to seek solutions to the remaining issues, which include rights, language and identity. He has continued to work closely with the Tánaiste, in accordance with the three-stranded approach, and the British and Irish Governments share the view that there remains an opportunity in the coming days to reach an accommodation. Indeed, the Secretary of State is not here in person to open the debate because he has decided to stay on in Northern Ireland tonight to continue to engage with the parties this evening.

The people of Northern Ireland have gone for more than 1,000 days without an Executive and Assembly, and I, along with colleagues throughout the House, do not want that stagnation to continue. Northern Ireland needs effective decision making, and its people deserve progress on key issues, including many that have been raised in the published reports.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The last time there were official cross-party talks was in July. We are now literally five days away from the Bill becoming an Act, and the provisions on abortion and same-sex marriage being extended as equal rights to Northern Ireland. What could it possibly be in the next couple of days that has suddenly renewed the Government's vigour and their desire to reopen the talks, and to offer the idea that the abortion law for the people in Northern Ireland could be suspended when there is a Brexit deal to be done? Will the Minister update us on what has happened to change things now, of all times?

Mr Walker: I do not accept that characterisation. The Government have always been clear that we want to see devolved Government restored and that this deadline set out in the Act of the 21st would be when legislation would have to be brought forward if the Executive were not in place. Of course it is right that we are engaging with the parties—as I suspect any Government of any colour would be doing—to try to restore the Executive and Assembly, and we should continue to do that right up to the deadline.

As the hon. Lady notes, the current period for Executive formation expires on Monday, 21 October, and in the event that the institutions have not been restored, we will be required to extend the Act by statutory instrument. On this, I want to be absolutely clear with the political parties in Northern Ireland: this would not be a good outcome. Northern Ireland needs political decision making. The Assembly has had over two and a half years to reach a compromise and get Stormont back up and running, and the people of Northern Ireland are sick and tired of continued delay.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): I understand why the Secretary of State is not with us tonight, but can the Minister confirm that there is no part of this country of ours that will be more affected by either a deal on Brexit or, worse, no deal on Brexit? The Secretary of State committed to come to the House and give a clear indication of what powers he would need to take in the event of any outcome of Brexit. We have not yet seen this before the House. Can the Minister guarantee that at a very early stage we will see what legislation is necessary to ensure that we have an orderly exit with a deal and, even more importantly, without a deal?

[Tony Lloyd]

Mr Walker: It is absolutely clear, and my Secretary of State has been clear, that in the event of no deal there would need to be further powers for Ministers to take action, but of course the hon. Gentleman will agree that we do not want to be in that situation. We want to have a deal, and I think we are all hopeful that in the coming days we might be able to have moved forward in debating that.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): The Minister will be aware of Baroness O’Loan’s call to re-engage with the Assembly and recall the Assembly, which my party fully supports, but will he accept and acknowledge tonight that there is one party that is holding back the formation of the Assembly again: Sinn Féin?

Mr Walker: The hon. Gentleman makes his point clearly. It is not for me to assign blame between parties; it is for me to call on all parties to ensure that not only an Assembly but a power-sharing Executive can be restored and say that agreement needs to be reached to achieve that.

As colleagues across the House are also aware, should no Executive be formed before the 21 October deadline set out in the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019, this Government are under a statutory duty to change the law in Northern Ireland on access to abortion services, to introduce same-sex marriage and opposite-sex civil partnerships, and to introduce a new victims payments scheme. While every effort is being made to restore an Executive, I must also take appropriate steps to ensure that the Government are able to meet our obligations should an Executive not be formed within the statutory deadline. That is why we launched an awareness campaign last week to ensure that people know how the potential changes to the law may affect them; further information will continue to be provided over the coming weeks if the duties come into effect.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (LD) *rose*—

Mr Walker: I am going to go into more detail on abortion but am happy to give way to the hon. Lady.

Dr Wollaston: As the Minister knows, Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom where women do not have access to safe abortion in the place where they live, and they are really looking forward to a change in the law. The Government have set out that they are talking to Church groups; can the Minister set out which women’s organisations the Government have been talking to in advance of this very important and much longed-for change in the law?

Mr Walker: The hon. Lady makes an important point. I can assure her that we have been engaging with a range of organisations, including human rights organisations, women’s organisations and campaigns—*[Interruption.]* I would perhaps have to write to her with more detail.

Turning to the issue of abortion, one has only to look at the passionate and sincere demonstrations in recent weeks on both sides of this issue to appreciate that it remains a highly sensitive matter in Northern Ireland. I

understand that there are many people in Northern Ireland who may, as the hon. Lady says, welcome the change. There are also many who would not. I would prefer, as would the Government, that the Northern Ireland Assembly was considering reforms of Northern Ireland’s abortion law. This is, as I have noted, a highly sensitive devolved issue and as such it would be best addressed by Northern Ireland’s locally elected and locally accountable political representatives.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): The Minister has stated that he would prefer it if the Northern Ireland Executive dealt with this issue, and he seems very much to be focusing on abortion. Does he feel the same way about the same-sex marriage provisions?

Mr Walker: On both issues, it is clear that we will take action should the deadline be reached, but I think that both issues would be best addressed by the Northern Ireland Assembly taking responsibility itself and delivering on the requirements. I support the right to same-sex marriage and have voted for it consistently, but I would prefer that locally elected representatives were able to deliver it in the most suitable way, no doubt arguing about it passionately and with conviction on all sides.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): Can the Minister indicate what he feels might happen in March 2020, should the Assembly not be up and running?

Mr Walker: In March 2020, should the Assembly not be up and running, the regulations that we are required to bring forward under the Act would come into effect. I will go into more detail on those requirements in a moment.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): Will my hon. Friend clarify whether it is the re-formation of the Assembly or the re-formation of the Executive that is required according to the legislation that we passed in this place?

Mr Walker: I think it is both. The Executive will be required for the Assembly to be in place and to work effectively.

There can be a Northern Ireland solution to this issue, but for that to materialise Northern Ireland needs the Assembly and Executive back in the coming days. In the absence of a restored Assembly and Executive, the Secretary of State has taken steps to ensure that the Government are ready to fulfil their obligations. As part of the information campaign, my Department has worked closely with the Department of Health and Social Care and published guidance for healthcare professionals to provide clarity on the new state of the law and their duties and responsibilities. The guidance sets out changes in the law in this area, should they come into effect from 22 October 2019, until a new regulatory framework is in place by the end of March.

The immediate changes are the repeal of sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 in Northern Ireland, meaning that no criminal charges can be brought under that Act against women and girls who have an abortion or against qualified healthcare professionals or others who provide and assist in an abortion. There will also be a moratorium on current

and future criminal investigations and prosecutions. The Government then have a duty to introduce a new legal framework to come into force from 31 March 2020. It is worth noting that, during this interim period from 22 October until the new legal framework comes into place on 31 March, other relevant laws relating to the termination of pregnancy will remain in place. That includes section 25(1) of the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 1945, which makes it a criminal offence for anyone to assist or wilfully act

“to destroy the life of a child then capable of being born alive”, except where the purpose is to preserve the life of the mother in good faith.

From 22 October, women resident in Northern Ireland can continue to access services in England and will now have all their travel and, where needed, accommodation costs met by the UK Government. Healthcare professionals will be able lawfully to refer patients to services in England by providing the details of the central booking service or directing them to information on gov.uk.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Does the Minister accept that offering women the opportunity to go abroad or to travel to have an abortion is not the same as enabling them to have one at home by recognising their rights under the conventions? Does he accept that simply to say, “We will not prosecute” is not enough?

Mr Walker: Broadly, yes—I do accept that, but I also accept that the legislation allowed for this interim period so that the right guidance could be put into place to ensure that when services become available they are operating under the right framework.

It is expected that access to abortion services will not be routinely available in Northern Ireland until the new legal framework is in place after March 2020. The guidance notes that, if healthcare professionals choose to offer an abortion service to women during the interim period within the bounds of the relevant law, they should do so in line with their professional competence and guidance from their professional body. The guidance also notes the state of play relating to conscientious objection and what to do in cases in which patients have purchased abortion pills online. We are continuing to work at pace to be ready to continue to take forward all the necessary work to be able to implement new regulations by 31 March 2020 if there is no restored Executive by the deadline. Make no mistake: we will change the law on these issues if there is no Executive within the deadline.

My Department is therefore preparing to launch a consultation on changes to the law, on access to abortion services, and on the scheme for a victims payment once the 21 October deadline passes.

Stella Creasy: The Act is exceptionally clear that it is solely the Executive being reformed, not the Assembly, that would be the trigger. It is also very clear that this is not dependent on the Assembly being in place post 22 October. For the avoidance of doubt, will the Minister tell the House whether the legislation that we passed in July this year will be amended by this Government if the Assembly is up and running after 22 October to give the Assembly the power to set these laws, or is he going to do what the Act, which this House passed overwhelmingly, asks him to do by March 2020?

Mr Walker: I am slightly confused by the hon. Lady’s intervention, because I think I have been absolutely clear that we will do what the law requires in this respect. We are not intending to amend it. What I am saying, though, is that, if the Executive and Assembly were to be up and running before the deadline, those requirements would not apply. The requirements very specifically, as she said, require the Executive to be in place.

Stella Creasy: For the avoidance of doubt, the Act makes no mention of the role of the Assembly if it is reconstituted once the 21 October trigger passes. Will the Minister tell the House that he intends to amend the legislation that we passed in this House about the provision of regulation by March 2020 if the Assembly is back in place? Surely the Assembly Members need to know whether the Government are expecting them to step in if the Assembly is reconstituted, because that is not what the Act says.

Mr Walker: The Act is clear on the requirements on the Government to act in the event that the Executive have not been reconstituted.

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): For the purposes of clarity, it may be useful to note that termination of pregnancy and abortion is a devolved matter, so if the Assembly is restored that will rightly fall back to the Assembly. A devolved Assembly of the United Kingdom can amend or change the law regardless because these are devolved powers under the constitutional settlement of the United Kingdom. I am sure that the Minister agrees that legal clarity can be obtained on that issue if some Members remain confused or in doubt about it.

Mr Walker: Yes, I would agree with the hon. Lady and her intervention. I want to give other Members the chance to speak in this debate, so I will touch briefly on the other sections covered in the publication.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Further to the previous discussion, the Minister will be aware that the UN said that the UK was effectively torturing the women of Northern Ireland by not enabling them to secure an abortion if they had a fatal foetal abnormality or were pregnant due to rape or incest. Will the Minister commit that that torture will be stopped by March 2020 at the latest?

Mr Walker: I have been absolutely clear that we will bring forward this legislation. Clearly, if the Executive were restored, it would be for them to take action on this matter, but we are talking about a matter of days. We are taking forward the necessary steps to ensure that we can put the regulations into place, as the hon. Lady says, by March 2020.

Mrs Miller: Will my hon. Friend give way one more time?

Mr Walker: I have taken many interventions on this issue, so if my right hon. Friend will forgive me, I will try to make some progress.

Alongside substantive updates on Executive formation in the abortion law review, reports were published on transparency of political donations, higher education

[Mr Robin Walker]

and a Derry/Londonderry university, presumption of non-prosecution, and troubles prosecution guidance. The section of the report on transparency of political donations states:

“The regime in place for political donations and loans is specific to Northern Ireland and reflects circumstances that are unique to Northern Ireland parties and their donors. The current law maintains anonymity concerning most donations and loans made before 2017.

The legislative framework provides that greater transparency may be introduced in respect of donations or loans made after 1 January 2014, however, in considering the merits of doing so the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland would wish to be satisfied that it creates no risk of intimidation.

The current legislative arrangements are based on broad consensus among the Northern Ireland parties and moves towards changing the law on donations before July 2017 will require a similar level of Northern Ireland consensus. There is a broader long-standing convention that changes to legislation directly affecting political parties are not made without wider discussion and consultation between parties and the Government.”

Higher education and a Derry university are a devolved matter, which once again underscores the importance of getting Stormont back up and running. The decision on the business case for Ulster University’s proposed Northern Ireland graduate-entry medical school for the Magee campus is, therefore, a matter for Northern Ireland Ministers in a restored Northern Ireland Executive. The Government remain open to considering the eligibility of contributing inclusive future funding towards the capital costs of the project. However, that, too, will be dependent on a restoration of the Executive.

On the presumption of non-prosecution, the report published on 4 September set out the current position on the investigation of troubles-related deaths and the steps being taken to develop an improved system for dealing with the legacy of the troubles. Since then there have been no significant updates on which to report.

Again, on troubles prosecution guidance, the report of 4 September set out the current position with regard to the relevant elements of policing and the justice system in Northern Ireland and the steps the Government are taking to improve the current system for investigating the past in Northern Ireland. Since then there have been no significant updates on which to report.

I hope I have made my position clear: I want to see Stormont back up and running. The Secretary of State is doing everything in his power to achieve that objective, and I hope the parties will do the same and commit to reaching an accommodation on restoring the institutions at the earliest opportunity.

7.21 pm

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): I begin by asking the Minister to respond to this debate. Many important questions have been asked and will be asked in this debate, and he was not able to respond to the questions raised in our debate on the previous report.

Mr Robin Walker: I was timed out by other speeches in our previous debate but, if the Chair is happy to make time, I would be happy to provide a closing statement.

Tony Lloyd: That is important, because the House will address some substantive issues tonight and we need answers.

The Minister rightly said it is now over 1,000 days since the Stormont Assembly and the Stormont Executive last functioned, which is outrageous. It is almost unrecognisable in terms of modern democratic governance.

If not for other factors, I would be talking tonight about the failure of the political system to reform the education of our young people in Northern Ireland. I would be talking about the failure to reform the health service, and the fact that the Bengoa report is now receding dramatically in the rear-view mirror of life. That is, quite frankly, tragic because it is letting down patients, as the health service in Northern Ireland now sees increasing waiting lists and other things that are unacceptable.

Mental health provision in Northern Ireland is grossly inadequate. If there is one statistic that ought to frighten Members on both sides of the House, it is that more people have died since the troubles through suicide than died during the troubles—that figure is dramatic but true. It is immeasurably sad, and we ought to dwell on that. It is a failure of politicians of all stripes in Northern Ireland.

Emma Little Pengelly: I absolutely agree with the shadow Secretary of State about mental health, on which we urgently need more investment. Northern Ireland has a much higher need than the average across the United Kingdom, and it is only growing—of course we need investment in mental health across the UK.

The shadow Secretary of State says that the Bengoa report is disappearing—I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests, as my husband is the permanent secretary at the Department of Health. Fortunately, the Northern Ireland Executive agreed the Bengoa recommendations. They are very high level, but that policy framework is currently being implemented. It is important for clarity to make sure that people are fully aware of that, but we need Ministers back because health and education are suffering enormously.

Tony Lloyd: I think the hon. Lady and I are in agreement. Not enough is being done and the political decision-making capacity is not there. These things are outrageous and tragic in their own right, but of course the reality is that we also have two dates approaching very quickly: 21 October and the things that will move forward on the back of that and, of course, 31 October. I wish to talk about the two events that those dates touch on.

First, of course, is Brexit. As I said to the Minister, there is no part of this United Kingdom of ours that will be more changed than Northern Ireland. Irrespective of whether we have a deal on Brexit or a crash-out Brexit, either will transform Northern Ireland in a way that will be massively different from the effect on any other part of this United Kingdom. We need to dwell on that. I said to the Minister that the Secretary of State had said he would need to bring forward regulation and legislation to equip himself as Secretary of State, and the Government, with the necessary provisions. Even if we sit not just this Saturday but every other weekend day between now and 31 October, we are now some 14 days from that Brexit date. That is worrying and frightening.

We need to have some certainty about issues such as policing. We know that the previous Chief Constable warned that a hard border across the island of Ireland

would create targets for would-be terrorists, and we know that the current Chief Constable has asked for more resource in the event of a no-deal Brexit. In any event, we know that, with the possibility of an increase in civil disturbances, almost irrespective of the type of Brexit, there needs to be some concentration on keeping the peace and on the questions relating to stability. We are simply not seeing that. I hope we get clear answers from the Minister on the timetable for when the Secretary of State will come to the House.

The Secretary of State and the Minister know Northern Ireland, so I do not doubt that they will recognise that there can be no hard border across the island of Ireland. The Prime Minister's red lines are such that they must take that into account. In that context, the need for an Assembly and an Executive to be up and running is paramount. That really has to be a driving force. I accept that the Secretary of State is in Belfast today bringing the parties together—I do not simply accept that; I want him to be there—but I have to say to the politicians that the gap between them is so small. I need to say this through the House. I cannot recognise the principle that keeps them apart, out of the Assembly and out of the Executive when we look at issues such as health, education and the very important issue of Brexit. I hope the Minister can reflect on the questions that we need to address that will help to bring the Executive back into operation between now and 31 October, because we need the Executive there, irrespective of what takes place there—save for the Prime Minister having to write the letter, which so far he has been reluctant to say he will do, to ask for an extension. If he writes that letter, there is of course some leeway in the formation of the Executive, but frankly not an awful lot.

I wish now to turn to the question of abortion, which other Members will want to raise as well. I have two specific questions for the Minister. He talked a little around the issues, and I am not sure that we have had absolute certainty on them. If the Assembly does not meet before 21 October, the provisions of the legislation will come into operation. There has already been an exchange on what that means. My understanding is that, once the clock begins to tick on 22 October, the Assembly will not be able to annul the legislation. Will the Minister guarantee that, from 22 October, there will be a proper campaign to make people aware of how they can access safe and legal abortion for women in Northern Ireland? Such a campaign would guarantee that health professionals, and those who would give advice more generally, know that they have comfort in the law to give proper and adequate advice to women who seek that kind of advice. That is of fundamental importance during the interim period.

The second question may be even more important, and it has been raised, either directly or indirectly, by other hon. Members. Will the Minister guarantee that, if we move into this phase, come 1 April when the new regime moves in, there will be the provision of safe and legal abortion for women in Northern Ireland? That is the intention of the law as this House voted, and it is absolutely necessary that we have a commitment from the Government tonight not simply that the law will allow it, but that the Government will institute it, provide for those services and make sure that they are available. Women in Northern Ireland are entitled now to know that they have certainty about the direction of travel of this Government.

I do not intend to speak for long, because I know that other Members wish to speak, but may I simply say to the Minister that I hope he can answer some of these difficult questions tonight? Those he cannot answer, will he undertake to return to Members, both individually and collectively, so that we have proper answers on the record and we know where we are travelling both in terms of the formation of the Executive and, of course, on this very difficult, but very necessary, issue of providing safe and legal abortion?

7.31 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I thank the Minister for his statement and for the report that has been laid before Parliament under the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019. It gives us another welcome opportunity to interrogate the Minister and the Government on the progress in the negotiations towards establishing a new Northern Ireland Executive. Let me say that I understand absolutely why the Secretary of State is not in his place just now, but, given the monumental significance of the next few days for Northern Ireland, it would surely be helpful for him to bring a further statement to this House in the very near future and to answer further questions.

We are clearly not significantly further forward towards restoration, as we would have liked in the time since the September report was laid before this House. However, we note that it is the view of the Secretary of State, and that of the Tanaiste, that there remains an opportunity over the next few weeks for the parties to reach an accommodation. We are, of course, in complete agreement when the report states that

“a restored Executive Assembly and North South Ministerial Council remain the best way forward for Northern Ireland.”

We have just passed, as we have heard, a landmark 1,000 days from the collapse of the previous Executive, so it is little wonder that there is huge frustration at the absence of an Executive, given the huge number of pressing policy issues—several of which were alluded to by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd)—that cannot be properly addressed in the absence of a functioning devolved Government. We are talking about issues such as the schools funding crisis that the Northern Ireland Committee recently reported on; the lengthening waiting times and growing frustrations in the NHS; and the workforce issues, including the threat of recession, reported on by the Northern Ireland chamber of commerce just earlier today. In short, it is the bread and butter of normal government that the people of Northern Ireland want to see the politicians able to get on with. Restoring the Executive does not fix all these issues, but it is the only way to start addressing them sustainably.

Looming over all this is Brexit—a process that, on the one hand, complicates the process of negotiations, but that, on the other hand, makes it utterly essential that those negotiations are successful so that devolved government is restored. We are within touching distance of going through the entire article 50 process without a functioning Executive and Assembly to represent all of Northern Ireland, and what a monumental constitutional failure it would be if that were to happen.

In conclusion, I think that I am saying nothing controversial when I say that previous processes and talks have managed to overcome hurdles that are

[Stuart C. McDonald]

significant—perhaps way more significant—than those that are currently blocking progress today. I simply encourage all parties to ask of themselves whether the negotiating positions that they are holding on to are capable of just a little further compromise—compromise that could see the massive problems being caused by the vacuum at the heart of Northern Ireland politics finally being addressed and tackled.

The Secretary of State must continue to work closely with the Tanaiste, the Irish Government and all parties to resolve outstanding issues. For the sake of all the people of Northern Ireland, I wish all involved in the forthcoming talks success in the days ahead, because it is long overdue.

7.34 pm

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I do not think there is a difference across the House in wanting to see the Stormont Assembly and Executive up and running. We all agree that it is important that the people of Northern Ireland have that Government restored. We also think, however, that the women of Northern Ireland deserve some honesty about what will happen to their human rights, which, in this House in July, we pledged to uphold. Tonight, the Minister has shown what most of us feared might happen—the slow unpicking of the commitment the House made to ensure that we treat all UK citizens equally when it comes to their ability to make choices about their own bodies.

For the avoidance of doubt, let us set out some clear principles. It is written in the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 that this is about the Executive reforming, not the Assembly. Let us be specific: it is about having a First Minister, a Deputy First Minister and 10 Ministers with departmental responsibilities by the end of next Monday—nothing less, nothing more. That is not the preserve of the Government, or one single party, to deliver. It is about power sharing. There is absolutely nothing in the Act about mandating the Assembly to take on the legislation post 22 October. Indeed, it would be bizarre, given hon. Members' concerns, to uphold the role of the Assembly and then direct it to take over the legislation.

There is plenty in the Act about the importance of the role of the Secretary of State, and I quote section 9(7):

“The Secretary of State must carry out the duties imposed by this section expeditiously, recognising the importance of doing so for protecting the human rights of women in Northern Ireland.”

What does that mean in practice? What have we seen over the past couple of days, with this sudden flurry of interest in trying to get the Executive up and running?

I am disappointed that the Secretary of State is not here, because I had hoped that he would account for his words on Twitter—[*Interruption.*] I had hoped that he would account for his words because he said something very powerful and threatening. He said that he understood that Church leaders were worried about abortion reform and that he would be

“working all week...to ensure that I do everything I can to encourage political leaders to get back into an Executive and ensure that they can shape the abortion laws for Northern Ireland.”

People might think that that is a worthy sentiment, but given that if the Assembly is reconstituted by Monday, the regulations on same-sex marriage will also fall, it is

telling that he highlighted only abortion. Only women's rights have become a bargaining chip in the Brexit process.

The Minister tells us that he has been talking to women's groups, but he cannot name a single one. We cannot find a single women's group in Northern Ireland that has had a meeting with the Secretary of State, that has been consulted or that the Government have talked to. It is very clear, however, that they are listening to the Churches.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): Would it be possible, in the time remaining, for those who advise the Minister to find at least one person whom they have discussed it with, other than the Churches, given that he indicated that many discussions had taken place?

Stella Creasy: I hope they can, because then the Minister could answer the words of Lyra McKee's partner, who said:

“It seems that pleas from people who have seen their loved ones murdered mean a lot less than the demand of church men desperate to repress women.”

Lyra McKee's family are deeply concerned by the way in which her memory and legacy have been used in the debate.

The Minister has to show us, not just by next Monday, but until March next year, that he is prepared to uphold what is in the legislation about acting expeditiously to protect the human rights of women in Northern Ireland. That is not the same as giving powers to the Assembly to deal with it. That is not what is in the Act. He needs to be honest that that is how the Government now intend to deal with it and get the House's approval for that.

The consequences of not doing that are very real for women in Northern Ireland. The Minister knows that, right now, we cannot tell women in Northern Ireland who might need an abortion how they will access that service next Tuesday. He and I have talked about the issue of pills. We are all worried about women accessing products online that may not be safe. In 1967, when the House legislated to exempt women in England and Wales from prosecution, we did not say, “Look, it's okay, you can continue to have a backstreet abortion, but at least you will be able to go to a doctor.” We recognised the importance of making sure that people could access safe procedures. Yet it is very clear that that will not be the case for women in Northern Ireland from next week.

Many hon. Members will have heard the brave words of Sarah Ewart, who had to take our country to the High Court because her rights were violated. She had a fatal foetal abnormality and she was not able to seek support in her home nation of Northern Ireland to deal with that. Indeed, when faced with that horrific prognosis, the response that she got from doctors was, “I'm not going to get prosecuted to help you.”

Hand on heart, none of us can say that from next week that situation will change for women in Northern Ireland. Indeed, with hand on heart, many of us have to look Sarah Ewart in the eye, because the Supreme Court has said that it will wait to see what happens with this legislation before acting to see whether the Government have to uphold the human rights of women in Northern Ireland. What a shameful situation that we are still

quibbling over treating our fellow UK citizens with dignity and respect, in the way that we would expect for our constituents here in England and Wales.

There is nothing in the legislation that will change the time limits and nothing that will change the existing medical regulations that would allow abortion to take place. It simply removes the criminal element and sees this as a medical matter. It sees women as able to make choices over their own bodies, just as men would wish to do.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): I understand my hon. Friend's passion about people in Northern Ireland being treated equally. This is not to divert us from that important issue, but does she not think, as a Labour Member, that our party should allow people in Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom, to vote for Labour candidates? Does she not think that that is a democratic principle? Yes, this issue is hugely important, but it is about a principle of democracy.

Stella Creasy: What I do know is that you, Mr Deputy Speaker, would not forgive me for straying into what is essentially a family matter for the Labour movement. The Labour movement has stood up for human rights around the world. We stand up for the human rights of the people of Northern Ireland to love who they love and to marry who they want, yet when it comes to the human rights of women in Northern Ireland to have control over their bodies, suddenly this place is stuttering.

The Government have issued guidance on this legislation, but there is no public information campaign. What do we say to people in Northern Ireland next week? Can they go to a doctor and ask for misoprostol and have an early-term abortion—yes or no? It will not be illegal any more, so physicians could certainly prescribe the pill, but the Government have not done the work to tell people what the legislation will be. We will be in an interim period. That is exactly why the legislation was drafted not just with decriminalisation in mind, but to keep the regulatory period as short as possible to avoid this confusion.

What the Minister has done tonight, by waving in front of one party in this place the opportunity to kill this measure through providing the role of the Assembly, is to create further confusion about how women in Northern Ireland will access their basic rights. We know that he is going to do that, because he has talked about having a public consultation on how to do abortion, as though it is something that we all have an ability to make happen. People on Twitter think that I have the ability to do that, but I want to be very clear that I have never made an abortion happen.

The point here is that we do not ask for public consultation on other healthcare issues. At no point do we put the concept of doing a vasectomy up to people in the community, yet somehow—

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Stella Creasy: I happily give way; I was going to finish.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: The reason we have to have a public consultation in Northern Ireland is that this Parliament passed into law section 75 of the Northern

Ireland Act 1998—part of the Good Friday/Belfast agreement—which says that on such issues that affect certain groups, there must be a public consultation. That is a statutory responsibility on the part of the Government.

Stella Creasy: I have a lot of respect for the right hon. Gentleman, but on his point about a section 75 consultation, he will find that that is not the case. The whole point about how the 2019 legislation was drafted was that it was about human rights—it was about not devolving human rights. Absolutely, there could be a consultation, but nobody can tell me what non-medical questions we should be asking people who are not medical professionals about abortion. That is the challenge we face.

Women in Northern Ireland deserve honesty. From next week, if the Executive are not reconstituted, will those women be able to get an abortion and, if so, how? That is what the 2019 Act pledged—it pledged to treat them as equal citizens, just as we pledged to treat our fellow citizens who want to marry somebody of the same sex equally. Yet somehow one of those is being disposed of in favour of political gain. At least if the Government were honest about that, women in Northern Ireland could prepare themselves.

I fear what will happen next Tuesday, because we will enter a period in which the Government will try every single trick to undermine this very basic piece of legislation that this House passed. I tell the Minister now, just as I tell the protestors in my constituency: they will not stop us standing up and fighting for the rights of women in Northern Ireland to be treated equally and fairly and to ensure that what this place promised overwhelmingly in July that it would do happens by March 2020. The Government set that deadline, not us. Now we can see why they wanted the delay, but I tell the Minister that it is not in the legislation, it will be contested, and he needs to be honest, if he is going to seek new legislation, that that is what he will do.

Surely, those women who have waited—who have watched rape victims not be able to get abortions, watched women with fatal foetal abnormality suffer and seen parents prosecuted for trying to protect their children in abusive relationships—at least deserve that from the Minister: some honesty.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Can I suggest that we take around 10 minutes?

7.45 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): First, let me say that I believe very firmly in the principle of devolution for Northern Ireland. As someone who served in the Northern Ireland Assembly for 12 years and on his local council for some 26 years, I can attest to the fact that local people having power in their own hands to shape local outcomes is worth having.

During the period 2007 to 2017, representatives from the main parties in Northern Ireland worked together to deliver for our people. I believe that all parties who served in the Government can point to significant achievements in improvements to our public services, keeping the cost of university education down, and record foreign direct investment. Devolution works. It is a source of profound sadness and frustration to me that

[*Jim Shannon*]

Northern Ireland has gone so long without a fully functioning Executive and institutions. The absence of the Executive has had a damaging effect on our society. Essential reforms of public services, particularly healthcare, are waiting to be actioned, as my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) said. Decisions about the future of our education system have also been left to wait. This is not good enough.

It is important to state in simple terms why we are in this position. The decision to collapse the institutions was taken by one party—and one party, by refusing to return to them, is preventing Northern Ireland from having a devolved Administration. Hon. and right hon. Members need to know that there can sometimes be a tendency to blame the two parties—Sinn Féin and the DUP—by saying, “A plague on both your houses.” This is a lazy analysis. The truth is that my party, the DUP, stands ready and willing to return to Stormont tomorrow. We have no red lines; we have no preconditions.

For everyone’s information, I understand that a recall of the Assembly has been asked for by different individuals across Northern Ireland and the parties have to respond to that. Just so that everyone understands what that means, if we were able to have a recall of the Assembly at Stormont on Monday, a First Minister and a Deputy First Minister would have to be in place so that they could make these decisions. That is what the people who contact me want to see. That is what this House should be talking about—devolution that can actually work. The absence of devolution is the greatest instability in Northern Ireland. It is important in a post-conflict society like ours that political vacuums are not allowed to develop. Local politicians working strongly together is the surest way to deliver stability, which is so important for our people but also for potential investors in the Province.

The abortion section of this report is quite simply mind-blowing. I speak today unapologetically on behalf of the 100,000 children who live today—who have a life today—because of the legislation that we have in Northern Ireland. If that had been changed when it was proposed before, those 100,000 children would not be alive today and would not be contributing to society. The proposal that the women of Northern Ireland should be subject to great indignity between 22 October and 31 March would be deemed wholly unacceptable by any self-respecting democracy, including Great Britain.

Jess Phillips: I wonder on what evidence the hon. Gentleman is basing the idea of the children walking around today. As somebody who has myself had an abortion, I can guarantee that had I had the child that I aborted, my son Danny would not be walking around today, so where is the evidence for what he is suggesting?

Jim Shannon: I can very clearly state the evidence. The evidence is on record. It has been agreed by Government bodies that the figure of 100,000 is correct. The hon. Lady can sneer, smile and laugh, but the figures are on record. I am very happy to put them on record again to make sure: 100,000 children live today because we do not have the abortion legislation that there is here on the mainland.

Emma Little Pengelly: Does my hon. Friend agree that this figure was challenged whenever it was put out? It was challenged the entire way to the court, and the court ruled that it is a defensible figure in terms of the laws in Northern Ireland. We may disagree very strongly on a number of matters. However, I can say very categorically that those people who strongly take a different position care just as much about women, but they also care about this issue. We should be respectful of that and the different views we have across this House.

Jim Shannon: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. She has made the case clearly, and I agree with her.

Stella Creasy: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Jim Shannon: The hon. Lady has had her chance.

It would have been one thing for this House to vote to impose abortion on Northern Ireland in the face of every Member of Parliament representing Northern Ireland voting against the measure, in the knowledge that the most recent abortion vote of any UK legislature on primary legislation was in the Northern Ireland Assembly in February 2016, when the people who should be making the decision voted not to change our law in any way. A national opinion poll last week showed that the majority of people in Northern Ireland do not want to see the liberalisation of abortion planned by Members of this House.

When I think about what will be imposed on my part of the United Kingdom from Tuesday, I am left utterly speechless. Between 22 October 2019 and 31 March 2020, the only law on this that will be in place in Northern Ireland will be the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 1945, which is not engaged until the point at which a child is capable of being born alive. That effectively means that we would have a legal void in protections for the unborn until at least 21 weeks of gestation, and potentially up to 28 weeks’ gestation. It means that from Tuesday some unborn animals subject to research will have more statutory protection in Northern Ireland, thanks to the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, than some unborn human beings. It is absolutely unbelievable that anyone would do this, and the Members responsible need to look at themselves very seriously. It is deeply troubling.

It also means that from Tuesday, quite unlike any other part of the United Kingdom, we will effectively have unregulated abortions, with all the attendant risks for women. The Government say in this report that they intend that the NHS will not significantly change the way it provides abortions until 31 March, but I find the emphasis that they place on this deeply disturbing. The Minister knows that; I spoke to him this afternoon about it.

Abortions need not come from the NHS. From Tuesday, it will be legal for private clinics to provide abortions in Northern Ireland. The Independent Health Care Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 place a statutory duty on the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority to register and inspect independent hospitals and clinics that meet the stated requirement for registration, but those regulations are wholly inadequate. We must have legislation in place that protects people.

Currently, there are two conditions that would require an independent clinic to be registered with the RQIA: the first is that an independent clinic intends to carry out a prescribed technique or make use of prescribed technology; and the second that a medical practitioner working in the clinic is not otherwise engaged in providing services to health and social care in Northern Ireland. Abortion provision is not a prescribed technique or technology under the regulations, which means that only independent clinics that do not employ any doctors who also work for the NHS will be subject to this regulation. Again, a minefield of regulation.

Moreover, and this is of huge concern, this regulation will be quite unlike that pertaining to abortion clinics in England, where the activity of providing abortions is subject to abortion-specific regulation and the premises are subject to abortion-specific regulation and a series of abortion-specific required operating standard procedures. It is about the technical parts of the procedure. The Minister knows this; we talked about it this afternoon. None of those abortion-specific regulations will apply in Northern Ireland on Tuesday for at least five months.

Another important safeguard that currently applies in England but will not apply in Northern Ireland on Tuesday is regulation 20 of the Care Quality Commission (Registration) Regulations 2009, which deals with requirements relating to the termination of pregnancies. What is most shocking, however, is that the change in law means that from Tuesday there will be nothing to prevent someone without any medical qualifications at all from offering abortion services. With respect, I say that Government will thus cross a line that has never been crossed before: Government will potentially make backstreet abortions legal. This should not be about going back to the pre-1967 days, but it will be on Tuesday unless the Assembly returns by Monday. That recall is in process and hopefully can be achieved; if it can, this can be stopped, and the responsibility will lie with the Northern Ireland Assembly's elected representatives, as it should.

Regardless of what one thinks about abortion, we cannot countenance this outrageous legislative framework for a day, let alone five months. In that context, I have a simple question for the Government and those in the Northern Ireland Office specifically: what were Government thinking when they agreed to the text of section 9 of the 2019 Act in the other place? They could have stood up for the women of Northern Ireland, as I am doing tonight, for the unborn and for babies alive in the womb, and pointed out that the safety implications of what section 9 proposed were just as inappropriate for the women of Northern Ireland as they would be for the women of England. They did not. This has to count as one of the most serious failures of governance that I have ever encountered. I say this honestly and respectfully to the Minister and to Government.

Emma Little Pengelly: We debated the matter in this House and we made it clear—I said it myself—that the way in which it was done, and I understand that it was made clear by the proposers, with the date as it was, left inadequate time to deal with many issues that need to be in place. We have ended up with a period when the regulations will not be in place. Some Members have already acknowledged that. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is wholly unacceptable, sad and disappointing and that it should never have happened?

Jim Shannon: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. If the Assembly is not restored on Monday, the Government have an almighty problem on their hands.

I say again that the majority of people in my constituency are very clear that they do not want liberalised abortion in Strangford or across Northern Ireland. It would be better if the Northern Ireland Assembly made that decision, and I hope that the recall on Monday will be a way forward.

7.55 pm

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): I had not intended to speak. I do not know that this necessarily needs to be an argument about the rights and wrongs of abortion, although it seems to have strayed into that.

I start with the point that we are now in a Trumpian time, when we talk about big issues on Twitter rather than in these Chambers. The Secretary of State commented on Twitter that the Government had discussed this issue with Church groups. I ask the Minister what other health matters on the UK mainland and in Northern Ireland we have discussed with Church groups. I wonder whether on, for example, the hormone replacement therapy crisis—there is a lack of HRT—the Government have spoken to St Mary's Church in Moseley, Birmingham.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Jess Phillips: Not at the moment.

Maria Caulfield *rose*—

Jess Phillips: I don't have to give way if I don't want to. I shall give way when I am ready.

I wonder whether the Secretary of State has spoken to any Church groups about medicinal cannabis.

Maria Caulfield: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Jess Phillips: I will. Let's go for it.

Maria Caulfield: The hon. Lady may not be aware of many of the sensitive issues in Northern Ireland, but Church groups have been talked to particularly around historical institutional abuse. Many young children were abused by Church institutions. It is a particularly sensitive issue, and we are asking the Churches to be involved in the compensation process.

Jess Phillips: My father is from Northern Ireland and I have grown up in the shadow of some of the issues of Northern Ireland, given where I come from. I understand the issues incredibly well, and the problems that Northern Ireland has faced over the years, including with the Church and institutional abuse. There is a difference between talking about institutional abuse that the Church was a perpetrator of with Church groups and discussing whether we should file prescriptions for certain things with them. The point I am making is that there is no other health issue in this country that we would first discuss with Church groups, so why is this clinical, health matter being discussed with Church groups rather than clinicians or women's groups? I ask the Minister to let us know. I am sure that the people who scurry along

[Jess Phillips]

to the Minister with bits of paper can tell us which women's groups the Government have spoken to—here we go. I will be fascinated to hear the answer.

Emma Little Pengelly: Very often there are matters, including in healthcare, that touch on life and death, in which the Churches become involved—for example, proposals for end-of-life issues. Many Churches have come forward because members of their congregations are midwives and nurses. There is an absence of any reference to conscientious objection, which is common—for example, there is a case in the Republic of Ireland. There are legitimate reasons for members of congregations across the Church community to get involved, not just in the life and death issues, which they are also concerned about, as many people are on these Benches and across Northern Ireland.

Jess Phillips: I absolutely do not doubt that all sorts of organisations have people in their congregations, in this instance, or in their number who lobby them. Lots of women lobby me every day from Northern Ireland, from every constituency over there represented on these Benches, asking me not to forget about the women of Northern Ireland and asking me to stand and give voice to their voice. I totally understand why Church groups might also want to give their voice. But I have never heard a Secretary of State tell me that they have been discussing this particular clinical health matter with Church groups. I do not mind if they discuss it with Church groups, to be honest, as long as they also discuss it with women's rights groups: Women's Aid Northern Ireland, for example, who have very strong opinions on this, specifically in the cases of victims of domestic abuse, or the rape crisis centres in Northern Ireland. I very much hope that every single one of those women's rights groups, equal to any Church group, was consulted. I look forward to hearing from the Minister how that was done.

I also ask the Minister how he would feel if he had to have an examination that he felt a little bit uncomfortable about—I will not embarrass him by naming some of them—and he had to get on a plane and go to Belfast to have it, and not just that, but to have any treatment. I ask him now to imagine that he had not had to go to Belfast and that he was in lovely Worcester, a fine place in the midlands, and that he went to the doctor to ask a question about something that was wrong—again, I will not embarrass him, but let us say something about his fertility, or because he did not want to have children any more—and the doctor told him that he could no longer continue the conversation because if he did he would be criminalised. That would never happen here. My husband went to have a vasectomy; if it had happened in Northern Ireland nobody would be criminalised for that, yet when a woman wants to talk about her fertility that is exactly what happens.

Martin Whitfield: To take that one step further, what if someone was unable to travel because they did not have any photographic ID, because they had childcare that needed to be taken care of, or because they were in a relationship where, because of its nature, they were desperately worried about the other person finding out the situation?

Jess Phillips: My hon. Friend makes an incredible point, and that is something we were told again and again when I and colleagues from across the House visited Northern Ireland with the Women and Equalities Committee. We absolutely met Church groups and pro-life groups, but we also met women who had been victims and had not been able to escape. We met migrant women who would not have had the paperwork to travel. We met lots of women who told us how tortuous the journey had been, as we heard earlier.

I think—in fact I do not just think, I know, because this House has voted for it—that this House wants the situation to change. This House wants things to change under the auspices of the powers in Northern Ireland, but that has not happened before this date. I therefore seek some more assurances from the Minister that this is not an issue that can just be given back to the Assembly halfway through. One of our colleagues from Northern Ireland made the point earlier that if a recall is successful over the next few days, there would be a First Minister in place if the Assembly is recalled as opposed to the Executive being formed—[HON. MEMBERS: “Nobody said that.”] I am afraid somebody definitely did say that.

Jim Shannon: What I said was that if there was a recall of the Assembly on Monday—it takes 30 Members for that to happen—the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will have to be nominated. Only then can it go forward. That is what I said; *Hansard* will prove that.

Jess Phillips: I retract, then; that was not how I heard it. So even if the Assembly is recalled, unless the First Minister can be nominated, as has been explained, we are still in exactly the same position as we are today where our legislation continues to roll over.

I ask the Minister to understand why people—women mainly, but lots of people in this House—have felt the need to come here and make these representations, and why we feel more nervous about this issue than we do about equal marriage. No mention has been made of that issue. My experience in this House is that a woman's right to choose is, for some reason, much more difficult for people to deal with than the idea that you can love who you want, although both have been difficult over the years. I ask the Minister specifically to say that there is nothing going on that we should have to be concerned about, because it very, very much seems to us and to the women of Northern Ireland who have been in touch with us today that that is what is going on.

8.5 pm

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): I am very grateful to have the opportunity to speak in this debate. During the course of my remarks, I hope to consider what I can only describe as the conspiracy theories that have been shared in the Chamber this evening: mistruths, suggestions that do not have any bearing in fact, and assumptions that have been raised about the motivations of individuals who represent Northern Ireland, in this Chamber or at home, that are wholly without foundation and, I have to say, incredibly unhelpful when we consider the reports before us this evening.

Before I commence my remarks, may I welcome the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) to the Scottish National

party Front Bench on Northern Ireland issues? I hope that that is a recurring thing. He is an honourable man, and we look forward to his contributions and interest in Northern Ireland.

I listened very carefully to what the Minister had to say on a range of issues, but I want to focus on two of them. The first is on military issues and the reports on legacy, investigations, the presumption against prosecution, and measures he will be aware of about the full implementation of the armed forces covenant in Northern Ireland. I know that the reports we are considering tonight were first published on 9 October. I know they were printed and laid before us on 14 October. It is simply not good enough, however, to indicate this evening that there has been no further progress since the publication of those reports.

I was outraged by the text of the report that builds on the one from a number of weeks ago, which does not in any way address the national commitment that this Parliament has given to veterans in the United Kingdom; a national commitment that transcends our internal borders, one that should apply equally to those who put their lives on the line for this country be they living in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. To suggest that nothing substantive has changed, when, following the Gracious Speech on Monday, the Prime Minister stood in this Chamber and confirmed to two hon. Members that he was going to legislate on these matters, is a shame. It is a shame that that was not reflected in the comments this evening. For those who are interested in ensuring that service and sacrifice for this country from Northern Ireland is as equally valued at home as it is in the rest of the United Kingdom, it is a material change and it should have featured in the contributions this evening.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree with me that we are very proud of the contribution made by our armed forces. We are not just talking about Operation Banner. Northern Ireland accounts for about 3% of the population of the United Kingdom, yet more than double that percentage represents Northern Ireland's contribution to the reserve forces, for example. We box way above our weight when it comes to our contribution to the armed forces. It is wrong that those men and women who are prepared to serve their country do not get the same benefits from the military armed forces covenant as others.

Gavin Robinson: My right hon. Friend is entirely right. This is an issue that we are going to have to return to. When I read the reports before us this evening, the very first line told me that I did not really need to read the rest. The report was based on information from the Northern Ireland Office. That said it all to me. I say that with great deference to the Minister and officials at the back of the Chamber. As somebody who sits on the Defence Committee and who knows the reports that we have published on these issues and what the Government response has been, particularly from the Ministry of Defence, I can say that to rely solely on information from our good friends at the back of the Chamber is simply not good enough.

On talks, it is right that there will be an opportunity, which I hope is seized, for the Assembly to return on Monday. There has been some strange confusion or

concern around this quest to have the recall of the Assembly, as though that in some way satisfies the Act. We cannot elect an Executive unless the Assembly meets. One can only follow the other, but it is high time that there was a return to devolution in Northern Ireland. Back in July, when we considered the amendments that are being discussed this evening, we could not have been clearer that, irrespective of the personal interests of Labour Members or the way in which they have campaigned on these issues continually—it is entirely their right to do so—to focus on two issues solely and not in any way to include other issues or aspects of encouragement would have one fundamental impact: it would prove to be a disincentive to the restoration of the Assembly. We need only look at comments made by a party leader in Northern Ireland today. When asked whether their party leaders would support the recall of the Assembly, the response was, “No, because we would lose out on the proposals that are due on 22 October.”

Emma Little Pengelly: There are many at the moment who clearly have not been following proceedings in this House or the many, many things that my party colleagues have said over the last—sadly—1,000 days since the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive last met. Does my hon. Friend agree that there has been a call for this? Some people have said, “Why now? Is it to prevent this?” Many, many thousands of people care really deeply about the issue on both sides; they are deeply concerned about it and want the Assembly to meet. However, does he agree that this is a point that I—we—have been raising in this House continually? The Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive need to get back now and start delivering the critical public services—health, education and other issues—for the people of Northern Ireland, because everybody in Northern Ireland is suffering.

Gavin Robinson: I could not agree more. It was a great shame that back in July that disincentive was provided to the restoration of the Assembly, and we are seeing the outworkings of that.

Is it not bizarre that those who propose the changes in this legislation and who framed it in a way that allowed the Assembly to return failed to recognise that disincentive? Even this evening, when it is suggested that these devolved matters should be considered by a devolved Assembly, should it be restored, they are outraged. They are outraged by devolution, outraged by local democracy and outraged that people who are elected to represent their constituents in Northern Ireland, from whatever perspective, should have the ability to legislate on the issues that matter.

Stella Creasy: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Gavin Robinson: I will, but I am conscious of time and I have a bit more to say.

Stella Creasy: For the avoidance of doubt, no Labour Members are opposing devolution. Many of us have been strong supporters of it in many different ways. We are concerned tonight to hear that a piece of legislation written in good faith in this House is going to be amended to say something different by the Government—that is what the Minister will have to do, because it does not say that. That is the concern. This is about honesty with the British public about what we voted for and intended that is now up for grabs.

Gavin Robinson: There is no concern about honesty. There is no denying the will that this House has shown, nor is there any difficulty in acknowledging the court judgment that came before Belfast last week. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) may shake her head, but she knows very well that the individuals involved in that case are close to me—they are constituents of mine—but the law is the law. However, her refusal to accept that locally elected politicians should have a role in the consideration of regulations that are brought forward is rather obtuse. It is an affront to democracy. If we have devolution, and if we wish it well and want it to succeed, I would rather the House recognised that we should give it the opportunity to do so.

Maria Caulfield: This is a case not just of dismissing devolution but of pretending to speak on behalf of the women of Northern Ireland. In the *Belfast Telegraph* just a few days ago, polling showed that across every age group and gender, people in Northern Ireland were against changes in the rules on abortion. Some 54% of 18 to 24-year-olds and 51% of women are against the changes proposed.

Gavin Robinson: That is right. The people of Northern Ireland are concerned by the proposals and by the absence of any regulation over the next five months. We will be devoid in Northern Ireland of any legislative protection. The Minister referred to section 25 of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Act. I do not believe he was right. I would like him to consider this point. He indicated that it provided a legal protection from termination during this five-month period, but it applies only to a woman whose pregnancy is at such an advanced stage that the child is capable of being born and living. We are talking about towards the end of gestation, arguably 27 or 28 weeks. At that stage, there would be some difficulties, but not a barrier.

People have talked in this Chamber about legislation in England that says that healthcare professionals have to be regulated individually, but that is not the case in Northern Ireland. The piece of paper I am holding here is a legal opinion from a QC who is pre-eminent in the field of healthcare. He is also a former Labour Member of Parliament: David Lock. This legal opinion lays out in stark terms the lack of any legal protection that will be available in Northern Ireland over the next five months. *[Interruption.]* I see people sitting on the Labour Benches to my right dismissing this, shaking their heads and saying it is not true. Well, it is, and it is not just their former colleague making this point. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission has made exactly the same point. It said:

“The likelihood of individuals resorting to potentially unsafe practices remains while prosecutions under the criminal law have been removed and a healthcare process not yet been established.”

In Northern Ireland, we regulate the buildings not the people. I wish to ask the Minister a series of questions. I will understand if he cannot answer them in full this evening, but if he cannot, I think we will need a written response in quick time. Can he indicate which piece of legislation in Northern Ireland over the next five months will preclude terminations where there is not a person qualified to do one? What law stops a non-qualified person, when consent is present, carrying out such a termination? What legislation precludes terminations

taking place anywhere or what legislation requires a termination over the next five months to take place in a hospital or clinic? Those are serious questions.

The hon. Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) raised the concerns of women in Northern Ireland. They are concerned about the lack of any legislative protection whatsoever as a consequence of the cavalier attitude taken when passing the legislation in the House.

Stella Creasy: I understand that the hon. Gentleman is concerned about this, but he is simply wrong to say that the Act, which only repeals sections 58 and 59 of Offences Against the Person Act 1861, removes all legal protection. For example, will he confirm that the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 1945, which refers to child viability in Northern Ireland, will still be in place? It is not removed by this legislation. It is simply not true that there will be no legal or regulatory framework. He might want a new one, but it is not true that it does not exist.

Gavin Robinson: The hon. Lady has not answered any of my questions. She does not accept, as the Minister outlined in the report, that section 25 of the 1945 Act is not adequate. She does not accept that in Northern Ireland we do not regulate individuals who carry out procedures, and she does not accept that we have no legislation that would indicate where those procedures can take place. She does not accept the views of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, which has expressed its concerns very clearly. I can assure you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission does not often look to me for advice, and nor do I look to the commission. We approach things from completely different perspectives, but we have exactly the same concerns.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to exceed my allotted time. I think that the interventions have been helpful, and I am thankful for the opportunity to speak.

8.20 pm

Mr Robin Walker: We have heard thoughtful and at times vociferous contributions from Members in all parts of the House. It is clear that, while there are very disparate views on the issue of abortion, the House wants the Northern Ireland Executive to be restored in the shortest possible order. I think everyone who has spoken today has spoken in favour of that.

Let me, however, make clear to the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) that the Government have no intention of amending the legislation. She spoke about the Executive and the Assembly. She was right to say that the legislation refers to the restoration of the Executive, and the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) was also right to say that an Assembly needs to be in place for the Executive to be restored. It is clear that if that happens on 21 October, the Government's requirement under the Act to legislate on these matters will fall away, and it will be for the Assembly and the Executive to take matters forward. If it does not happen, the Government will act as they are required to do by the legislation. I hope that that gives the hon. Lady some reassurance following the concerns that she has raised.

Emma Little Pengelly: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Walker: I am happy to give way to the hon. Lady, but I will not be able to give way many times, as there are a number of issues that I want to address.

Emma Little Pengelly: Although we did not gain much insight into the speech of the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), I have just read a tweet from her alleging that there is some sort of conspiracy, that the Democratic Unionist party made an agreement with the Government, and that that is why this is not going to happen. Would the Minister like to take the opportunity to make categorically clear that that is not the case, that this is a sensitive subject that we all want to get right, given the mess that we are in because regulations are having to be made and there is not enough time in which to do that, and that we should all treat this issue with the utmost seriousness and without this type of nonsense?

Mr Walker: The hon. Lady is right to say that this is a sensitive matter, and we should all seek to get it right. Let me make clear that we will take the action that is required by the law, and that means that more guidance will be published. We have already published guidance for healthcare professionals—on 7 October—to confirm the new state of the law during the interim period and their responsibilities. The guidance was published on gov.uk and circulated via the royal medical colleges. It also contains information for healthcare professionals in Northern Ireland about the funded abortion services in England that are available to women from Northern Ireland under the existing UK Government scheme. The healthcare professionals will be able to refer women to the service if the requirements of the Act come into force on 22 October.

The hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) asked about information on service provision. It is already available, and more information will be made available as we move forward with the process. The hon. Gentleman also asked an important question about the Secretary of State returning to the House. I can confirm that, as and when any extension of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act was considered or as and when any other powers were sought, the Secretary of State would need to come to the House in order to deal with that.

Maria Caulfield *rose*—

Mr Walker: I will give way, but this is probably the last time that I shall do so.

Maria Caulfield: When the issue of historical institutional abuse was raised during debate on the Bill that became the Act, the Secretary of State promised that there would be legislation, and it was mentioned in the Queen's Speech. Has the Minister any idea of the date when that legislation will be introduced? It will affect thousands of people in Northern Ireland.

Mr Walker: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As we heard from the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) at the beginning of the debate, the legislation is already proceeding in the House of Lords, but I have undertaken to write giving more details about the timetable, and I am happy to repeat that undertaking.

Concerns have been raised about supposed backstreet abortions. We should be very clear that repealing criminal offences specifically relating to procuring abortion does not repeal other relevant criminal laws that exist to protect individuals. Medical procedures are carefully regulated and have to be carried out, as has been noted, on regulated premises with appropriate quality and care oversight. The guidance we published should help to support that.

The repeal of sections 58 and 59 of the Offences against the Person Act 1861 means that women who take pills without prescription and medical supervision will be able to seek assistance and proper aftercare treatment without fear of prosecution. It will remain an offence under medicines legislation to sell or supply abortion pills online without a prescription. It is also an offence to carry out an abortion where the child is capable of being born alive except where it is necessary to save the woman's life.

As I said in my opening remarks, we will enhance the travel scheme to enable more women to access services free of charge in England and Wales. The point was made that this is not an ideal situation—it is not a situation that anyone wants to persist—and that is why, in answer to the question asked by the hon. Member for Belfast East, services will be available under the framework after March 2020, as required by the law. That is an issue we intend to address. I would say, however, that we believe that the net effect will be to reduce the number of women who might otherwise seek a termination without adequate and appropriate medical assistance; I think Members across the House will welcome that.

Gavin Robinson *rose*—

Mr Walker: I will not be able to answer all the hon. Gentleman's questions, but I undertake to write to him after this debate and to try to come back with more details on that front.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the important issue of veterans, and I am certainly happy to respond on that. We are clear that the current system for dealing with the past is not working well for anyone, and we want to see more progress on this issue. The Government remain fully committed to finding a solution for dealing with the legacy of the troubles that works for everyone, and that means a solution that meets the needs of victims and survivors, ensures that members of the armed forces and the police are treated fairly, and complies with the UK's domestic and international legal obligations.

The Prime Minister has said he wants absolutely to protect the armed forces covenant and protect our veterans, and I absolutely support him in that, and my Secretary of State has undertaken to work with the new Office for Veterans' Affairs to ensure that we can do that in the appropriate way.

As the report notes on the sensitive issue of abortion, if the duty comes into effect on 22 October, relevant criminal law will be repealed and a criminal moratorium will come into effect, but services are unlikely to be widely available given the policy and delivery considerations required in the following months to implement the new framework, and we are going to work at pace to ensure that the appropriate measures, including publication of further guidance and communications, are brought into effect. I absolutely commit to engaging with women's

[Mr Robin Walker]

groups in the process of the consultation period, and with the medical professionals at the forefront of this issue, making sure we get it absolutely right.

It is important that we move forward in a sensitive manner on these issues. It is clear that the time for the Executive to take this into their own hands and for the parties in Northern Ireland to shape this process is running out; only a matter of days are left for them to be able to step up and influence that process. I come back to a point that was made by the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald): greater challenges have been overcome in the past by the parties in Northern Ireland being prepared to work together. I would ask them to rise to that challenge, as the House has so clearly demanded today, and to ensure that we have an Executive in place in the shortest possible order.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the Report pursuant to section 3(5) of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019, which was laid before this House on Monday 14 October.

PETITIONS

Kashmir dispute

8.29 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I rise to present a petition on behalf of my constituents concerned about the situation in Kashmir. More than 1,500 residents are calling on the House to urge the UK Government to use their international standing to encourage India and Pakistan to engage in constructive and sustained dialogue to bring about a peaceful and just solution that is in accordance with the aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Trafford,

Declares that the dispute in Kashmir should be resolved peacefully.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the UK Government to use its international standing to encourage India to engage in a comprehensive and sustained dialogue process with its neighbour Pakistan to resolve the Kashmir dispute, and urge the international community to play its role in securing a just and peaceful resolution of the Kashmir dispute in accordance with the aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002529]

Insolvency of London Capital and Finance

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): I rise to present a petition that was brought to my attention at my constituency surgery by a constituent who was affected by the insolvency of London Capital and Finance.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Linlithgow and East Falkirk,

Declares that investors affected by the insolvency of London Capital and Finance eight months ago have still to learn whether they will have access to the Financial Services Compensation

Scheme; notes investors that include local residents of Linlithgow and East Falkirk have still to receive clarification about the Financial Conduct Authority's role in regulation the activity of London Capital and Finance; and further notes no explanation has been given as to why London Capital and Finance was permitted to promote itself as regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Treasury to ensure that the independent investigation into the events around London Capital and Finance's collapse is not in any way impeded and reaches a swift conclusion.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002530]

University Hospital Monklands

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): I rise to present a petition on behalf of residents of Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill,

Declares that the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport Jeane Freeman's unilateral executive decision to remove the current site of University Hospital Monklands as an option for the location of the new University Hospital Monklands will detrimentally impact healthcare provision across Lanarkshire; further that the current site offers significant advantages for a new hospital such as its existing public transport infrastructure; further that the unilateral executive decision taken by the Cabinet Secretary is in defiance of the recommendation of the Monklands Hospital Independent Review for greater public consultation on the location of the new University Hospital Monklands; further that concerns have failed to be addressed regarding the two alternative location options for the new hospital, particularly whether the offer of land in Glenmavis can be withdrawn at the whim of the owner; further that the Scottish Government should rebuild the planned new University Hospital Monklands on the site of the current hospital as it is the most suitable option for the greatest number of people in the Monklands community and is essential to those it serves.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to make representations to the Scottish Government on their behalf to have the current hospital site reinstated as an option for the location of the new University Hospital Monklands.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002532]

Single Use Plastics in Schools

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): I am delighted to present this petition from the students of Ysgol Dinas Brân school in Llangollen, and to congratulate them on their amazing campaigning on environmental issues.

The petition states:

The petition of students of Ysgol Dinas Brân, Clwyd South,

Declares that single use plastics are causing irreparable damage to the environment; and further that Styrofoam is toxic to the school environment and as such is a danger to student health and wellbeing.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to prohibit the use of all non-essential single use plastics in UK schools by the end of 2019, and the use of Styrofoam immediately.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002533]

Portishead Railway

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Iain Stewart.*)

8.34 pm

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to have this debate, especially during the week of the Queen's Speech. I am also grateful for the dogged and outstanding support that the Portishead railway project has had from the residents of the town itself, from North Somerset more widely, and from the wider region. I am also grateful to my fellow Bristol MPs for being here this evening. I single out and pay tribute to the Portishead Railway Group, whose contribution has been utterly invaluable.

When I last raised this issue in an Adjournment debate in this House, in January 2005, I spoke about the increase in population in Portishead. In the mid-1950s, the town had a population of around 9,000, which had risen to some 15,000 by the time I was first elected in the early 1990s. The population now stands at around 25,000. The power station and the phosphorus works that used to sit on the dock are long gone, with the last stacks having been brought down in 1992. In their place, we now have one of the country's finest marinas, and we have contributed more than most to the rise in the country's housing stock.

That housebuilding has not been without controversy. John Prescott, as Housing Minister, ordered that the housing density be doubled, so almost twice as many homes as originally intended were built on this land. That inevitably had consequences for the traffic in the town and parking has been a particular problem. Although the housing density was doubled, the number of parking spaces per home was allocated at the national average of 1.6 per household, when the average in North Somerset, even at the time, was 2.76. It does not take a mathematical genius to work out that the inevitable consequence was a huge deficit in the number of parking spaces available compared with what was needed.

The increased population in what I described back in 2005 as the most overcrowded cul-de-sac in the country—a phrase that has been widely deployed since—has inevitably put pressure on our road system. The A369 is the only A road out of the town, and junction 19 of the M5 is a regularly miserable experience for Portishead commuters, particularly at peak times. The answer to many of our problems, but by no means all, is to reopen the railway line to Portishead, providing additional capacity to our overstretched transport network.

The reopening of Portishead railway is part of the MetroWest project, which was given the go-ahead in July 2012 as part of the city deal under the coalition Government led by David Cameron. Portishead railway was part of MetroWest phase 1, but it has been beset by delays and cost overruns. In 2017, the planned date of the Portishead opening was 2020, yet by then the original cost of £50 million had mushroomed to £116 million. It became quickly clear that it would be beyond the financial scope of North Somerset Council or, indeed, the partnership of four councils to absorb such an increased cost. We were therefore pleased that the former Transport Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), came to visit North Somerset and indicated that this Government would ensure that additional money became available. I wish to focus on that area

and some of the technical issues around it so that the Minister can give us categorical assurances where there remain some anxieties.

The proposed allocation of £31.9 million by the Department exactly closed the funding gap. It did not reduce it; it closed it. The four local councils and the West of England Combined Authority have spent, and continue to spend, millions of pounds on the design of the reinstatement of the railway, the necessary environmental studies, and in preparing the development consent order application. For those who may not be familiar with the process, let me describe what this entails. The development consent order process is based on many submission items, one of which is a full funding statement. The statement has had to be generated on the assumption that the Department's £31.9 million funding share will not be withdrawn. Another item is the business case, which is strong. Its benefit-cost ratio of around 3:1 is almost unheard of for a public infrastructure project. In other words, we know the reinstatement would be an efficient and effective use of public funds to produce a defined benefit. That is a lot more than we can say for many projects funded with taxpayers' money.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, my constituency neighbour, both for securing this debate and for allowing me to intervene. He will be aware that, in addition to the football and the rugby, Ashton Gate stadium has hosted a number of entertainment events this year. Investment in transport to and from the ground is critical. As the line goes through south Bristol, it provides an opportunity to open up more local transport provision, so it is not just about what we can get now. We are very supportive of this opportunity, which is critical to us in south Bristol.

Dr Fox: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady, and she is right that we deserve better public transport in the Bristol area. Bristol is one of only two cities in the United Kingdom, outside London, that produce a net benefit to the economy, and we deserve a level of spending commensurate with that level of economic contribution to the UK economy.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for securing this debate. He was very good to us in Strangford on many occasions in his former position as a Minister, so I wanted to come along to support him tonight.

The right hon. Gentleman has outlined the need for the Portishead railway to be encouraged and rebuilt, based on the population trends, the extra traffic and the pressure on our roads. Does he agree that perhaps it is time for the Government to look at sustaining public transport, be it railways or buses, to take pressure off the roads?

Dr Fox: It is not simply a specific case; it is also a generic one. We need to see major improvements in our railway capacity for exactly those reasons and for the environmental benefits that will come from not having the pollutants from slow-moving traffic congesting our towns and villages.

As a result of the Department for Transport announcing its £31.9 million funding share, the four local councils and the West of England Combined Authority have

[Dr Fox]

now committed to their £84 million share of the funding for the railway project. I make it clear that the railway reinstatement cannot be completed without the Department's £31.9 million, so can the Minister make a clear commitment tonight that the Department's funding will be solely on the basis of there being a good business case?

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): I am pleased to be here to support the right hon. Gentleman's case for the Portishead line. Does he agree it is part of what should be a much broader rail network? It is about commuter traffic into and out of Bristol. My Bristol North West constituency is adjacent to his, and there should be a connection to the Henbury loop line so that people can travel between the major areas of employment, as well as travelling into and out of the city.

Dr Fox: I completely agree. Our transport network is now an economic rate-limiting step in the Bristol area. I know, and my colleagues will know, of companies that want to grow but are incapable of doing so. We are fortunate to have low levels of unemployment in our area, but it is difficult to get people to come into those areas where growth could occur because our public transport network is so inadequate.

The second issue I would like the Minister to address tonight is the Department's rail network enhancements pipeline. As the House will know, the RNEP is a multistage process that could lead the Department to adjust its priorities such that its £31.9 million funding share could be either reduced or cancelled. This railway reinstatement is widely accepted as a no brainer in the region and beyond. It has a strong business case, and it is viewed as being of the highest priority in the wider Bristol area. The Department for Transport itself seems to think that the reinstatement of the Portishead line is a major improvement to our railways overall, and so do I. A ministerial commitment on this issue would be most welcome, so will the Minister confirm that the RNEP process will be used only to assure the Department that it is using its money wisely, rather than being used to generate a reason to reduce or cancel the Department's funding contribution?

The Portishead reinstatement will upgrade 8 km of existing Network Rail freight line to Pill and reinstate the track along 4 km of existing permanent way from Pill to Portishead. Given the length of time it has taken and the amount of money spent, it must be one of the greatest investments in one of the smallest increases in railway track that the House has seen.

Unfortunately, despite the extremely modest nature of this particular project, the reinstatement is subject to the weighty process that applies to major rail improvements. Why? Because the criterion set out in the Planning Act 2008 is pegged at more than 2 km of track on non-railway land. The only reason why more than 2 km of the reinstatement track is on non-railway land is that North Somerset Council wisely decided to purchase the Portbury to Portishead section to ensure future reinstatement. In other words, we are being penalised because of the council's foresight and confidence that this most worthwhile project would eventually be brought to fruition.

I understand that, unfortunately, the processes operated by the planning inspectorate for the DCO and by the Department for the RNEP clearly have to be followed,

despite the non-major nature of the reinstatement. I want from the Minister an assurance that everything possible will be done to ensure that the process is as speedy as possible, within the constraints of the law.

Given the urgent need to reduce CO₂ emissions, which has been widely discussed recently, will the Minister confirm that he and his officials will do everything they can to speed up the processes, so that the long-standing congestion and environmental pollution that afflict the 50,000-plus people who will directly benefit from the railway and the 130,000-plus people who will indirectly benefit from the railway, can be reduced at the earliest opportunity?

I wish to raise two other brief points. There has been much speculation locally that, rather than a traditional railway, a hybrid of bus, tram and train might be introduced. What is the Minister's understanding of the likely outcome of any such proposals currently under consideration? There has been a great deal of debate about the relative merits of a range of different alternatives, but we are now seeking an end to the indecision, and clarity about the timescale and nature of the transportation system itself.

When I visited the North Somerset summer show this July, I gave my word that I would raise the issue of Sustrans. I am sure the Minister will be aware that Sustrans has been instrumental in the creation of a national network of cycle routes on quiet roads and traffic-free paths that now extends to more than 17,000 miles. I hope that he and his Department can look into the potential for a dual-use path alongside the planned railway, to see whether we can improve our local facilities further, with all the benefits that that will bring to recreation, transport and health.

As I have said, this project is a no-brainer. It fulfils all the Government's criteria for reducing road congestion, improving our environment and improving the functioning of our local economy. We are keen to give the Government all those things—if they give us reassurance, clarity and the necessary funding. After all the delay, I would be proud if this Government gave the people of Portishead what they deserve and what they have waited so long to get.

8.49 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris): It is a pleasure to answer the debate of my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox). I thank everyone who has contributed to the discussion, including the Bristol massive, who are lined up on the Opposition Benches—the hon. Members for Bristol North West (Darren Jones), for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), and for Bristol South (Karin Smyth)—ably assisted by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) in his support for his old right hon. Friend. I also congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing this debate on the future of the Portishead railway line and, indeed, the railway group that he named in his speech.

My right hon. Friend has always been an advocate of this important proposal and for improved transport links in and around his constituency. He describes the town of Portishead as one of the fastest growing in the south-west. Its population has risen by more than 3,000 since 2001 and is expected to increase by another 8,000 in the coming decade.

Reopening the Portishead line is an important part of the MetroWest scheme. This is a project that is led by North Somerset Council and the West of England Combined Authority, which have been leading on devolved matters in the area since 2017. I understand that good progress is being made—the business case for the Portishead line is being developed, and North Somerset Council will very shortly be taking a big step forward by submitting a development consent order for reopening the line to the Planning Inspectorate. I am very confident that our decision to provide £31.9 million of funding, subject to a satisfactory business case, provides the necessary commitment for North Somerset Council to submit the application and supporting funding settlement.

As my right hon. Friend knows, it is the Planning Inspectorate's responsibility to assess and decide on whether to grant the consents necessary for construction to commence, and he mentioned that in his speech. Once the outcome is known, we expect to carry out a full assessment of the business case for the scheme. He asked me to be as speedy in that process as I possibly can, and I give him the guarantee that my Department will be.

Although the development and delivery of MetroWest and the Portishead route are ultimately the responsibility of the local authorities and have been since their inception, the Government are committed to working closely with Network Rail, North Somerset Council and the West of England Combined Authority to support the reopening of the line and all elements of MetroWest, because improving rail services for the people in the Bristol area and the west of England has been, and will remain, one of the Government's key priorities. The importance that we place on the Greater Bristol area is demonstrated, I hope, by the recent investments that we have made. For example, we are investing £5 billion into the electrification and upgrade of the Great Western main line, from Paddington through to Bristol Parkway and Cardiff, delivering better services and new trains with thousands more seats.

Modernisation of the line will improve more than 100 million rail journeys each year and stimulate economic growth from London, through the Thames valley, to the Cotswolds, the west country and south Wales. It includes major rail infrastructure projects in the Greater Bristol area, such as the four-tracking at Filton Bank. This, combined with the biggest signalling renewal of its kind undertaken by Network Rail in the Bristol area, has increased capacity and contributed to reducing end-to-end journey times for Bristol to London Paddington services.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I wish to reaffirm my support for what the right hon. Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) said in his speech. I remember back in 2005, when I was first elected, that we talked about the urgent need for the Portishead line to be reopened. And here we are some 14 years later still waiting. All these rail improvements for Bristol are a really good thing, but we do also need to look at the very short local journeys on the suburban branch line, because they are as important for getting people around as the commuter services.

Chris Heaton-Harris: Yes, I agree with the hon. Lady. She is absolutely right in what she says. As a Minister in the Department, I welcome the cross-party nature of the support that is being given to my right hon. Friend and this proposal.

The services that I was talking about when I took the hon. Lady's contribution will ensure that the rail network can meet the growing passenger demand and will allow more trains to run in the future. My officials are working with Network Rail to secure funding to upgrade Bristol East junction to support future service enhancements and, importantly, to enable the capacity needed to run the second phase of MetroWest services. These works will also improve the resilience of the network, so passengers in the area will benefit from a more reliable railway.

As my right hon. Friend knows, the coming December 2019 timetable change will bring a significant increase in services making use of this new infrastructure, which is already providing performance benefits along the route.

The investments that we are making in the area are not just on the railways. As I am told by many people who live in and around Bristol, it is an exciting time for Bristol and the wider area. There are plans to develop the Bristol Temple Quarter enterprise zone, including Bristol Temple Meads station, for business, housing and education, including a new university campus. That work is progressing and is being led by the West of England Combined Authority and Bristol City Council. The combined authority will also receive £103 million from the Government through the transforming cities fund to transform connectivity in the city region.

On roads, the area has benefited from £36 million through the local highways maintenance challenge fund. Three separate awards provided by the Government, totalling £113 million, have been provided towards the metrobus scheme, which will provide a 50 km bus rapid transit network in the greater Bristol area.

Then, of course, there is MetroWest. The Government continue to be highly supportive of its development and recognise the benefits it will bring to the area. The plan is that MetroWest will help to reduce congestion in the centre of Bristol, get people out of their cars and create a cleaner environment for people in the city with a decrease in carbon emissions. That demonstrates the Government's commitment to decarbonisation through moving journeys from road to rail and helps to meet our ambitious, legally binding target of net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Darren Jones: Does the Minister recognise that the Mayor of Bristol is doing some extraordinarily important work in trying to meet our air pollution targets? As we have been discussing this evening, the delivery of public transport is a vital part of that. Can the Minister commit to continued support from the Department to help us to meet our air pollution targets in Bristol?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I do recognise the work of the Mayor of Bristol that the hon. Gentleman details and I can give him that commitment.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Bristol and that area is a fabulous part of the country—I used to live there. The Portishead line is a microcosm of the problem in many regions across the country. Does the Minister agree that one of the great challenges, as we have just heard, is that if we are to improve air quality in our urban areas—our city centres and so on

[*Matt Western*]

—improvement in sub-regional transport, as exemplified by this project, is critical? Does he see that as a greater priority than HS2?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I will deftly pass on answering the last part of the hon. Gentleman's question, but I do absolutely see that as critical—100%. That is why we stepped in to provide £31.9 million to bridge the funding gap for the Portishead line element of the project after costs increased.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset for acknowledging that that support was over and above what was expected from the Government, which I hope shows our commitment to seeing the line reopened. That support is, obviously, subject to my Department receiving a full business case that demonstrates the benefits for passengers and successfully passes through the Department's rail network enhancements pipeline process, as he described. That is a process, not an excuse to cancel. I assure him that it will be used as it would be for any other scheme.

I am pleased to say, as my right hon. Friend notes, that the business case for the scheme is looking positive. It is currently at the outline business case or design level. Work is under way by North Somerset Council and the West of England Combined Authority to develop the scheme further to a full business case.

Once that work is concluded and the outcomes of the development consent order are known, the business case will be assessed to ensure that it delivers sufficient passenger benefits and offers value for money for the taxpayer, to inform the Department's final investment decision. That approach will ensure that we are confident in our decision making, and it is in line with the Government's approach to funding all major improvements to our railways.

My right hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that outline designs for the project are being completed and feasibility works are under way to look at timetabling and how the new Portishead services will fit around existing train services in Bristol. Network Rail is continuing to develop strategies for the construction and future maintenance of the line. My officials and I will continue to work closely with the West of England Combined Authority and North Somerset Council to support the

delivery of all elements of MetroWest as quickly as possible and to ensure the best possible outcomes for the Greater Bristol area.

Our transport investment in the Greater Bristol area, and our work with local authorities to improve transport in the area, does not stop there. My Department last year committed to jointly fund the Greater Bristol area rail feasibility study with the combined authority, which will conclude shortly. The purpose of the study is to address transport priorities in the area, assess the feasibility of a number of proposals and support delivery of a local transport network that can be locally run and sustainable.

The study is looking at a wide range of areas such as station improvements, light rail and tram-train options in the Bristol area and a passenger demand study. That is a positive step towards developing a shared long-term vision for transport in the area and determining how best to meet the needs of passengers, the rail industry and all interested stakeholders. We will continue to support local authorities in the area, again because rail in the Bristol area and the west of England is a priority for the Government and the subject of significant investment.

I am aware of the benefits of reopening the railway to Portishead and of the need for an improved local rail service in the area. I look forward to continuing to work with the combined authority and North Somerset Council to support the scheme's delivery.

My right hon. Friend asked whether other options such as light rail could be considered. No, this is a rail solution—a heavy rail solution. He also mentioned the Sustrans plans for the local area. I met the chief executive officer of Sustrans today, and I look forward to developing all the proposals with that organisation that will get people out of cars and on to bicycles and, we hope, walking as well.

I should conclude, before I am timed out, by thanking everybody who took part in the debate. I thank my right hon. Friend again for securing this debate on the future of Portishead railway. I hope that, like me, he feels it has a very bright future indeed.

Question put and agreed to.

9.1 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 16 October 2019

CABINET OFFICE

Office of Veterans' Affairs

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Oliver Dowden): I would like to update the House on the work of the new Office for Veterans' Affairs, which was announced by the Prime Minister in July.

As the Minister attending Cabinet with responsibility for veterans, I have been appointed to oversee the Office with the Minister for Defence People and Veterans.

Veterans have offered to make the ultimate sacrifice in defence of our country, so the Government have a moral duty to them and their loved ones to provide the best possible support after they leave service.

Our ambition is for the UK to be the best place in the world to be a veteran and the Office for Veterans' Affairs will be a champion for our ex-servicemen and women at the centre of Government. It will promote the outstanding contribution veterans are already making to our economy and society and ensure no individual who needs help is left behind after they leave service.

As part of the recent spending round, £5 million of Government funding was secured to staff and resource the new Office.

Colonel (Retired) David Richmond CBE has now been appointed as the Head of the Office for Veterans' Affairs and has started work in the Cabinet Office this week. David Richmond was the most senior officer injured in combat in Afghanistan and subsequently became the Director of Recovery at Help for Heroes.

One of the Office's first tasks will be to produce a detailed work programme informed by the responses to the Government consultation on the strategy for our veterans. David Richmond and his team will be engaging widely with veterans, charities, the Devolved Administrations, local authorities and Parliamentarians so that the work of the Office reflects the needs of veterans and their families, with a particular focus on:

Pulling together all functions of Government, and better collaboration with charity sector provision, in order to ensure this Nation's life-long duty to those who have served.

Ensuring that every single veteran and their family knows where to turn to access support if required.

Helping to generate a 'single view of the veteran' by making better use of data to understand veterans' needs and where gaps in provision exist.

Improving the perception of veterans and showcasing the brilliant contribution they make after leaving service.

[HCWS15]

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Professional Qualifications and the Common Travel Area

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrea Leadsom): As set out in the memorandum of understanding signed on 8 May 2019, the common

travel area between the UK and Ireland means that British citizens in Ireland and Irish citizens in the UK can work in either country, including on a self-employed basis, without any requirement to obtain permission from the authorities.

Her Majesty's Government remain committed to ensuring the continuation of adequate and appropriate provisions to enable the recognition of Irish professional qualifications in the UK after Brexit.

We seek to build on the highly effective working relationships that currently exist between the UK and Ireland in this area. Many professional bodies and regulators in the UK and Ireland have close and long-standing links, rooted in mutual trust and familiarity. Some operate as a single body across jurisdictions. The Government will support and encourage continued close collaboration and communication between UK and Irish regulators.

My Department, along with colleagues across Whitehall, have been working closely with UK regulators and professional bodies to ensure that, as far as possible, there are appropriate systems and procedures in place for the recognition of Irish professional qualifications, whether through retained EU legislation or alternative profession-specific pathways. Some individuals will continue to benefit from bilateral arrangements already in place between UK and Irish regulators.

We recognise that it is in our mutual interest to ensure that these routes to recognition are in place to allow Irish professionals to continue in their important participation within the UK economy.

Her Majesty's Government will continue to encourage UK and Irish regulators to work together to strengthen their relationships and minimise the impact on individuals of any necessary changes after EU exit. By building on long-standing relationships and established good practice we seek to ensure minimal disruption for all stakeholders.

Finally, Her Majesty's Government would like to reassure professionals with Irish qualifications who have already had those qualifications recognised in the UK under the current EU directives, that their recognition decisions will still stand and they will continue to be recognised.

[HCWS12]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Online Harms

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Nicky Morgan): Protecting children is at the heart of our online harms agenda, and is key to wider Government priorities. Going online can be beneficial for children, who use the internet for connecting with peers, to access educational resources and for entertainment. However, the Government are concerned about the prevalence of adult content online, which is easily accessible to children, and believe it is vital that children are protected from accessing inappropriate, harmful content.

The Government published the Online Harms White Paper in April this year. It proposed the establishment of a duty of care on companies to improve online

safety, overseen by an independent regulator with strong enforcement powers to deal with non-compliance. Since the White Paper's publication, the Government's proposals have continued to develop at pace. The Government announced as part of the Queen's Speech that we will publish draft legislation for pre-legislative scrutiny. It is important that our policy aims and our overall policy on protecting children from online harms are developed coherently in view of these developments with the aim of bringing forward the most comprehensive approach possible to protecting children.

The Government have concluded that this objective of coherence will be best achieved through our wider online harms proposals and, as a consequence, will not be commencing part 3 of the Digital Economy Act 2017 concerning age verification for online pornography. The Digital Economy Act objectives will therefore be delivered through our proposed online harms regulatory regime. This course of action will give the regulator discretion on the most effective means for companies to meet their duty of care. As currently drafted, the Digital Economy Act does not cover social media platforms.

The Government's commitment to protecting children online is unwavering. Adult content is too easily accessed online and more needs to be done to protect children from harm. We want to deliver the most comprehensive approach to keeping children safe online and recognised in the Online Harms White Paper the role that technology can play in keeping all users, particularly children, safe. We are committed to the UK becoming a world-leader in the development of online safety technology and to ensure companies of all sizes have access to, and adopt, innovative solutions to improve the safety of their users. This includes age verification tools and we expect them to continue to play a key role in protecting children online.

We will continue to engage with Members of Parliament on the provisions of the online harms regime to ensure the most comprehensive online harms proposals which deliver on the objectives of the Digital Economy Act.

[HCWS13]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Review of National Adult Screening Programmes

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): I would like to inform the House that Professor Sir Mike Richards' review of adult screening has been published today. The review was commissioned in November 2018, following two high-profile screening incidents in the NHS breast and cervical cancer screening programmes.

Screening is an essential component of early diagnosis and a way of preventing more serious ill-health or death. Professor Richards recognises the value of our national screening programmes, which result in over 10 million screening appointments and save approximately 10,000 lives each year. The success of our programmes is in large part due to the expertise and dedication of staff across the NHS and Public Health England (PHE).

However, there is a serious need to improve the existing arrangements to achieve our vision for effective screening programmes and to harness powerful new technologies. We will use the findings from Professor Richards' review, and other recent

independent screening reviews, to inform the actions we need to take to improve our screening programmes and save even more lives.

I agree that there is a need for robust governance and clarity of responsibility and accountability for the different elements of screening. Working closely with Public Health England and NHS England we will ensure functions are located in the best place to deliver a high-quality service, building on the joint work that both organisations have already been implementing. I also agree it is important that screening programmes receive independent external scrutiny and we will continue to work with PHE and NHS England to design an optimum quality assurance process.

I agree with Professor Richards that there should be a single source of national expert advice on both population-wide and targeted screening. Public Health England, our national public health agency, hosts world-class scientific and expert advice on screening and will host this function, building on its current role providing support to the UK National Screening Committee. I have asked the chief medical officer for England, Professor Chris Whitty, to work with his counterparts across the UK to consider the detail of the proposed new advisory mechanism and how it could meet the needs of all four UK countries. By extending and consolidating our arrangements for providing independent expert advice on all screening programmes, we will improve delivery and exploit the huge scientific progress that is being made to deliver faster and better access to the latest and best screening interventions. NHS England will become the single body responsible for the delivery of screening services.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the invaluable advice received from the current UK National Screening Committee on both existing and potential screening programmes to ensure the programmes achieve the right balance of benefit versus harm and that our national screening programmes are effective and of high quality.

In his report, Professor Richards also notes the need for significant investment in diagnostic capacity. I have recently announced £200 million investment in new cancer screening equipment, including x-ray mammography machines and MRI and CT scanners, with priority given to replacing the oldest machines with new cutting-edge technology. This will significantly improve the ability of the NHS to diagnose cancer and will support the commitment in the NHS long-term plan to ensure 55,000 more people survive cancer each year.

I recognise the immense value that research adds to our understanding of screening and I am determined to ensure we use cutting-edge data techniques. NHSX will lead the vital work to drive this forward to save more lives.

Professor Richards has delivered a significant body of work, together with a substantial number of recommendations. His full recommendations will need further consideration, taking into account the potential impact on current service delivery to ensure any changes can be delivered safely and consistently. We will consider the review's report and recommendations and develop an implementation plan, which we will publish in due course.

I would like to record my thanks to Professor Richards for his report, and to colleagues across the health system who have contributed, and to pay tribute to all those who work to deliver the screening system across the country.

[HCWS11]

HOME DEPARTMENT

SNP Debate on A Fair Immigration System: Government Response

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Seema Kennedy): People from all over the world have come to the UK and helped make this nation what it is today, and this Government welcome the contribution migrants make to the UK's economy, society and culture.

Leaving the EU allows us to introduce a new points-based immigration system and we have commissioned the independent Migration Advisory Committee to conduct a review of the Australian immigration system and other international comparators, as the first step in creating our new fairer immigration system.

The new immigration system will be a single system, where it is people's skills that matter, not where they come from. For example, our new graduate route will be open to international students who have successfully completed a course of study in any subject at undergraduate level or above at an approved UK higher education provider. It will build on action to help recruit and retain the best and brightest global talent.

But a fair system also means a controlled system. My right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, has confirmed he is not getting into a numbers game in respect of migration, but it is only fair to those who play by the rules and everyone else that those working, living and accessing public services are doing so legally. It is right that the system distinguishes effectively between those with lawful status and those here illegally.

In that respect, we are keen to ensure that the experiences of the Windrush generation are not repeated. One of the key lessons we have learnt is that declaratory systems do not work. The EU settlement scheme means that, in years to come, EU citizens will always have the evidence that they need to continue living in the UK as they do now. Simply to grant all EU citizens a status in law, and not require them to obtain evidence of this, would significantly increase the risk of another Windrush.

The EU settlement scheme, is a fair, simple and straightforward system for EU citizens to secure their immigration status in UK law. The system is working well, and the latest internal figures show we have received two million applications and are processing up to 20,000 a day.

Settled and pre-settled status reflects the residence rights that EU citizens currently have under EU free movement rules. EU citizens resident in the UK for less than five years can get pre-settled status, which protects their current rights to live, work, receive benefits and access services, qualifying for settled status once five years residence is complete.

Fairness also means ensuring we provide protection to those most in need of it. This Government have great respect for human rights and has evidenced this through

a long and proud history of supporting refugees and other vulnerable people. Over 75,000 individuals have been granted some form of protection since 2010.

In 2015 we committed to resettle up to 20,000 refugees affected by the conflict in Syria by 2020—and we are well over three-quarters of the way there, resettling over 17,000. We have re-affirmed this commitment to resettlement beyond the current commitments by creating a new consolidated global resettlement scheme, resettling in the region of 5,000 refugees in its first year of operation.

Immigration is a reserved matter and this Government believe it is right that it stays that way, but we do recognise the need for some regional variation, which is why Scotland already benefits from a separate shortage occupation list.

It is also why, earlier this year, we commissioned the MAC to advise on issues concerning potential future salary thresholds.

This Government believe that a controlled immigration system that serves the best interests of the whole of the UK, that rewards hard work and talent, that is based on a person's skills and what they have to offer rather than where they come from; and that provides protection to the most vulnerable, is a system that constitutes fairness. That is the system this Government are working to deliver.

[HCWS14]

JUSTICE

Justice and Home Affairs Post-Council statement

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Robert Buckland): The Justice and Home Affairs Council of the Finnish EU presidency recently took place in Luxembourg. The JHA Counsellor at the permanent representation of the UK to the EU attended Justice Day on 7 October. The UK did not attend Interior Day on 8 October.

The UK Government decided that from 1 September until Brexit day, UK Ministers and officials will only attend EU meetings where the UK has a significant national interest in the outcome of the discussions.

Justice Day began with a discussion on the EU Action against corruption, in the broader context of the debate on rule of law and mutual recognition. All member states supported the need to take action against corruption. The presidency concluded that there was support for a new comprehensive EU strategy or action plan. The EU work should bring added value and as such should look first at using its existing tools. Member states also supported the EU becoming a full member of the Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO), so that the EU institutions are held to the same standards as GRECO members.

Ministers adopted the supplementary negotiating directives on EU accession to the ECHR. The Commission committed to restarting negotiations as soon as possible, whilst ensuring that the EU would reform its internal rules ahead of agreement with the Council of Europe.

The Council conclusions on the "EU Charter of Fundamental Rights after 10 Years: a State of Play and future work" were waived through without debate.

During lunch, Ministers discussed the rights of victims of crime, particularly the most vulnerable, including children and victims of domestic and sexual violence. The Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) cited the 2.5 million children across the EU who are involved in criminal proceedings in different forms. The need for a multi-agency approach was noted, with care of victims being about more than the criminal justice system alone. It also entailed medical, social and psychological care. The presidency concluded that they would consider this issue further at the December Council.

After lunch, the FRA director presented the 'Fundamental Rights Challenges in 2020 and Beyond' paper. Many member states touched on the importance of the link between rule of law and fundamental rights and the importance of the EU moving forwards on artificial intelligence with a fundamental rights focus.

The Commission then welcomed the progress made following the introduction of the code of conduct but called for further work to be done by the next Commission on disinformation and online hate speech.

Ministers also approved the Council conclusions on Eurojust. Eurojust presented the counter-terrorism register which was launched in September. Member states agreed that the register would build upon the spirit of co-operation reached in the 2005 Council decision to support the work of Eurojust.

The Commission briefed the Council on the latest EU-US senior officials meeting, reiterating the limited mandate due to the ongoing e-evidence negotiations. The second senior officials meeting would take place in early November to make progress before the EU-US Ministerial on 10 December. Security Commissioner Sir Julian King briefed on the progress made on the Budapest Convention. The presidency concluded that it would return to the issue in December.

The Commission considered that the appointment of the European Public Prosecutor would give a boost to the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) being set up and reminded participating member states to nominate their three nominees so as to be ready before November 2020.

[HCWS16]

Ministerial Corrections

Wednesday 16 October 2019

CABINET OFFICE

Preparations for Leaving the EU

The following are extracts from the statement on Preparations for Leaving the EU on 8 October 2019

Michael Gove: This morning, my right hon. Friend the Trade Secretary has published the temporary tariff regime, which will apply from 1 November. In all, it liberalises tariffs on 88% of goods entering the UK by value. It maintains a mixture of tariffs and quotas on 12% of goods, such as beef, lamb, pork, poultry and some dairy products, to support farms and producers that have historically been protected through high EU tariffs in the past. I should say that, as a result of cutting these tariffs, we should see a 15% reduction in the cost of honey from New Zealand, a 9% cut in the cost of grapes from South America and of course a 7% reduction in the cost of wine from Argentina.

[Official Report, 8 October 2019, Vol. 664, c. 1659.]

Michael Gove: We in this Government have compromised. We in this Government are showing flexibility. We in this Government seek to leave without a deal, but faced with the delaying, disruptive and denying tactics of the Opposition we say, on behalf of the 17.4 million: enough, enough, enough—we need to leave.

[Official Report, 8 October 2019, Vol. 664, c. 1664.]

Michael Gove: It is of course possible, for a host of reasons, that we might leave on 31 October without a deal, and it is prudent that this Government—and indeed the Scottish Government and the Welsh Assembly Government, led by Labour—are preparing for that, because that eventuality is a realisable and potential outcome. In the meantime, I am anxious to secure a

deal. I argued that we should leave the European Union without a deal, but if it is impossible to leave the European Union without a deal, then, much though I regret it, we have to leave.

[Official Report, 8 October 2019, Vol. 664, c. 1667.]

Letter of correction from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Michael Gove):

Errors have been identified in my statement to the House.

The correct responses should have been:

Michael Gove: This morning, my right hon. Friend the Trade Secretary has published the temporary tariff regime, which will apply from 1 November. In all, it liberalises tariffs on 88% of goods entering the UK by value. It maintains a mixture of tariffs and quotas on 12% of goods, such as beef, lamb, pork, poultry and some dairy products, to support farms and producers that have historically been protected through high EU tariffs in the past. I should say that, as a result of cutting these tariffs, **the 17% tariff on honey from New Zealand, the 15% tariff on grapes from South America and the 7% tariff on wine from Argentina will all be reduced to zero.**

Michael Gove: We in this Government have compromised. We in this Government are showing flexibility. We in this Government seek to leave **with** a deal, but faced with the delaying, disruptive and denying tactics of the Opposition we say, on behalf of the 17.4 million: enough, enough, enough—we need to leave.

Michael Gove: It is of course possible, for a host of reasons, that we might leave on 31 October without a deal, and it is prudent that this Government—and indeed the Scottish Government and the Welsh Assembly Government, led by Labour—are preparing for that, because that eventuality is a realisable and potential outcome. In the meantime, I am anxious to secure a deal. I argued that we should leave the European Union **with** a deal, but if it is impossible to leave the European Union **with** a deal, then, much though I regret it, we have to leave.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Wednesday 16 October 2019

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY	15WS	HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	17WS
Professional Qualifications and the Common Travel Area	15WS	Review of National Adult Screening Programmes .	17WS
CABINET OFFICE	15WS	HOME DEPARTMENT	19WS
Office of Veterans' Affairs	15WS	SNP Debate on A Fair Immigration System: Government Response	19WS
DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	16WS	JUSTICE	20WS
Online Harms	16WS	Justice and Home Affairs Post-Council statement..	20WS

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

Wednesday 16 October 2019

	<i>Col. No.</i>
CABINET OFFICE	3MC
Preparations for Leaving the EU	3MC

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than
Wednesday 23 October 2019**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Wednesday 16 October 2019

Debate on the Address (Third day) [Col. 271]

Debate adjourned

Northern Ireland (Executive Formation Etc) Act 2019 Section 3(5) [Col. 393]

Motion—(Mr Robin Walker)—agreed to

Petitions [Col. 419]

Portishead Railway [Col. 421]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Written Statements [Col. 15WS]

Ministerial Corrections [Col. 3MC]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
