

**Tuesday
14 January 2020**

**Volume 669
No. 9**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 14 January 2020

House of Commons

Tuesday 14 January 2020

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

JUSTICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Legal Aid Access

1. **Miss Sarah Dines** (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to ensure that legal aid is accessible to people who need it. [900150]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Wendy Morton): It is a pleasure to be in the Chamber, Mr Speaker, with you in the Chair.

Access to justice is a fundamental right and the Government are committed to ensuring that everyone can get the timely support that they need to access the justice system. However, legal aid is only part of the picture. We are also enhancing the support and offer to litigants in person by providing a further £3 million of funding over the next two years to ensure that those representing themselves in court understand the process and are better supported through it. We are additionally investing up to £5 million in a legal support innovation fund alongside many other initiatives.

Miss Dines: I should declare my interest as a former legal aid barrister. One of the first emails that I received following my successful election as Member of Parliament for Derbyshire Dales was from a constituent about legal aid issues. What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that we do not waste legal aid on those who do not need it or on poor administration and excessive charges, and focus legal aid on provision for truly vulnerable people who really need it?

Wendy Morton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her question. She brings a huge amount of experience in family law to this place. She has made an important point. The Government have always made it clear that it is important that legal aid should be targeted on those who need it most. Applicants for legal aid funding are subject to a stringent merits test. We have begun a review of the legal aid means test to ensure that those who need legal aid, particularly the vulnerable, can continue to access it in future.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): Before asking my question I want to put on record the fact that my thoughts and, I am sure, those of the whole House are with the prison staff at HMP Whitemoor and their families after the horrific attack last week.

Over a year ago, the UN special rapporteur said that Conservative cuts to legal aid had

“effectively deprived”

people

of their human right to a remedy.”

Is it not the case that if the UN special rapporteur returned today they would make exactly the same finding because the Government have not done anything to address that? Is that failure to respond the result of incompetence or is it simply because they do not care?

Wendy Morton: I do not accept the accusations made by the hon. Gentleman. I have made it absolutely clear that access to high-quality, early legal aid can be important in supporting people in resolving their problems at an early stage. Last year, we spent £91 million on early legal advice through legal help, and our total spend was £1.7 billion. We are in the process of launching a series of pilots offering support to people with social welfare problems such as housing. I believe in access to justice, which is a fundamental right, and the Government are committed to ensuring that everyone can have the timely support that they need.

Richard Burgon: What people who are denied their basic rights need from the Government is action, not words. The UN special rapporteur said that the cuts had “overwhelmingly affected the poor” and disabled people. Labour is calling for the return of all legal aid-funded early advice, which would be a lifeline for the single mother standing up to a lousy landlord, the worker standing up to a bullying boss, or the migrant fighting cruel Home Office policies. Does it not say everything about whose side the Government are on that they are deliberately preventing those people from defending their hard-won rights?

Wendy Morton: No, I do not accept that. I go back to my earlier point: we believe in access to justice, particularly early legal support for those people who absolutely need it. We have pilots, and the innovation fund is being introduced. The Government remain firmly committed to helping those people who need early legal support and legal advice.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): What can be done to stop millions of pounds of public money being spent on legal aid to support the defence of terrorist suspects who are accused of the most heinous crimes?

Wendy Morton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. He makes a fair point, but this is about people having access to justice when they need it. As I said, the Government remain committed to ensuring that people have access to justice and support when they absolutely need it.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): In March 2018, 22-year-old Luke Morris Jones of Blaenau Ffestiniog was the first man to die in HMP Berwyn following a heart attack caused by psychoactive substance abuse. His family, who in this instance did receive legal aid, remain concerned, following his inquest last month, that electrical equipment in cells such as kettles can be used to create the spark needed to take Spice. Will the Minister commit to work with others in reviewing whether

electrical equipment such as kettles should be removed from cells holding prisoners with a history of Spice abuse as a matter of urgency?

Wendy Morton: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for her question. Although prisons do not fall within my portfolio, I fully understand why she would be concerned about the issue and about the tragedy of the gentlemen who lost his life. My hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State would be more than happy to meet the right hon. Lady to discuss the matter further.

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): What assurances can my hon. Friend give me that legal aid is reaching those who need it most—not only in my constituency, but across the UK—in order that they can access justice?

Wendy Morton: I welcome another new Member to the Chamber today for MOJ oral questions.

We have made it very clear that we remain committed not only to providing legal aid to those who need it, but to developing further means of legal support including the expansion of early legal advice to help some of the most vulnerable people in society with social welfare problems such as housing. We are committed to finding effective solutions, because it is often early legal advice that makes the difference.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Will the Minister share with us any plans she has to reverse the hundreds of millions of pounds of cuts to legal aid budgets under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 that have been so destructive of access to justice in this country?

Wendy Morton: I think it is fair to say that I have been setting out some of the action points that we are taking forward. We have had the post-implementation review of LASPO, and are looking at various means of legal support to help with social welfare issues. We could not be clearer that we support legal aid and legal support for those who need it, and we will continue to do so.

Criminal Appeals: Victims of Crime

2. **Gareth Johnson** (Dartford) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the effect of criminal appeals procedures on victims of crime. [900151]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Chris Philp): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) for his tireless campaigning for victims over the years. Partly as a consequence of his campaigning, the unduly lenient sentence scheme was expanded in November to cover 14 more offences, including child sexual offending, stalking and harassment, in order to ensure that the victims of those crimes have a right of appeal if they feel that the sentence handed down by the judge is unduly lenient. I would urge any victim who feels that that is the case for a qualifying sentence to avail themselves of the ULS scheme.

Gareth Johnson: Nobody has done more to widen the scope of the unduly lenient sentence scheme than the Secretary of State. However, may I ask the Minister to continue expanding the scheme? There is currently no

ability to appeal against ridiculously lenient sentences for offences such as burglary, possession of a knife, actual bodily harm, and even for rape when dealt with in a youth court. Surely we owe it to the victims of crime to give them a right to an appropriate sentence.

Chris Philp: I wholly agree with the sentiment that my hon. Friend is expressing. Let me reassure him on the question of rape defendants in the youth court. If the judge feels that the crime is sufficiently grave and merits a sentence of more than two years, they can move the case to the Crown court, where it is then eligible for the unduly lenient sentence scheme. In the past few years, the number of referrals under the ULS scheme has increased significantly. In 2018, 1,066 cases were referred to the Attorney General, who passed 140 on to the Court of Appeal; the sentence was increased in 99 of those cases. We keep the ULS scheme under continual review and will certainly consider very carefully my hon. Friend's representations about its scope.

19. [900170] **Lucy Powell** (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome you to your place in the Chair, Mr Speaker.

As well as victims of crime, there are also miscarriages of justice. Can the Minister tell us how many appeals the Criminal Cases Review Commission has recommended should progress to appeal, and how many cases the Court of Appeal has granted in the last two years? Can he assure the House that, if those figures are as low as I fear, miscarriages of justice are not being brushed under the carpet by a legal establishment watching its own back, rather than being open to real scrutiny?

Chris Philp: The hon. Lady is quite right to raise that issue. I do not have the figures she asks for immediately to hand, so perhaps I could undertake to write to her. Let me assure her that this Government are certainly committed to making sure that miscarriages of justice are properly investigated, and if there is anything more that needs to be done, she can rest assured that we will do it.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I very much welcome what the Minister says about procedures for unreasonably short sentencing, but my constituent Ellie Gould was brutally murdered by Thomas Griffiths this time last year and he was given only a nine-year sentence, much to the outrage of the family, and me, because he was only 17 at the time, although he was 18 when he was tried and convicted. Surely the hurdle is too high for referral to the Attorney General. It should be much lower to make it easier for the courts and for the families to seek the Attorney General's referral to the Court of Appeal.

Chris Philp: I believe that my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor is meeting my hon. Friend next week to discuss precisely that case. Not every case referred to the Attorney General will be referred onward to the Court of Appeal, because obviously the Attorney General has to assess the case in the light of statute. I know that the Lord Chancellor is looking forward to his meeting with my hon. Friend and will be discussing that particular, very distressing case in some detail.

Perinatal Women: Custodial Settings

3. **Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): What plans his Department has to improve training for people working with perinatal women in custodial settings. [900152]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Lucy Frazer): I, too, welcome to your place, Mr Speaker.

I know that the hon. Lady is very interested in this very important area and chaired a roundtable that a former Justice Minister attended. It is absolutely right that pregnant women in custody should get the care that they deserve. I hope she will be reassured to know that there is a two-day programme that prison officers can attend to ensure that they get the appropriate training to deal with women in custody who are pregnant. However, we recognise that there are more things that we can do, and before the election was called we had already started a fundamental review of pregnant women in custody and the operation of our mother and baby units.

Carolyn Harris: The current review of the operational guidance for the mother and baby units is welcome, but guidance is not enough. Will the Minister agree to meet me and the charity Birth Companions to discuss the recommendations in its new birth charter toolkit and the need for mandatory standards, so that prisons are scrutinised and indeed held to account for perinatal care?

Lucy Frazer: I would be happy to meet the hon. Lady, who is very experienced in this issue. Last week I visited HMP Bronzefield where I spoke to people on the mother and baby unit. Birth Companions operates from that prison, but I would be very happy to meet the hon. Lady and take advantage of her expertise.

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): The Liberal Democrats would scrap all sentences for women apart from the most serious offences. Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that that creates double standards in the justice system?

Lucy Frazer: We have to recognise that the treatment of women in prison, their sentences and the treatment once they are sentenced might be different from men and if they are victims of crime. In our female offenders strategy, we recognise different treatment; but of course people who commit crimes must be punished for them.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): I listened carefully to the Minister when she said that prison officers can access training. Does she agree that it should be mandatory for prison officers who are working with pregnant women to have such training, and can she confirm what proportion of prison officers have already accessed that training?

Lucy Frazer: At least one prison officer in each establishment has already undertaken the training, so there is specialist support, and more women than that have done it; I would be very happy to provide the figures in due course.

Victims of Domestic Abuse

4. **Nickie Aiken** (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support victims of domestic abuse. [900153]

22. **Siobhan Baillie** (Stroud) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support victims of domestic abuse. [900173]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Wendy Morton): We are committed to doing everything we can to end domestic abuse. It is an appalling crime that ruins far too many lives. It is vital that we better protect and support victims of abuse and their children and bring more perpetrators to justice. That is why we introduced the landmark Domestic Abuse Bill in July last year and set out a comprehensive action plan of non-legislative measures directed to this end. We reaffirmed our commitment to this Bill in the Queen's Speech on 19 December.

Nickie Aiken: County lines drug gangs are involved in the largest exploitation of our children that this country has ever witnessed. Children from all walks of life are being groomed by these gangs. Given that women and girls are particularly at risk of being abused and exploited, what steps are the Government taking to ensure that the criminal justice system is doing more to protect our women and girls, particularly using the Modern Slavery Act 2015?

Wendy Morton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. I know that she brings a huge amount of expertise in this area, which is to be welcomed. This Government recognise the risks to girls and young women who are exploited by these ruthless gangs. That is why the Home Office provided £400,000 this financial year for young people's advocates in London, Manchester and the west midlands, to work directly with gang-affected women and girls, especially if they have been victims or are at risk of sexual abuse by gangs, including county lines gangs. I can assure her that colleagues in the Home Office are also working with the police and the Crown Prosecution Service to take full advantage of powers in the Modern Slavery Act.

Siobhan Baillie: It takes courage to leave an abusive relationship. Living in fear of the next punch or being told that you are worthless, stupid or cannot cope alone destroys confidence. When people find the courage, they often turn to frontline workers and great charities such as the Stroud Women's Refuge. Will my hon. Friend explain what the Department is doing to ensure that the people at the frontline of supporting domestic violence victims are prepared to adapt in order to assist victims as the new legislation comes in?

Wendy Morton: My hon. Friend makes some powerful points. She brings to the Chamber experience in legal matters, particularly divorce and family law. Our ambition is to build a society that has zero tolerance of domestic abuse and actively empowers victims, communities and professionals to confront it. We know that the legislation we are introducing will need to be supported by all

those on the frontline, and we have started implementation planning for the Bill with all those who will be affected by the provisions.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): The previous Government implemented an independent review of the family courts' treatment of domestic abuse survivors. Domestic abuse survivors across the country will be watching with interest to see how that review is taken forward. Will the Minister meet me to discuss how that review can make the impact that is necessary?

Wendy Morton: I have a very simple answer: absolutely. I know that the hon. Lady takes an interest in that matter. We made a manifesto commitment in this area. We are determined to improve the family justice response to vulnerable victims and witnesses, including victims of crime. It is worth noting that in May 2019, we announced a public call for evidence, led by a panel of experts, to gather evidence to help us better understand this. I look forward to meeting her.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): There is significant evidence from domestic abuse charities and police forces across the United Kingdom that during major sporting events, the number of domestic abuse cases increases. With the Six Nations in a few weeks' time, what work is the Minister doing with the rugby unions across the UK, from the stadiums to television programming and working with the rugby players themselves, to explain that domestic abuse is clearly wrong and that there is never an excuse for it? There needs to be more investment to tackle the causes of it, which includes these sporting events.

Wendy Morton: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point, highlighting the fact that domestic abuse is out there in so many different areas, and not always where we expect. With regard to rugby, I would need to go away and ask a few questions, but I thank him for raising that in the Chamber and for highlighting the importance of bringing forward the Domestic Abuse Bill, to see an end to these abhorrent crimes.

Sentencing Policy for Prolific Offenders

5. **Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Whether his Department plans to review sentencing policy for prolific offenders. [900154]

6. **Amanda Solloway** (Derby North) (Con): Whether his Department plans to review sentencing policy for prolific offenders. [900156]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Robert Buckland): Mr Speaker, may I welcome you to the Chair? This is the first opportunity I have had formally to do so, other than in the ceremony of appointment.

We have already started work to overhaul our sentencing framework. We know that prolific offenders generally have multiple and complex needs linked to their offending behaviour, in particular relating to drugs, alcohol and mental health. We will be introducing new sentencing laws, including more robust and effective community penalties.

Tom Tugendhat: The Lord Chancellor speaks very well on many matters of sentencing, but one of the things that came up in the manifesto that I would be particularly interested in hearing him speak about is extending sentences for some of the worst offences. On page 18 of our manifesto, as he will remember—indeed, I am sure he wrote it—there is a call for extending child cruelty sentences as well. I would be very grateful if he tried to introduce Tony's law, named after baby Tony Hudgell, who was so brutally assaulted by his birth parents before, thank God, he found love with his true parents, the Hudgell family.

Robert Buckland: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his consistent campaigning on this issue. He will remember my own involvement in getting child cruelty law updated to cover psychiatric and psychological harm because, frankly, it was out of date. I would be happy to talk to him about it. It is important to remember that there is an interrelationship between this offence and very serious offences of violence that tragically are inflicted on children and for which, for example in section 18, the maximum sentence is life imprisonment.

Amanda Solloway: The average rate of reoffending in Derbyshire is 27.1%, which is lower than the average for England and Wales, but my constituents in Derby North are still rightly concerned about career criminals. What plans does the Minister have to bring down reoffending further both in Derbyshire and in England and Wales?

Robert Buckland: I welcome my hon. Friend back. We have missed her for the last two and a half years; it is good to see her back in her place. I pay tribute to her for her community campaigning in Derby North. She is absolutely right to raise the issue of career criminals. Sadly, there is a cohort of people who are very hard to reach, which is why all options have to be open to sentencers, including custody. But it will be part of our plans, canvassed in a White Paper ahead of any sentencing legislation, to see what extra programmes and measures can be taken to deal with that particular cohort of persistent offender.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): For far too many, prison is the worst place to tackle the issue of debt, substance abuse and mental health problems that led them to commit crimes in the first place. Figures that I uncovered show that nearly half of all women sent to prison were homeless—up 70% in just four years. Many thousands are stuck in a destructive cycle of short sentence after short sentence, which costs a fortune, does nothing to reduce reoffending and fails to keep the public safe. Is it not about time that the Government face the facts and, finally, properly invest in alternatives to prison for less serious offenders?

Robert Buckland: I reassure the hon. Gentleman that that is precisely my policy. It is not just about being tough on crime, though public protection is important; it is about being smart on crime as well. Having had experience as a sentencer, the last thing we need to do, with respect to him, is to reduce sentencing options and prevent sentencers from imposing short sentences where appropriate. That has to be one of the tools in the box. Frankly, at the last election, he and his party advanced a mistaken policy.

Richard Burgon: Unlike the Conservative party, we care about what works. The Conservatives like to claim that they are not ideologues, but the Government's own evidence shows that 30,000 fewer crimes would be committed each year if the Government properly invested in alternatives to prison. Does the Justice Secretary accept that his Government's decision to chase headlines in the right-wing press, rather than acting on the evidence, will leave people right across our country facing higher levels of crime? Is it not time that he acted on his own Department's evidence and put an end to ineffective super-short prison sentences?

Robert Buckland: It is a bit rich to be lectured about ideology and an ideological approach by the hon. Gentleman. After nearly 20 years in practice and now over 30 years' experience of the criminal justice system, the approach that I and my team will be taking will be a multi-layered approach that will emphasise the importance of protecting the public and making our streets safer, while at the same time increasing the sentencing options on community orders to deal with the drivers of less serious crimes such as drug addiction, alcohol addiction, family relationships and accommodation. We understand it, we absolutely get the point and that is what we are going to be getting on with.

Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con): One of the areas of sentencing policy that has already been reviewed and consulted on is the whole question of death by dangerous driving, particularly when drugs are involved, such as in the tragic case of my constituent, Bryony Hollands. The previous Government committed to legislate on this issue to lengthen sentences in certain circumstances. This is not in the Queen's Speech. Are this Government committed to legislate and, if so, when?

Robert Buckland: I thank my right hon. Friend for raising that point. I have met in this place families of victims of this appalling crime and worked with hon. Members across the House on the issue. I want to get on with it. The commitment remains absolutely crystal clear. I very much hope that we can have a vehicle to do that. I am going to be doing a sentencing Bill this year; that could be one vehicle. I want to get on with this as soon as possible. We will have the time and the support of the Government to change the law in the right direction.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): At the moment, there exists a loophole in the law that allows prolific sexual offenders to groom 16 and 17-year-olds with impunity. The independent inquiry into child sexual abuse, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the Church of England, the Offside Trust and the all-party group on safeguarding in faith settings are all calling on the Government to close that loophole to protect children. Will the Minister please meet me to explain why the Government have not acted thus far?

Robert Buckland: Again, I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for her consistent campaigning on these issues; we have worked together on them over many years. I am interested in the overall issue of grooming because it affects not only children but adults with learning disabilities. The Law Commission is looking at this issue now, but

we cannot wait. We need to get on with change. I certainly will meet her and talk through the issues with her at the earliest opportunity.

Darren Henry (Broxtowe) (Con): My Broxtowe constituents have raised the TV licence fee with me and asked whether my right hon. and learned Friend has plans to decriminalise non-payment of the licence fee and whether he has made any assessment of how that might impact the volume of cases brought before the magistrates.

Robert Buckland: May I welcome my hon. Friend to this House? He and I have known each other for a number of years and have campaigned together, and he will make an outstanding advocate for the people of Broxtowe. With regard to the issue of television licences, we believe that there is a case to examine decriminalisation. About one in 12 cases in the magistrates courts are taken up with television licence default. We want to consult on the matter, take evidence and see whether there is a better way forward.

Staffing at Courts: Access to Justice

7. **Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab):** What assessment he has made of the effect of trends in the level of staffing at courts on access to justice. [900157]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Chris Philp): The hon. Member will be aware that the court system is in the middle of a reform programme, whose objectives are to make it more efficient, of course, but also to improve the user experience and access to justice. Despite the intended and planned reduction in Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service headcount, I believe that access to justice has been maintained, not least through the very widespread use now of online platforms to access justice, such as issuing and replying to civil money claims online, entering and replying to minor pleas online, and online probate applications and uncontested divorce cases. So I am satisfied that access to justice is being maintained throughout the court reform process.

Christian Matheson: That reform programme, which I read as court closures, is creating delays, but there are further delays in respect of the administrative staff who are supporting the courts: for example, I am told that in Chester and other courts CPS court caseworkers are now having to manage maybe three cases at once, with all the resultant delays that that brings about. So will the Minister look at the levels of administrative and support staff working behind the scenes to keep these things moving, because at the moment we are having delays of up to two years in Chester?

Chris Philp: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his follow-up question. Questions concerning CPS staff levels are a matter for the Attorney General, but I can tell him that substantially larger amounts of money are going into the CPS—£85 million is going in over two years—to hire more staff. Also, innovations such as the common platform—the online system for handling criminal cases—will start to be rolled out very shortly, by which I mean in the next few weeks. So besides putting more money into the CPS, we are using the online system to make the staff working there more effective and efficient.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): May I welcome you to the Chair, Mr Speaker, not just as a neighbouring constituency MP, but as a man who is making Chorley very famous? Normally, it is famous for the Frederick's ice cream parlour, but with you becoming the Speaker Chorley is now even more well known.

The fire sale of our courts and deep cuts to our justice system have created a perfect storm as courts are left sitting empty even while sitting days are cut. The Government's own statistics show that on average serious cases in the Crown court are taking 133 days longer to move from the offence to completion than in 2010, leaving victims waiting months and months more for their day in court. That is not good enough. Will the Minister commit to providing proper investment in courts and court staff and promise to end the reckless closure programme?

Chris Philp: I had not heard of the fame of the Chorley ice cream parlour, but perhaps I should add it to my list of recess destinations. *[Interruption.]* The Lord Chancellor says he is going to come along as well.

On the question of Crown courts sitting, we need to bear in mind that, as reported by the crime survey, the most reliable measure of criminal offending, over the past nine years there has been a significant reduction in the total number of criminal offences, from about 9.5 million offences in 2010 to about 6.5 million offences today. That is a very welcome 30% reduction under this Conservative Government, so of course, bearing in mind the reduction in the number of criminal offences, one would expect to have fewer sitting days. However, we keep the question of Crown court sitting days under continual review. Just a few weeks ago, my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor increased the number of Crown court sitting days in this current financial year by 700 to ensure that we keep working through the outstanding case load. The outstanding case load is at its lowest level since 2001. We will of course keep the question of Crown court sitting days under review for the next financial year—the one starting in a few weeks—and, if necessary, we will of course increase Crown court sitting days.

Constitution, Democracy and Rights Commission

8. **Rosie Duffield** (Canterbury) (Lab): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the criteria for determining the composition of the Constitution, Democracy and Rights Commission. [900158]

18. **Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the appointment of a Constitution, Democracy and Rights Commission. [900169]

23. **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the appointment of a Constitution, Democracy and Rights Commission. [900174]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Robert Buckland): Discussions with Cabinet colleagues are at an early stage, but I can say that we want a commission or similar body to examine the issues and

make recommendations that restore people's trust in our democracy and the institutions that underpin it. No decisions have been made yet on the appointment of such a body, its scope or composition. I will update the House in due course.

Rosie Duffield: A key ongoing concern for public law practitioners remains the accountability of constitutional processes and safeguards. To what extent will the commission include consultation with relevant external professions, such as the legal profession, and will they be invited to have substantial input and proper scrutiny?

Robert Buckland: The hon. Lady asks a very proper question. Indeed, I would envisage the body taking evidence from third parties, outside organisations and civic society more generally to provide a thorough evidence base before any recommendations are made.

Margaret Ferrier: May I take this opportunity to welcome you to your place, Mr Speaker?

Following the Prorogation case, both the Prime Minister and the Attorney General have hinted that the judicial appointment process might change. Will the Justice Secretary confirm whether that will be considered by the commission?

Robert Buckland: The commission will look at a range of issues. I think I have made my position about the independence of the judiciary and the integrity of the appointments process very clear. It is nobody's wish, I think on either side of this House, to see political influence being brought to bear on the appointment of judges. It is important to remember that we do not have a constitutional court, or a US-style system in this country and it is not something I would wish to see replicated here.

Martyn Day: It has been reported that the commission is expected to look at prerogative powers. Currently their use can be challenged in the courts, which led to the ruling against the Prime Minister's Prorogation of Parliament. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that it is imperative that the courts still have jurisdiction to look at prerogative powers?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising an important issue. After the stresses and strains we have all seen the constitution being put under as a result of the tumultuous events of the past few years, it would be wrong of the Government not to pause, take stock and look at the general constitutional position through the lens of the public because it is all about public confidence and the confidence the public have in this place being the ultimate arbiter of our democracy, which is key. But we will take time and do it in a measured way. I very much hope and expect that the commission will come up with some evidence-based solutions.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): Members have every right to be concerned about what the Government are up to with the commission, given their previous noises about human rights, judicial appointments, prerogative powers, judicial review and much, much more. Those concerns are shared not just among Members, but across civil

society and beyond. Does the Secretary of State agree that in any such commission Scotland's perspective and experiences must be properly and independently represented, and that any changes proposed to the competences of the Scottish Government and Parliament must have the consent of those institutions?

Robert Buckland: I am very much aware of the important devolution aspect of this issue. It is about more than devolution, of course—the Scottish legal and judicial system was never devolved because it was always separate, and even when we did not have a Scottish Parliament, it had a separate legislative framework that was legislated for in this House. I fully understand the balance that needs to be kept and I take on board the hon. Member's comments.

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): It is a pleasure to see you back in the Chair in this Parliament, Mr Speaker. I very much welcome what the Lord Chancellor said about the independence of the judiciary. That is fundamental to this country's international reputation and we should set at rest any suggestion that that should ever be compromised. Given the wide-ranging nature of the commission, will he also consider that it may be beneficial to have, serving as members of the commission, experienced former members of the judiciary who have the integrity and independence of thought that would increase public respect and regard for the outcome that we all wish to see?

Robert Buckland: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his recent honour, which is thoroughly deserved after a lifetime in public service, both here and in other elected assemblies. His suggestions are well made. I am already having a number of discussions with ministerial colleagues and thinking very deeply about the range of expertise and individuals that we need, and the diversity of that panel, so that we make sure that the commission, or the committee, is in the best possible place to gather evidence and come up with measured, sensible reforms.

Rapes Reported to the Police: Number of Suspects Charged

9. **Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab):** What plans his Department has to reduce the disparity between the number of rapes reported to the police and the number of suspects charged with that offence. [900159]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Chris Philp): The hon. Member is right to raise this issue. It is extremely serious and, frankly, far too few reported cases are being progressed into the criminal justice system, so I entirely agree with and accept the premise of her question. The Government are taking action in this area. The extra 20,000 police officers will greatly help to get rape victims through the system and to get their cases into court. I referenced earlier the extra £85 million for the Crown Prosecution Service. A great deal of that will be targeted towards helping to progress those often very complicated rape cases. As recently as last September, the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), provided an extra £5 million of funding for rape centres and ISVAs—independent

sexual violence advisers—because one of the issues is rape victims dropping out of the process before the case reaches court. I hope that in the upcoming Budget and spending review, there is more we can do.

Rachel Reeves: In West Yorkshire, the number of rapes reported increased by 25% last year, but just 4.4% of those cases resulted in someone being charged. The same is true across the country, so what are the Government doing to ensure that the criminal justice system is properly resourced and that it does not let down victims and add to the trauma that they have already experienced?

Chris Philp: As I said, we are putting 20,000 extra officers into the system and £85 million into the CPS, and we are increasing expenditure on rape centres and ISVAs, although I am sure that in those areas, there is more we can do. There is also a review urgently under way to see what further steps we can take, but I believe that the actions that I have outlined, which are taking place as we speak, will move us back in a happier direction.

Court Proceedings: Proportion Covered by Court Reporters

10. **Mr John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con):** What recent estimate he has made of the proportion of court proceedings covered by court reporters. [900160]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Chris Philp): We at the Ministry of Justice do not track or hold data on the number of reporters who report on court proceedings, but I am sad to say that anecdotal evidence suggests that in line with the general decline in local reporting, the reporting of local courts will have declined as well. When my right hon. Friend was Secretary of State at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, he was instrumental in making sure, at the BBC's charter renewal, that the local democracy reporting scheme provided £8 million a year to get local reporters into the courts. I congratulate him on that step and hope that there is more we can do along those lines in future.

Mr Whittingdale: I thank my hon. Friend, and I thank the Minister of State, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer), for the work that she has done in this area. Does he share my view of how important it is that court proceedings are properly reported by trained journalists so that justice can be seen to be done? Will he continue to work with the Society of Editors, the News Media Association and others to see what further measures can be taken to achieve that?

Chris Philp: I strongly concur and can certainly give my right hon. Friend the commitment he asks for. Certainly from the perspective of Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service, staff are given training to facilitate access by journalists, and the Ministry is currently giving very active and relatively imminent consideration to ways of making sure that court decisions and proceedings are brought more directly to the public.

Human Rights Framework: Reform

11. **Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on reforming the UK's human rights framework. [900161]

20. **Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on reforming the UK's human rights framework. [900171]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Robert Buckland): I have been discussing this issue with my Cabinet colleagues and will continue to do so. The United Kingdom is committed to protecting and respecting human rights and will continue to champion them both here and abroad. As set out in our manifesto, after Brexit we need to look at the broader aspects of our constitution, including the balance between the rights of individuals and effective government.

Angela Crawley: I welcome you to your place, Mr Speaker.

Before the general election, the Conservative manifesto promised to update the Human Rights Act 1998. Since its introduction, the Act has successfully protected countless citizens across the UK from human rights abuses, so can the Secretary of State tell me which specific aspects of the Act need updating?

Robert Buckland: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave in the context of the constitutional commission. Updating Acts is something we do regularly in this place. The Human Rights Act is now just over 20 years old. Aspects of its operation have worked very well; others deserve a further look—for example, the operation of the margin of appreciation and how Strasbourg case law is adhered to. All those issues are relevant and material to the work of the commission.

Deidre Brock: Christine Bell, professor of constitutional law at Edinburgh Law School, has said that “any unilateral repeal of the HRA by Westminster would... violate the Sewel Convention”.

Does the Secretary of State agree? If not, why not?

Robert Buckland: The hon. Lady will remember that our manifesto talked about updating the Act, not repealing it, so her question is literally academic.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): The Human Rights Act is also part of the constitutional backbone of devolution, so again will the Secretary of State agree that there should be no change to that Act, given all its implications for devolved competences, without the express agreement of the Scottish Parliament and Government? Otherwise, what sort of democracy are we living in if one Parliament can change the competences of another with such ease and little respect?

Robert Buckland: As I said to the hon. Gentleman in a previous answer, I am in the spirit of working constructively with a fellow Parliament and fellow parliamentarians. I want to ensure a situation where the

whole of the United Kingdom can benefit from improvements and rebalancing, and that applies equally to the people of Scotland. I hold out an olive branch to him today. I want us to work together on these issues. We can achieve far more working together than by pursuing pointless independence referendums.

Topical Questions

T1. [900175] **Mr Shailesh Vara** (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Robert Buckland): Prison officers are some of our finest public servants, and I have had the honour and pleasure of meeting many of them, not just as a Minister, but as a practising member of the Bar. The incident at HMP Whitemoor was quickly resolved thanks to the bravery and professionalism of the staff who intervened. Their courage in protecting others cannot be overstated. HMP Liverpool is driving prison officer safety through an increased focus on key work as part of our offender management in custody investment, through a new drugs strategy and through the improved use of data to understand the reasons for violence, but we recognise that more needs to be done, which is why we are introducing PAVA, a synthetic pepper spray, to protect staff from incidents of serious violence or where they are in imminent or perceived risk of serious violence.

Mr Vara: Would my right hon. and learned Friend kindly update the House on the ambitious reform programme by Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service?

Robert Buckland: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work when he was courts Minister. As he knows, the programme that he helped to spearhead is already improving both access to justice and efficiency. More than 300,000 people have now used new online services established to enhance access, such as to make civil money claims, to apply for divorce or to make a plea to low-level criminal offences. Last year alone, more than 65,000 civil money claims were made online, with nine out of 10 users saying they were satisfied or very satisfied with the service.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): I, too, welcome you to your place, Mr Speaker. Let me also align myself with the comments of both the Secretary of State and the shadow Secretary of State about staff at HMP Whitemoor.

Our probation service should keep us all safe, but this morning another damning report said that understaffing in a national probation service that is dealing with the most serious offenders is putting public safety at risk. Those shortages leave staff overworked and unable to conduct due diligence, force them to take on too many cases, and are a direct consequence of the Government's decision to break up the probation service, so will the Minister commit herself to returning staffing across the service to safe levels in order to undo the serious damage they have caused?

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Lucy Frazer): I welcome this morning's report from the inspectorate of probation. Its publication is timely,

given the changes that we are making to create a more unified probation service. That transition has already taken place in Wales.

Having read the report, I am pleased to note that it says that leadership is good throughout the service. Of course we need to recruit more probation officers, and we are doing that—800 officers who are currently being trained will come on board imminently—but we also recognise that as we recruit more police officers, we need to recruit more prison and probation officers as well, and we are taking steps to do so.

T4. [900178] **Stephen McPartland** (Stevenage) (Con): I am delighted that Finn's law has received Royal Assent, but can the Minister update us on when the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill, also known as Finn's law part 2, will return to the House?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Chris Philp): I thank my hon. Friend for his tireless campaigning on animal welfare. I am, of course, delighted that Finn's law reached the statute book last year, and increasing the maximum sentence for animal cruelty from six months to five years is a manifesto commitment which we intend to deliver as quickly as possible. It builds on the fact that—I am proud to say—this country has among the world's best animal welfare provisions, including a tough ivory ban, CCTV in slaughterhouses, and a ban on the commercial third-party sale of puppies and kittens.

T2. [900176] **Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): According to the most recent figures, tens of thousands of people still have not had their employment tribunal fees refunded, although the Supreme Court declared them unlawful two and a half years ago. I really do not understand why it is taking so long. Names, addresses and contact details must be submitted in the case of all tribunal claims. Will the Minister please explain what the problem is?

Chris Philp: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. Following the 2017 Unison case, employment tribunal fees are due to be refunded. The programme is under way, and many tens of thousands of fees have already been refunded. The hon. Gentleman can rest assured that the Ministry of Justice is looking carefully at the position to ensure that everyone who is eligible for a refund does indeed receive one.

T5. [900179] **Mr Gareth Bacon** (Orpington) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the successful unification of offender supervision services in Wales under the national probation service is a positive change that will benefit victims and the wider public?

Lucy Frazer: My hon. Friend—whom I welcome to his place—is absolutely right. We have looked at the system and recognised that it could be improved, and we have made those changes in Wales, where the national probation service has taken responsibility for supervising all offenders. I look forward very much to visiting Wales on Thursday to see how those changes have been implemented. I understand that the transition has proceeded very smoothly, and I look forward to speaking to staff there in order to ensure that when the same transition takes place in England, it too will proceed smoothly.

T3. [900177] **Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): For some weird, inexplicable reason, the Government have a dangerous and flawed obsession with handing huge contracts to private firms to run our prisons. I appreciate that the Secretary of State may not heed my call for prisons to be returned to public ownership, but will he at the very least implement a moratorium on private prisons until an independent review has ascertained whether they are indeed more violent?

Robert Buckland: I listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman has said, and I have to say, with respect to him, that the characterisation of “public good, private bad”—or, indeed, vice versa—is wrong. There are plenty of examples of privately run prisons that are more than passing muster with the inspectorate, and are doing an excellent job. I have always believed in a mixed approach, and I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that will continue. I will base my decision on hard evidence rather than on blind ideology in which, I am afraid, his Front Benchers have indulged far too much in recent years.

T6. [900180] **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): One of the ways of preventing people leaving prison from reoffending is to ensure that they have a secure roof over their head when they leave. Under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, prison governors have a statutory duty to ensure that those leaving prison do indeed have that secure home. Will my right hon. Friend update the House on the progress being made on ensuring that prison governors carry out their statutory duty?

Lucy Frazer: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work that he did on the Homelessness Reduction Act, which has been very effective. I am pleased to be able to tell him that the latest statistics show that more than a quarter of the referrals to local authorities under the duty to refer were made by either prison or probation services. However, we need to work more broadly as well to ensure that when offenders come out of prison they have somewhere to go. We have a pilot with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government that involves a two-year wraparound service. When an ex-offender comes out, they are helped to find a home and to understand the duties of their tenancy so that they can stay in their home and manage it over the two-year period.

T7. [900182] **Ian Byrne** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab): Vauxhall Law Centre in Liverpool is one of only 42 law centres still in existence. It enables working-class people to defend their fundamental right of access to justice, a right that is currently under attack from Government cuts. What urgent action are the Government taking to guarantee the future of law centres in Liverpool and across the country?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Wendy Morton): I welcome the new Member to his place on the Opposition Benches. We recognise the valuable work that law centres do in our local communities around the country, and we support them through grant funding and legal aid contracts. In two of the early visits that I made when I went into the Ministry of Justice, I visited the law centre in Southwark and another in south-west London to gain a deeper understanding

of the tremendous work they do. He can rest assured that we support our law centres and the work they do, to ensure that the people who need support can receive it.

T9. [900184] **Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I am sure that the Government believe in leading by example and would want to emulate, and indeed go further than, companies such as Halfords, Greggs and Timpson in employing ex-offenders. Since the Government banned the box, what increase in the employment of ex-offenders has there been across Government and the wider public sector?

Robert Buckland: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his work both as a Minister in this Department and as a campaigner on this issue. I share his approach to these issues. Since we launched the going forward into employment scheme in January 2018, we have recruited 29 ex-offenders who are currently in post in civil service roles, with a further 20 due to start in post shortly. I commend the work being done on Ban the Box, the private sector community initiative, which I actively support.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): When the Prime Minister was Mayor of London, the number of stop and searches steadily declined, but they became more effective and intelligence-led. As a result, the arrest rate significantly increased. Now that the Prime Minister has decided to increase stop and search, the reverse has happened. They are less intelligence-led, and arrest rates are declining. Does the Secretary of State agree with me and with the all-party parliamentary group on knife crime that stop and search is an important tool, but it is not the only answer, and that a long-term public health approach that puts prevention at the heart of policing is the way to tackle knife crime?

Chris Philp: I agree that stop and search is a vital part of our fight against knife crime. When the use of stop and search was dramatically reduced between about 2014 and 2018, we saw a reduction in the number of convictions and, shortly afterwards, an increase in the number of offences. Leading police and crime commissioners, including Jane Kennedy, the former Labour MP and Minister who is now the police and crime commissioner in Merseyside, have said that the

fair and effective use of stop and search remains one of the most powerful tools that the police have at their disposal. With body-worn cameras now in use, some of the issues to do with communities feeling disrespected have been largely addressed. However, this is only part of the battle against knife crime, as the hon. Lady says, and I pay tribute to her work as chair of the knife crime APPG. Preventive work and work in schools are important as well.

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): Do Ministers agree that the crime of burglary has devastating effects on those who have been burgled? Will they increase the sentences available for people who have committed that offence?

Robert Buckland: My hon. Friend is right to remind us that burglary is a crime not just against property, but against the wellbeing of people whose homes are violated. He will be glad to know that average sentences for burglary have increased over the years from an average of 21 months to 28 months. I will have a further conversation with him about this, but I assure him that sentences are going in the right direction when it comes to dwelling house burglaries.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): Reading jail is a hugely important historical site. It is the burial place of King Henry I of England and also where Oscar Wilde was incarcerated. The building is currently up for sale by the Ministry of Justice. Will the Secretary of State or the prisons Minister agree to meet me before any decision is made on the sale and also to meet local campaigners and representatives?

Lucy Frazer: I am pleased to have already spoken to the hon. Gentleman and my right hon. Friend the Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma) about this matter. As the hon. Gentleman knows, bids are already in, and they are commercially sensitive. If it is appropriate for me to meet him, I will be happy to do so, together with his neighbour.

Mr Speaker: Before we move on, I advise the House that we will have 45 minutes for the urgent question and 45 minutes for the statement, so please let us help each other out.

Flybe

12.31 pm

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what support has been made available to Flybe, its passengers, and the regional airports that facilitate many of its routes, and whether he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Paul Maynard): I thank my right hon. Friend for raising this matter. She is a strong advocate for her local airport.

Let me stress that Flybe remains a going concern. Flights continue as scheduled, and passengers should continue to go to the airport as usual. I must also emphasise that regional air carriers and airports are vital to the Government, playing a key role in providing connectivity between communities, regions and nations across the United Kingdom.

The speculation surrounding Flybe relates to commercial matters. The Government do not comment on the financial affairs of or speculation surrounding private companies. We are working hard, but there are commercial limits on what a Government can do to rescue any firm.

Be in no doubt, however, that we understand Flybe's important role in delivering connectivity across the entire United Kingdom. This Government are committed to ensuring that the country has the regional connectivity that it needs. That is part of our agenda of uniting and levelling up the whole country. We do not have good enough infrastructure in many areas, and people do not feel they have a chance to get to the opportunity areas with high-skilled and high-paid jobs. That is what this Government are addressing now.

I hope the House will appreciate that I regret that I am not able to go into further detail at this stage, but I will update the House further when it is appropriate to do so.

Caroline Nokes: Flybe is, as the Minister said, an important regional airline, serving the UK market for business and leisure travel. I must confess from the outset that Southampton airport sits on the boundary between my constituency of Romsey and Southampton North and the Eastleigh constituency, but it employs many of my constituents and, of course, serves the much wider region. It is a crucial part of Hampshire's connectivity, located adjacent to the mainline to London Waterloo and the M27 motorway, and it serves the cruise terminal at Southampton. It is in every sense a transport hub for the south-east, and about 90% of flights out of Southampton are run by Flybe.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is working hard on this issue, for which I sincerely thank him. He has been diligent in keeping me updated and has been in close contact with colleagues across the country who believe that the Government need to find a practical and pragmatic solution to the current reported difficulties, as indeed I do. It is a sensitive time for the company, but my questions today are not criticisms. We are seeking reassurance from the Government that solutions can be found.

I welcomed the comments from my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister this morning about regional connectivity. He specifically referenced Northern Ireland, and Southampton airport has a thriving route in and out of Belfast, not to mention Glasgow and Edinburgh, with onward routes to Aberdeen. It is a hub that serves the whole United Kingdom.

I do not wish to put the Minister in a corner, but I hope that he may be able to expand a little on what might be achieved with regard to air passenger duty, which has long been a concern to airlines and airport operators. We leave the European Union at the end of this month, which might give us some opportunity to consider the freedoms that there could be from state aid rules. I do not expect the Minister to make any sweeping announcements from the Dispatch Box, but I hope he and his officials are closely considering it.

What powers does the Minister have to protect the key strategic routes operated by Flybe and, of course, to protect its staff? Flybe employs 200 people at Southampton, and the airport employs some 900 people. A far wider supply chain relies on a thriving regional airport with a functioning operator.

We have an opportunity to use every lever of government to make sure that regional connectivity is maintained to ensure that businesses can operate smoothly and that people can move around the country seamlessly. I seek reassurance from my hon. Friend that he is pulling all those levers.

Paul Maynard: I thank my right hon. Friend once again for working hard on behalf of Southampton airport. I am acutely conscious of the fact that some 94% of Southampton's passengers are Flybe passengers, and she makes an important series of points about the airport's importance to her region. Indeed, I gather the airport is also important to inbound tourism.

My right hon. Friend tries to tempt me on to the topic of APD. It may help the House if I make it clear that Transport Ministers never comment on air passenger duty, which is a matter for the Treasury, and I do not intend to change that now. I will not be making any comments on air passenger duty.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) on securing this important urgent question. It is agreed on both sides of the House that Flybe, a great British brand, is a hugely important regional airline that provides a vital lifeline and connectivity for many of our communities. News of its difficulties will worry workers and passengers alike.

There is clearly a case for Government intervention, and I trust the Government will learn the lessons from their inept response to the Thomas Cook collapse, which saw other nation states being prepared to step in while this Government sat on their hands and contacted the company only after it was too late. We cannot have a repeat of that debacle. Flybe's workers and passengers deserve better.

What restructuring plan has been agreed as part of the Government's support, and what discussions is the Secretary of State having with the trade unions Unite and the British Airline Pilots Association? Will the Minister and the Secretary of State commit to ensuring those unions are fully engaged in the process?

[*Andy McDonald*]

The Government must avoid simply feathering the nests of the new consortium, including Virgin Atlantic and the Stobart group. Surely they knew the scale of the financial challenges facing them when they acquired the business. What was known to the new owners at the time of their acquisition? Prior to the acquisition, did they seek assurances on Government assistance and an indication of the Government's intentions for APD? What discussions is the Minister having with the industry about transitioning to greater sustainability, including electric flights, and about whether current plans are compatible with reducing emissions?

Slashing air passenger duty across the board would make a mockery of the Government's supposed commitment to climate emissions. It would also benefit a wealthy minority. Some 70% of UK flights are made by a wealthy 15% of the population, with the great majority of people not flying at all. Aviation is set to be the biggest source of emissions by 2050, with Ministers planning for demand to double.

The Government's own advisory body on climate change has said that the UK is "way off track" to meet its climate change targets. Rather than proposing to slash aviation tax, will the Minister not listen to the recommendation of the Committee on Climate Change for a frequent flyer levy that would remove people who fly just once a year from taxation while making wealthy frequent flyers pay more?

I encourage the Minister to do all he can to support Flybe and its workforce, and to protect passengers, but can he assure the House that his Government will simultaneously and fully accept their responsibility to protect the planet?

Paul Maynard: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, particularly as we agree on the importance of Flybe to the country. The Government are working hard to find what they can do to support the company. I cannot and will not provide a running commentary on those discussions. He will note that the Secretary of State is not here to answer the urgent question, as he is having discussions in Whitehall and is working hard on behalf of the airline.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the environmental aspects. Domestic aviation constitutes 4% of UK aviation's overall emissions. He mentioned the advice of the Committee on Climate Change, which it gave to us just before the election, and we are looking forward to consulting on it imminently. In addition, the transport decarbonisation plan is coming soon.

We are acutely conscious of the fact that aviation has an important role to play in meeting our net zero target by 2050, and I am working very hard on finding the answers to those questions.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Thank you for granting this urgent question, Mr Speaker, which I know is important to many of us. I thank the Minister for his constructive engagement with me and many other colleagues on this matter.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of Flybe to Cornwall Airport Newquay and the wider Cornish economy. Contrary to the characterisation from the Opposition Front Bencher, it is many ordinary working

people and small businesses in Cornwall that rely on the connection that Flybe provides, both across the whole country and, through Heathrow, internationally. May I therefore urge the Minister to do all he can to ensure that Flybe is able to continue operating? If he is able to use his influence to cut APD, he will have my full support in doing so. Will he confirm that the public service obligation route to Heathrow is not dependent on a particular airline and could be easily transferred should the worst happen to Flybe?

Paul Maynard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. As he will know, some 74% of Newquay's passengers use Flybe, so Newquay is also highly dependent on this airline, not least for a lot of its inbound tourism. He commented on the PSO flights. We will continue to work with the county council in Cornwall, the joint funder of those flights, to make sure that that service continues into the future.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): First, may I ask what impact assessment has been undertaken on the effect of losing connectivity between Scotland and various UK regions if Flybe does go down? How many of these routes have been assessed as lifeline routes? What assessment have his Government made of the Flybe Heathrow slots if Flybe does not operate and of what that would mean for future connectivity? We know that Flybe operates outwith ATOL—the air travel organiser's licence scheme—so what consumer protections are available for customers booking with these types of carriers? What changes do the Government propose to bring in to protect consumers? Where are we on the proposed legislation changes promised after the collapse of Monarch and then Thomas Cook? Given that there was no Government intervention previously, why are they now looking at doing something—we do support Flybe continuing to operate? Is that not firm proof that the Government need a comprehensive plan, rather than reacting with short-term fixes? What additional supports will the UK Government bring forward across the entire sector that they have ignored to date?

Will the Minister confirm that the Government do not ring-fence APD moneys for tackling climate change? What message does talk of delaying revenues or reducing APD send out about the Government's willingness to tackle climate change?

What is the deadline for Government action, because this is going to create further market uncertainty and will hit future bookings for Flybe?

Paul Maynard: Let me start by reinforcing the fact that Flybe remains a going concern; flights continue to take off and land, and passengers should go to the airport.

I very much take the hon. Gentleman's point about the importance of Flybe, not just to the regions of England but to the nation of Scotland and, not least, the oil and gas sector out of Aberdeen—I genuinely understand that. He makes an observation about PSO flights, both within Scotland and to London. We are looking at PSO flights policy more widely and whether we need to consider further options.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned slots at Heathrow, and he will be aware that slots are a matter for the independent ACL—Airport Coordination Limited—body. No decisions have been taken on the use of further slots at Heathrow in this regard.

The hon. Gentleman mentions protection for consumers. Those who are on a package are covered by ATOL, but, as he will know, there is separate travel insurance and those who pay by credit card will have consumer protections. We continue to review consumer protection more widely within the travel sector. He will also know that in the Queen's Speech we announced the airline insolvency Bill, which will come forward shortly.

Once again, I reiterate that I cannot offer the running commentary the hon. Gentleman looks for on what is occurring within Government.

Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con): First, let me thank the Minister for keeping me informed of developments as they have gone on and reassure him that, despite the shadow Secretary of State's characterisation, it is not the richest 15% of people in my constituency who use this vital service. Some 94% of flights out of Southampton are operated by Flybe, meaning that any loss of service will have a detrimental impact on the local economy and jobs in my constituency. Given this Government's pledge to back prosperity across the whole United Kingdom, will he reassure me that he will do anything and everything necessary to keep this airline afloat for my constituents and local jobs in Eastleigh?

Paul Maynard: I reassure my hon. Friend that we are working hard on behalf of Flybe and Southampton airport to find solutions wherever we can. He is right to point out the importance of improving regional connectivity across all modes, as the Prime Minister said today.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): There is something of a pattern developing. We have had the collapse of Monarch and of Thomas Cook, and now the potential collapse of Flybe. When, in the last Parliament, the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee took evidence on the collapse of Thomas Cook, the evidence we heard from the business and the trade unions was the same; they said that the Government were asleep at the wheel. What lessons have the Government learned from that collapse? What are they doing to ensure that passengers are protected, that critical routes that connect regional towns and cities are supported and that the taxpayer does not end up footing the bill for another corporate failure?

Paul Maynard: I hear what the hon. Lady says. I am sure she knows that across Europe as a whole the airline sector is a highly volatile market. I do not accept her comparison at all. We continue to work hard and I have made comments already about public service obligation flights.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): The Flybe crisis—and it is a crisis—could soon become a major disruption for many of my constituents, with half term looming. There is clearly a short-term issue here that I know Ministers are grappling with; I wish them well and they have my support. There is an uneven playing field around APD and regulations on regional airlines and airports, and that has without doubt contributed to Flybe's current predicament. Longer term, is there any appetite within Government to address that and the crippling impact it is having on the regional connectivity that the Minister and the Prime Minister have rightly referred to?

Paul Maynard: I recognise what my hon. Friend says. Our network of regional airfields is crucial to our regional connectivity. I am acutely conscious of that and I am looking at all policy options.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Over the coming months it will become ever more apparent that tackling the climate emergency means rapid changes to high-carbon sectors and that aviation must decrease, not increase. Instead of bailing out polluting companies every time there is a crisis, and, in this instance, doing so in a way that is going to increase emissions, does the Minister agree that the Government should instead be developing just transition plans for high-carbon industries, including retraining workers in new sustainable jobs, involving unions and local communities, and, in this case, enhancing rail connectivity?

Paul Maynard: I think the hon. Lady overlooks what we seek to do to ensure that aviation plays its role in reaching net zero by 2050. As I have said, we will consult on our response to the Committee on Climate Change. The Minister with responsibility for future transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), is working hard looking at how to diversify the plane market, and we are bringing forward a transport decarbonisation plan. In the Department, we are informed with good ideas about how we can decarbonise transport.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): As my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) ably said, the links between London and Cornwall are vital to many of our constituents, not just in his constituency but across Cornwall. Those links are important for the many small businesses that access contracts and come to London for business meetings, but also for net inbound tourism when people fly in from other countries to visit London and come down to Cornwall for a few days' break. I ask the Minister to do all he can to ensure that the link remains.

Paul Maynard: My hon. Friend is quite right to point out the importance of the links between Newquay and London, not least for tourism. That is why we set out the public service obligation, and it is why we will carry on working with the county council to ensure its continuation.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): The new owners of Flybe got the airline for a song, destroying shareholder value. They must not be allowed to profit from the public sector through subsidy for their failure. The Minister has made clear his position on APD—he will not comment—but does he recognise that that tax is damaging to the economy and costs jobs? Does he recognise that reports given to the Department for Transport and the Treasury show that abolishing air passenger duty would lead to an increase in tax income and have a beneficial impact on the economy and jobs? Will he look at those reports?

Paul Maynard: I am certain that the Treasury has heard the hon. Gentleman's comments loud and clear.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Many airlines that face these types of difficulties would get more certainty and would be more able to get through them if they were allowed to continue to operate while

[*Huw Merriman*]

in administration. Airlines in the States have done just that, and have returned and are now succeeding. Will the Government look into that type of reform when they press on with the insolvency review, which I hope will happen in the early part of this Parliament?

Paul Maynard: I am sure my hon. Friend will welcome the airline insolvency Bill and the work going on, in the light of the Green Paper, to improve consumer protection across the airline sector as a whole.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Many of my constituents work at or travel from Cardiff airport in the Vale of Glamorgan. They have already been hit by the collapse of Thomas Cook and, indeed, by Flybe's reductions, the removal of its base—with the loss of 60 jobs last year—and its cutback of routes. Will the Minister explain whether he or the Secretary of State have had conversations directly with the Welsh Government, who are obviously crucial in terms of Cardiff airport's viability going forward?

Paul Maynard: I am more than aware that some 30% of Cardiff's passengers stem from Flybe. I reassure the hon. Gentleman that the Department and the Civil Aviation Authority are in regular touch with all the devolved Administrations to discuss the ramifications.

Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con): I apologise for my raspy tones because of a recent cold. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) on securing the question.

Flybe is based in my beautiful constituency of East Devon and employs around 2,000 people nationwide, contributing a great deal to our local economy and providing essential transport links. Does the Minister agree that it is wrong to politicise the situation with Flybe, as Opposition Members have managed to do so far, and that work should be done to ensure that this vital airline continues to serve the south-west and beyond?

Paul Maynard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. He is right to observe the importance of Flybe in his constituency. I am very much aware that, wherever possible, we should work on a cross-party basis when faced with immediate challenges.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): The Minister referred to the airline insolvency Bill; will he confirm when that legislation will be brought forward? Many Members have spelled out the importance of their regional airports and domestic airlines for local economies, but what assessment has the Minister made of the future role of domestic aviation in our transport networks? How will that fit with the Department's decarbonisation plan?

Paul Maynard: On both those questions, I am afraid the answer is "Wait and see." We are looking to bring forward the airline insolvency Bill as soon as we can. We recognise its importance, but it is a complex policy area and there is no silver bullet, so when we bring it forward it has to be right. On the wider issue of how decarbonisation fits in and how aviation can play a role,

that will be covered in the transport decarbonisation plan. I recognise that there are trade-offs to be made; we have to have a balanced approach.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) on securing the urgent question and thank the Minister for his response.

The routes that Flybe operates out of Aberdeen International airport are vital to jobs and the local economy in West Aberdeenshire, connecting the energy capital of Europe, which is Aberdeen, to other energy hubs such as Teesside and Humberside. What work is being done in the Department to make sure that these economically vital routes are protected in future?

Paul Maynard: My hon. Friend is right to observe, as I did earlier, the importance of these services to the oil and gas sector in particular. The Department and the CAA as a whole are examining the economic impact of any changes that may occur across all our regional airports, but our focus is on working hard to ensure that we get the right result.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I entirely accept the importance of regional airports to jobs—Bristol airport is on my doorstep and I was a director of London Luton airport in my days as a councillor in Luton—but the fact that the Minister can come to the House to answer an urgent question about domestic flights without mentioning decarbonisation and climate change once just shows—[*Interruption.*] He has mentioned them in response to questions but did not mention them in his initial response. He has been prompted to do that. It is not enough to kick it into the long grass and say, "This is something we're going to deal with in the future." Decarbonisation and climate change need to be factored into the Minister's response to the Flybe emergency and APD now.

Paul Maynard: I have mentioned decarbonisation at least three times. I tried to obey Mr Speaker's instruction to keep my opening statement brief. I entirely recognise the importance of decarbonisation, and a significant amount of work is occurring in the Department, between two Ministers. I ask the hon. Lady to wait to see the documents when they are produced.

Gary Sambrook (Birmingham, Northfield) (Con): Last year, 30% of all flights from Birmingham airport were operated by Flybe, and a lot of employees of the airline and the airport will be very worried about the current situation. Can the Minister reassure me and my constituents that he and the Government are doing everything practically possible that they can do in talks with Flybe to protect jobs?

Paul Maynard: I recognise the importance of Flybe to Birmingham airport, one of our key national airports. The Government are working hard, as I keep reiterating. We are certainly doing our best.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): If we are serious about tackling our carbon emissions, we must ensure that rail is an attractive and viable alternative to air travel, certainly domestically. In places where this is not

possible—such as the Isle of Man, for obvious reasons—we must ensure that domestic flights in the UK are green and sustainable. For example, we should use sustainable alternatives to kerosene and look at electric low-carbon planes, as have been trialled in Orkney and Shetland. What has the Minister done specifically to ensure that UK domestic flights are as friendly as possible to the environment?

Paul Maynard: As I said earlier, the Minister of State, Department for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), is working on looking at alternative sources of fuel and power. The hon. Lady pointed out the example in Orkney; that is what we are working on for the transport decarbonisation plan, which will come forth shortly.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I welcome the Minister's comments about the impact on smaller regional airports such as Humberside airport, which is based in my Cleethorpes constituency. The impact on the offshore industries and the links to Aberdeen have already been drawn to his attention, but will he also take into account the fact that Flybe works in partnership with other airlines, such as Eastern Airways, which is based in Humberside, and the possible impact of the knock-on effect?

Paul Maynard: My hon. Friend temps me to go into a great, lengthy answer about franchising arrangements with Flybe, which I am trying not to do, but I very much hear his point and I regularly wade into the detail of that.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): The Minister went to school a stone's throw from Manchester airport in my constituency, but is the voice of northern England being heard? After the Thomas Cook debacle, 2.8 million passengers were taken out of capacity. If this Flybe collapse happens, that will affect 1.8 million passengers out of Manchester airport. I know that people are worried about climate change, but APD was a tax devised by London civil servants in Whitehall cooling towers that crippled the growth of regional airports throughout our country, and we are paying the price for that.

Paul Maynard: The hon. Gentleman is always a good defender of Manchester airport—I will grant him that. As he will know, ACL determines slot allocation at Manchester. The Thomas Cook slots have already been reallocated among easyJet and Jet2. ACL has the matter in hand. I recognise Manchester's interest in the process.

Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con): Regional connectivity is at the heart of the Government's agenda, and the impact of Flybe collapsing on its partnerships with other airlines would be quite severe. Can the Minister provide reassurance that the Government will support Flybe until the airline insolvency legislation has come into force?

Paul Maynard: We are continuing to work hard in Government to give all the support that we can at this stage. I cannot comment further on exactly what is occurring, but I very much hear my hon. Friend's plea.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): Teesside International airport tripled its losses to nearly £6 million under the stewardship of the Tees Valley Mayor last year—after he had paid tens of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money for it. Flybe is one of the few airlines to provide flights from the airport—44% of them—and is critical to the airport's future and the Mayor's plans. The Government failed to intervene when SSI went bust, they refused to provide Sirius Minerals with a loan guarantee to unlock international investment, and they are doing nothing to support Hitachi, which is making 250 people redundant. Are the Government really prepared to continue to fail the Tees valley and to see Flybe collapse, taking regional airports such as Teesside with it?

Paul Maynard: The hon. Member will not be surprised to hear that I have great confidence in Mayor Houchen's stewardship of both—

Alex Cunningham: It's a £6 million loss!

Paul Maynard: I am not going to get stuck into that. The hon. Member knows that elections are coming and I know that elections are coming—I know what he is up to.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): Flybe flies from Leeds Bradford airport in West Yorkshire to the likes of Newquay, Southampton and Belfast. Passengers have very little alternative until we see major investment in regional and cross-country rail. Does the Minister agree that until that happens, we need to keep investing in our regional infrastructure, and we also need to crack on with trans-Pennine rail?

Paul Maynard: My hon. Friend makes an incredibly important point. When we consider aviation, it is not just about aviation; it is also about links across other modes of transport. He will know that I am the Minister responsible for Northern Powerhouse Rail so I take a very close interest in it, and I am always happy to discuss it with him.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Further to the question from the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), have the British Government received any direct representations from the Welsh Government following the news this morning?

Paul Maynard: I am not aware of any representations received.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Following the Monarch and Thomas Cook debacles, what lessons has the Minister learned and which of them will he apply to the situation with Flybe?

Paul Maynard: I would caution that the cases are not as similar as some might think. I am not going to offer a running commentary, but the Department works hard in collaboration with the CAA to monitor all airlines that operate from this country.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): Of course the Government should intervene to safeguard people's livelihoods and the economy around the country, but

[Bill Esterson]

on a day on which we have heard about yet another increase in global ocean temperatures, when we know that parts of Australia are burning to a crisp, and when the Government are on target to hit net zero in 2099, not 2050, is it right that a subsidy that supports profitable and successful airlines should encourage and increase air travel, not result in the reductions that are essential if we are to address our commitments to reducing the effects of climate change?

Paul Maynard: The hon. Gentleman may have heard my answers, but I will try again. I am working hard with the Minister of State, Department for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk, to make the UK a global leader in reducing aviation emissions. The hon. Gentleman may want to wait and see our proposals when they are introduced.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Last but certainly not least, the one and only Jim Shannon.

Jim Shannon: Mr Speaker, The Bible says that “the last shall be first, and the first last”.

Mr Speaker: I shall bear that in mind.

Jim Shannon: Absolutely—thank you so much. I thank the Minister for his response. He will know that the success of George Best Belfast City airport is down to the Government policy of connectivity and how important that is. It is also down to the success of Flybe. The Minister is probably aware that it flies from Belfast to 14 destinations in the UK—the largest number of any airline company. Some 3,400 jobs depend on Flybe across the United Kingdom, but 100% of those jobs are important to Northern Ireland. In the light of the new dawn in Northern Ireland—the Assembly is up and running, so responsibility falls on its shoulders—has he had an opportunity to speak to anyone in the Assembly such as the First Minister to ensure that Flybe retains its critical position for Northern Ireland?

Paul Maynard: Naturally I welcome the resumption of Stormont. I note the fact that 68% of passengers at Belfast City are Flybe passengers, so the company is clearly important there. I am in close contact both with the Northern Ireland Office and with the devolved Administration.

Joint Comprehensive Plan Of Action

1.2 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and First Secretary of State (Dominic Raab): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the Iran nuclear agreement known as the joint comprehensive plan of action.

I addressed the House yesterday on wider concerns in relation to Iran’s conduct in the region. The strategic aim for the UK and our international partners remains as it has always been: to de-escalate tensions; to hold Iran to account for its nefarious activities; and to keep the diplomatic door open for the regime to negotiate a peaceful way forward. Iran’s destabilising activity should serve as a reminder to us all of the danger to the region and to the world if it were ever to acquire a nuclear weapon. We cannot let that happen.

With that in mind, today, the E3, consisting of the United Kingdom, France and Germany, has jointly taken action to hold Iran to account for its systematic non-compliance with the JCPOA. As the European parties to the deal, we have written to the EU High Representative, Josep Borrell, in his capacity as co-ordinator of the JCPOA. We have formally triggered the dispute resolution mechanism, thereby referring Iran to the Joint Commission.

Let me set out the pattern of non-compliance by the regime that left us with no credible alternative. Since last May, Iran has step by step reduced its compliance with critical elements of the JCPOA, leaving it a shell of an agreement. On 1 July 2019, the International Atomic Energy Agency reported that Iran had exceeded key limits on low enriched uranium stockpile limits. On 8 July, the IAEA reported that Iran had exceeded its 3.67% enriched uranium production limit. On 5 November, the IAEA confirmed that Iran had crossed its advanced centrifuge research and development limits. On 7 November, the IAEA confirmed that Iran had restarted enrichment activities at the Fordow facility—a clear violation of JCPOA restrictions. On 18 November, the IAEA reported that Iran had exceeded its heavy water limits. On 5 January this year, Iran announced that it would no longer adhere to JCPOA limits on centrifuge numbers.

Each of those actions was serious. Together, they now raise acute concerns about Iran’s nuclear ambitions. Iran’s breakout time—the time that it would need to produce enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon—is now falling, which is an international concern. Time and time again, we have expressed our serious concerns to Iran, and urged it to come back into compliance. Time and time again, in its statements and more importantly through its actions, it has refused, undermining the very integrity of the deal and flouting its international commitments.

Iran’s announcement on 5 January made it clear that it was now effectively refusing to comply with any of the outstanding substantive restrictions that the JCPOA placed on its nuclear programme. On that date, the Iranian Government stated that its

“nuclear program no longer faces any operational restrictions, including enrichment capacity, percentage of enrichment, amount of enriched material, and research and development.”

With regret, the E3 was left with no choice but to refer Iran to the JCPOA’s dispute resolution mechanism. The DRM is the procedure set out in the deal to resolve

disputes between the parties to the agreement. Alongside our partners, we will use this to press Iran to come back into full compliance with its commitments and honour an agreement that is in all our interests.

The European External Action Service will now co-ordinate and convene the DRM process. As a first step, it will call a meeting of the Joint Commission, bringing together all parties to the JCPOA within 15 days. This process has been designed explicitly to allow participants flexibility and full control at each and every stage. Let me make it clear to the House that we are triggering the DRM because Iran has undermined the objective and purpose of the JCPOA, but we do so with a view to bringing Iran back into full compliance. We are triggering the DRM to reinforce the diplomatic track, not to abandon it. For our part, as the United Kingdom we were disappointed that the US withdrew from the JCPOA in May 2018, and we have worked tirelessly with our international partners to preserve the agreement. We have upheld our commitments, lifting economic and financial sanctions on sectors such as banking, oil, shipping and metals. We lifted an asset freeze and travel bans on listed entities and individuals. We have sought to support a legitimate trade relationship with Iran. The UK, France and Germany will remain committed to the deal, and we will approach the DRM in good faith, striving to resolve the dispute and bring Iran back into full compliance with its JCPOA obligations.

As I made clear to the House yesterday, the Government in Iran have a choice. The regime can take steps to de-escalate tensions and adhere to the basic rules of international law or sink deeper and deeper into political and economic isolation. So too, Iran's response to the DRM will be a crucial test of its intentions and good will. We urge Iran to work with us to save the deal. We urge Iran to see this as an opportunity to reassure the world that its nuclear intentions are exclusively peaceful. We urge the Iranian Government to choose an alternative path and engage in diplomacy and negotiation to resolve the full range of its activities that flout international law and destabilise the region. I commend the statement to the House.

1.8 pm

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I thank the Foreign Secretary for advance sight of his statement. For all of us who regard the Iran nuclear deal as one of the crowning diplomatic achievements of this century and a path towards progress with Iran on other issues of concern, it is deeply distressing to see Iran join the United States in openly flouting the terms of the deal, as the Foreign Secretary has described.

I firmly agree with the action that has been taken today alongside our European partners. I welcome every word of the joint statement issued at the weekend by Britain, France and Germany in relation to the JCPOA. I agree with their commitment to uphold the nuclear non-proliferation regime. I agree with their determination to ensure that Iran never develops a nuclear weapon. I agree with their conclusion that the JCPOA plays a key role in those objectives. I would have been stronger in my wording. Although I agree with their "regret" and "concern", I would have said "revulsion" and "condemnation" over the Trump Administration's attempted sabotage of the JCPOA and their re-imposition of sanctions on Iran.

I agree with the E3's attempts to preserve the agreement despite the actions of Donald Trump and the reciprocal actions of the Iranian regime, to which the Foreign Secretary referred in his statement. I also agree that Iran must be obliged to return to full compliance with its side of the agreement. That was a sensible and balanced statement on the JCPOA, stressing the international unity around the importance of retaining and restoring it, and accepting that both sides have breached it in terms and that neither has any justification for doing so.

That is what makes it all the more remarkable that this morning we heard from one of the signatories to that statement—our very own Prime Minister—telling "BBC Breakfast" the following:

"the problem with the JCPOA is basically—this is the crucial thing, this is why there is tension—from the American perspective it's a flawed agreement, it expires, plus it was negotiated by President Obama...from their point of view it has many many faults. Well, if we're going to get rid of it let's replace it—and let's replace it with the Trump deal. That's what we need to see...that would be a great way forward. President Trump is a great dealmaker by his own account, and by many others...Let's work together to replace the JCPOA and get the Trump deal instead."

In the space of two or three days, the Prime Minister has gone from signing a joint statement with France and Germany calling for the retention and restoration of the JCPOA, to calling for it to be scrapped and replaced by some mythical Trump deal. The Foreign Secretary did not refer to any of that in his statement, and we could be forgiven for thinking that he and the Prime Minister are not exactly on the same page, but perhaps in his response he could answer some questions about the Prime Minister's remarks.

First, will the Foreign Secretary confirm that in his discussions with his American counterparts, they have said that one of the problems with the JCPOA is that, to quote the Prime Minister, "it was negotiated by President Obama"?

We all suspect that that is Trump the toddler's main issue with it, but can the Secretary of State confirm that the Prime Minister was correct?

Secondly, can the Foreign Secretary tell us how this supposed alternative Trump deal, which the Prime Minister is so enthusiastic about, differs from the current JCPOA—or, like his mythical middle eastern peace plan and his mythical deal with the North Koreans on nuclear weapons, is it simply another Trump fantasy?

Thirdly, can the Foreign Secretary tell us why on earth Iran would accept a new deal negotiated with Donald Trump, with new conditions attached, when he has shown his readiness to tear up the existing deal and move the goalposts in terms of what it should cover?

Finally, based on what the Prime Minister said this morning, are we now to understand that—despite everything the Foreign Secretary said in his statement just now and everything contained in the joint statement at the weekend—it is now the official policy of the UK Government to replace the JCPOA and get a Trump deal instead, and that that would represent a "great way forward"? If that is not official Government policy, why did the Prime Minister say it, and why is he walking all over the Foreign Secretary's patch?

Dominic Raab: I thank the right hon. Lady for her support for the action we have taken today and the action that we are taking as part of the E3. She made a

[Dominic Raab]

number of valid points at the outset of her remarks about holding Iran to account for the technical failures, and also about the importance that we certainly attach to leaving a diplomatic door ajar for Iran to come back from its non-compliance into compliance and to live up to its responsibilities.

The right hon. Lady made a whole range of comments about the Prime Minister, which I will address. First, it is Iran that is threatening the JCPOA, with its systematic non-compliance. The Prime Minister fully supports the JCPOA and bringing Iran back into full compliance; that is the clear position and he has said so on many occasions. [Interruption.] The right hon. Lady should draw breath and allow me to respond to her remarks. As usual, she made a whole series of attacks on the US Administration, which seemed rather to cloud her judgment in this area. In fact, not just President Trump but also President Macron has argued for a broader deal with Iran—a deal that would address some of the defects in the JCPOA, which is not a perfect deal but is the best deal we have on the table at the moment, and that would address the wider concerns that the US and many other states, including the United Kingdom, have about Iran's broader destabilising activities in the region. The US and our European partners want us to be ambitious in our diplomatic approach with Iran, and I fully subscribe to that. I fear that the right hon. Lady is rather confusing her attacks on the US Administration with sober and sensible policy making in this area.

As of now, we—the Prime Minister and the whole Government—believe that the JCPOA is the best available deal for restraining Iran's nuclear ambitions, and we want Iran to come back into full compliance. Equally, as was discussed in Biarritz last year, the Prime Minister, the United States and our European partners are fully open to a broader initiative that would address not just the nuclear concerns, but the broader concerns about the destabilising activity that we have seen recently, in particular in relation to the Quds Force.

The choice of the regime in Iran as of today is very simple. It can take the diplomatic path. It can come back into full compliance with the JCPOA and thereby give this country, our European partners and our American partners—and, crucially, many partners in the region—reassurance about its nuclear ambitions. If it wants to, it can also take the diplomatic path to resolve all the outstanding concerns that the international community has about its conduct. That is the choice for the regime in Iran. If it is willing to take that path in good faith, we will be ready to meet it with British diplomacy.

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con): I thank the Foreign Secretary for his support for the Iran nuclear deal, because the simple truth is that if Philip Hammond had not negotiated it, Iran would have nuclear weapons today and the middle east would be immensely more dangerous. However, it has caused a lot of stresses in the western alliance, and I would like to ask the Secretary of State's view as to the best way to strengthen that alliance, because however tattered and strained it is, it is a vital foundation of our peace and prosperity, and has been for the past 70 years.

Dominic Raab: My right hon. Friend, of course, knows a lot of the recent history of this situation as well as—if not better than—I do. As always, the answer is

for Britain to exercise its judgment and the full energy of its diplomacy to ensure that we forge common purpose with our European and American friends. I have been in the US and Brussels over the last two weeks, and will continue that endeavour. The worst thing that we could do right now would be to allow or foment divisions in that partnership, because that would only encourage the hardliners in Tehran.

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): I commend the Foreign Secretary for his statement, and I have to say that I agreed with every word of it. The Scottish National party very much supports actions against nuclear proliferation in the middle east. There was ample scope to trigger the dispute resolution mechanism, so I am glad that the External Action Service is going through the gears on that. I very much liked the phrase in his statement that these efforts are to “reinforce the diplomatic track”. We all agree on that. So let us go back to this morning's interview with the Prime Minister on breakfast TV, because I think it bears repetition. He said of the JCPOA:

“let's replace it with the Trump deal. That's what we need to see...President Trump is a great dealmaker by his own account, and by many others...Let's work together to replace the JCPOA and get the Trump deal instead.”

I am very happy to support the Foreign Secretary from the SNP Benches, but it seems that he is getting more support from the SNP than his own Prime Minister. How seriously does he think Tehran takes us all right now?

Dominic Raab: We engage with the regime on the basis that I have set out, which is that it has a choice. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support. This is not about the UK position or any nuance regarding the Prime Minister. This is the position of the E3 at leader level. The E3 made clear in the joint statement recently that we would like to preserve the JCPOA, but that we are also ambitious for a broader rapprochement with Iran, which of course would have to take into account all the other areas of international concern. It is not just the nuclear issue that is a concern to us; it is also the destabilising activity, the downing of the Ukrainian airline flight and the treatment of our dual nationals. Even if we got Iran back to the JCPOA in full compliance, those issues would remain, and of course we should—with our American partners, as we are doing with our European partners—look to deal with all those issues for the long term.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I wonder whether I am the only one who believes that the current regime is ever going to adhere to the JCPOA. What is the biggest threat now? Could it be that Israel, which has been threatened by Iran, is likely to strike if this goes on unless some sort of agreement is reached, which could of course inflame an already very difficult situation?

Dominic Raab: It is not clear to me that there is any credible alternative to a diplomatic route to solving this issue long term, even with airstrikes. I will not get into all the operational matters. The only way of dealing with the concerns that we have is a mixture—a combination—of holding Iran to account when it behaves badly, as it has done systematically in relation to its nuclear ambitions, and leaving open the door to diplomatic opportunity and diplomacy. That is the position of the UK—and, I believe, it is also the position of not just our European partners but our American partners too.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I certainly do not want to defend the actions of the Iranian regime on any count. The Foreign Secretary was instrumental, when he was on the Back Benches, in making sure that the Government introduced legislation known as the Magnitsky amendments, which were to enable the Government to have another tool in the box in relation to sanctions. They were primarily considered as relating to Russia, but would it not be a good idea to have them on the statute book in the UK now, as fast as possible, and would we not be considering using those sanctions in relation to Iranians as well?

Dominic Raab: The hon. Gentleman is quite right, first, about the importance of having that sanctions capacity. As we leave the EU we will have more autonomy to do that. We are looking forward to bringing that forward. It was mentioned in the Queen's Speech. He also made the point—I think we have always agreed about this since the campaign for a Magnitsky regime in this country—that such capacity certainly should not just apply to Russia, or to one country, but should be universal in geographic scope, and the approach that we are taking will be.

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con): Last year an archive of documents relating to Iran's nuclear programme was unearthed in a Tehran warehouse by Israel's intelligence agencies. The documents revealed the extent of Iran's deception to the IAEA and the world powers about its historical work to develop nuclear weapons and its ongoing efforts to circumvent the JCPOA. Is my right hon. Friend able to confirm whether the UK has seen these documents and whether he shares Israel's concerns about their contents?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend makes some interesting points. I am not going to comment on intelligence matters or operational matters, but I can say that of course we share Israel's concern not just about Iran's nuclear ambitions but about the wider activities in the region. The point that I think we and all our partners agree on is that ultimately Tehran should give up those ambitions and negotiate a way out of economic and political isolation, which will only deepen, and live up to the responsibilities that it has to its own people. There is a better path for the people of Iran, but it has to be a choice that is taken by the regime in Iran.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): This is a very troubling time not only for Mr Ashuri and his family but for other relations of British nationals being held in Iranian prisons. Will the Foreign Secretary clearly outline what steps he intends to take to support these individuals and their families and prevent them from being exploited even further in this dreadful situation?

Dominic Raab: I entirely agree with the hon. Lady. The plight of the nationals and dual nationals in detention from our country and other countries around the world is at the forefront of our minds. Of course, we have seen the systematic and callous behaviour by Iran in relation to them increase over time, not decrease, so it is all part of a wider pattern of behaviour. We will do everything we can to secure their release and, while they are in detention, the best conceivable treatment that we can imagine. Again, as with the other issues, Iran has to realise that it cannot pursue its appalling behaviour,

whether on the nuclear front, by destabilising countries in the region or in the treatment of dual nationals without being held to account, and that is the policy of the UK.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I welcome the decision to trigger the dispute resolution mechanism. However, given that over the past few weeks we have seen Iran use ballistic missiles to attack coalition forces and that, in the wake of the killing of General Soleimani, we have had another reminder of all the activities he used to carry out, it is sensible for the Prime Minister to have an ambition to bring the US back on board as part of this deal but to widen it to encompass all the other activities of Iran. Will the Foreign Secretary set out what Britain might do to try to kick-start that process as well as bringing the JCPOA back into full action?

Dominic Raab: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. We want to preserve the JCPOA—it is the only current deal in town—but of course we are ambitious to see a broader rapprochement. That is not just the Prime Minister's view. He has been actively supporting President Trump and President Macron, and there is a huge amount of diplomatic work being undertaken by me, by the Prime Minister and others and by our international partners to achieve that. But we come back to the basic equation and the basic choice: this is ultimately a decision that must be made in Tehran, because leaving the diplomatic door ajar is one thing but Iran has to be willing to walk through it. We will make sure that that diplomatic route—that diplomatic path—to a better alternative Iran is there, but it must be something that the regime in Tehran, bearing in mind all the recent events, the growing economic isolation and the disaffection of many, many people in Iran with the state of affairs, chooses and pursues of its own volition.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): It is precisely because we support this deal that the E3 was left with no option but to take the action that it has, and I support the Government in doing so. But can I bring the Foreign Secretary back to the Prime Minister's remarks this morning? Either the Prime Minister wants to maintain this deal or he is now advocating for its replacement: he cannot credibly hold both positions. Which one is the policy of the Government?

Dominic Raab: The right hon. Gentleman is just wrong. Of course one can want to preserve this deal but be ambitious and, if it is possible, bring the United States and Tehran into a broader rapprochement, dealing not just with the nuclear issue but with the wider destabilising activities. That is the policy that we are pursuing and we are doing so with the US and also, crucially, with our EU partners. There seems to be a bit of amnesia on the Opposition Benches. It was President Macron who last year proposed a very similar approach. Just as we are willing to support that in relation to proposals initiated in Washington, we supported it in relation to Macron. We want to keep the transatlantic alliance together and we want to bring a broader rapprochement between the US and Iran that can lead to a better path for the Iranian people.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): It seems that the JCPOA in its current form is dying, although it is not dead yet, and I compliment the Foreign Secretary and

[Bob Seely]

his Ministers for the work that they are doing. Is there any common ground between the United States and Iran on a potential JCPOA 2?

Dominic Raab: It is not clear that there is, as of now. However, there is scope, if Iran is willing—the E3 statement backed this up, but we come back to that basic dynamic and that basic choice—to see some sort of broader deal that would address not just the nuclear front but the wider destabilising activities. If we want a longer-term resolution to the challenge that Iran faces which brings in the United States and all the relevant partners in the region, it is absolutely right that we hold to that ambition and pursue it where we can.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I thank the Secretary of State for prior sight of his statement. Given his earlier remarks about dual nationals in Iran and the increasingly desperate situation of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, will he clarify when the Prime Minister is going to meet Richard Ratcliffe? At the moment, all we have is “soon”. Will this be taken up as a matter of urgency and a meeting arranged this week if possible?

Dominic Raab: The meetings that the Prime Minister has will be publicised in the usual way through the usual channels, but I have met Richard Ratcliffe. We of course understand the concern of Nazanin’s family and also all the other dual nationals who are detained. We have seen Iran’s behaviour deteriorate not just on the nuclear front and not just in the Revolutionary Guard’s activities in the region, but in relation to dual nationals. It is at the forefront of our mind to get a deal, long term, with the Iranians that can bring in all those aspects, which is why the nuclear deal is critically important. We also want to address the wider issues; that is why the Prime Minister has taken the approach that he has.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): Will the Foreign Secretary outline the steps that are being taken to safeguard British citizens, personnel and interests in the region?

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. We obviously keep the security of our armed forces under constant review. We do the same in terms of shipping in the Gulf, and particularly the strait of Hormuz. We have amended our travel advice recently, and we ensure that we have the appropriate level of security arrangements around our embassy and our diplomatic personnel.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The Foreign Secretary is right to highlight the importance of diplomacy in resolving this crisis. Can he update us on the situation of the British ambassador to Iran, particularly given the fact that in the last couple of hours it has been reported, including in the *Financial Times*, that Gholam-Hossein Esmaili, who is a representative of the Iranian judiciary, has called for him to be persona non grata and expelled from the country? Does the Foreign Secretary agree that that is completely unacceptable?

Dominic Raab: We have had no formal indication of that description. It would be deeply regrettable if that were the case. We need to keep the diplomatic channels open, and futile gestures like that are not going to resolve the problems that the regime in Tehran face.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State’s focus on not only the tactical issues but the wider strategic context that we face. I repeat the point that I made yesterday during the urgent question: there is little incentive for Iran to support the JCPOA when economic reform cannot take place. It could not take place before because legacy sanctions connected with ballistic missiles prevented any bank with international ties to the United States from supporting any new trade. Will he ensure that a future deal deals with those legacy sanctions and prevents the country from spending any new funds, such as oil revenues or released frozen assets, on its proxy wars across the region?

Dominic Raab: My right hon. Friend makes a good point, but he also highlights a conundrum. On the one hand, we do not want to relieve the pressure on Iran in relation to its nefarious activities. On the other hand, we have to incentivise, to the extent that we can, the right path and the right kind of conduct to build up the confidence of its international partners. At the moment, it is very clear, in relation to the JCPOA and more broadly, that that door is left open for Iran. What is missing is the political will and the good faith on behalf of the regime in Tehran.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Welcome to your place, Mr Deputy Speaker. The JCPOA, successful or not, will impact upon countries across the world. Iran is not a safe place for its own people, never mind any other citizens—the shooting down of the jet is an example of that. Can the Secretary of State outline his intention to prepare and secure expats and workers in Iran? What advice will be given to people working there who have British citizenship or are from other countries across the world to get ready to leave Iran?

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. He is right; we are always concerned to ensure that we do the right thing and give honest, accurate and clear advice to British citizens wherever they are in the world. In relation to Iran, we have amended our travel advice again. That is the normal way, and we would point individuals and businesses to that for the appropriate guidance.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): It is good to see you in the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker. Can the Foreign Secretary tell me what conversations he has had with not only our European partners in the E3 but our partners in the region—perhaps even our new partner, the new Sultan of Oman—on how we will deal with Iran?

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He is right. The Prime Minister was there for the funeral of the Sultan, which was a valuable opportunity to engage in conversation with the new Sultan. We have had conversations with our partners right around the region. There is a clear commonality of view that we need to de-escalate the tensions but also hold Iran to account for its behaviour. Bearing in mind that we have to engage very carefully with Russia and China on this, the approach that we are taking in the context of the JCPOA is that, on the terms of the deal, clearly, plainly and squarely Iran has, in its own words, effectively left the agreement as a shell. The right thing to do, as envisaged by the agreement, is to take matters to the

dispute resolution mechanism and use that to leverage, to bring some sense and clarity to the regime in Tehran and to encourage them to come back to full compliance.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): It is great to see you back in your rightful place, Mr Deputy Speaker. The British Government are right to work with our European partners and within the formal mechanisms of the nuclear deal. Can the Secretary of State inform the House what responses he has received from China and Russia following the actions he has taken?

Dominic Raab: We are engaging with them, and we will engage with them more during the process of the DRM, but we need to be clear that this is not a transatlantic issue, and it is not just an Iranian issue—it is a regional and global issue, because the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran would be damaging, devastating and destabilising for the region and the world. All permanent members of the Security Council need to be engaged in this and live up to their responsibilities to ensure, through the diplomatic track and the pressure that we exert on all sides, that Iran cannot pursue those ambitions.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Triggering the dispute resolution mechanism is a good thing, but to be frank, only doing so after six months of—to use the Foreign Secretary’s own words—“serious” and “systematic non-compliance” is weak. The JCPOA is time-limited. It would never prevent Iran from having a nuclear weapon; it would only delay the chances of that happening, but it cannot do that if, to use the Foreign Secretary’s own words, it is just a “shell” of an agreement. What are the dangers of Iran reducing its breakout time while the dispute resolution mechanism is under way? Is it not time for a truly comprehensive agreement covering nuclear weapon technology, missile technology and Iran’s export of terror?

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. I share his concerns that there are weaknesses to the JCPOA. It is time-limited. There are other weaknesses to it. We have never been doe-eyed about it being the perfect deal, but it is also the only deal in town that is restraining the behaviour of Iran. As we have now got to a situation where Iran is not complying with those restraints, we have to trigger the DRM as a matter of the credibility of the deal and the credibility of the E3. I take his point—it is the point that the Prime Minister made—that we should also be ambitious for a broader deal that deals with not only the nuclear issue in a more sustainable and long-term way but all the other wider concerns that those in the region, the Europeans and the Americans have about Iran’s conduct in the region.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): I thank the Foreign Secretary for his statement and welcome the action taken today. Are any discussions being had with the multiple oil and gas companies that operate in the region, which employ a large number of British citizens, many of whom are my constituents or family members of my constituents? There is obviously a concern in West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine for the safety of those who are out there working for oil and gas companies in what remains a very unpredictable situation.

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. The Defence Secretary has set out the contingency planning in relation to military support for shipping in the strait of Hormuz, which will affect the sector that my hon. Friend is talking about. We have adjusted and will keep under constant review our travel advice in relation to not only Iran but countries in the region, so that businesses and individuals travelling have the clearest guidance about risk.

Debate on the Address

[3RD DAY]

Debate resumed (Order, 13 January).

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.

Education and Local Government

1.37 pm

The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson):

May I say how delighted I am to see so many new faces among us? They could not have arrived at a more exciting time. This Government have a historic mandate to push through an ambitious and challenging agenda, to make changes that will transform the lives and prospects of a generation. We are poised to shape a new Britain. We are primed for a new era. This Government are ready to ensure that Britain can seize the opportunities that lie ahead of us after we leave the European Union—a Britain where the young people of today are prepared for the world of tomorrow.

Education is a mirror to the kind of society that we want to see—an open, flexible, tolerant and supportive society where everyone, wherever they are from and whatever their talents, has the chance to achieve their dreams and ambitions. Since becoming Education Secretary, I have been committed to making those ambitions a reality. As Her Majesty the Queen set out in her Gracious Speech on 19 December, we are about to embark on a full programme to ensure that everyone feels the benefit of these changes.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): The Secretary of State has sent me a most welcome spreadsheet telling me what schools in my constituency can expect from the settlement he has reached. I am glad to say that all my secondary schools are set to receive more than £5,000 per pupil, but how will he ensure that they get it and that local authorities will not increase their slice or use their own formula to redistribute it?

Gavin Williamson: I thank my right hon. Friend for making such an important intervention, and for his compliment on the spreadsheet, which is a compliment I have not received before. He makes an important point about making sure that money that has been allocated to schools is going to be properly passported through. It will be the Government's intention to move a statutory instrument to ensure that the minimum funding of £5,000 for every secondary school and £3,750 for every primary school is passported through to schools in the next financial year. For primary schools, that will obviously be increased to £4,000.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Gavin Williamson: If I may, I will take the opportunity to make some more progress. The hon. Gentleman always has lots of interventions that can be placed at any point in a speech, as they usually have very little relevance to the speech taking place.

Money spent on schools is an investment in our futures. I am pleased to say that we are going to deliver the biggest funding injection into schools in a decade. Over the next three years, we are going to put an additional £14.4 billion into schools in England, with areas in most need seeing the greatest gains. My Department is acutely aware of the huge responsibility we have for all our children, but none more so than the most vulnerable, especially those with special educational needs. That is why we announced £780 million additional high needs funding for the following financial year, an increase of 12% compared with this year. That will be the largest year-on-year increase since the high needs funding block was created in 2013, and I am sure it is something everyone will welcome.

Alex Cunningham *rose*—

Gavin Williamson: I am sure the hon. Gentleman is about to welcome it.

Alex Cunningham: I always welcome additional finance for special needs, but schools in Stockton also know what they are going to get. They are going to get a £6.2 million reduction or shortfall by 2020, a loss of £210 a pupil. How is that fair?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Gentleman has never been known for his skill at maths. If he were to look at the Confederation of School Trusts figures, an independent organisation that has done the calculations of what every school will receive, he will see that every school is getting a per pupil increase in funding. It is a shame that he did not take the opportunity to welcome that.

One of our most pressing priorities is to make sure that all children in care or in need of adoption are given a loving and stable home. We are providing councils with an additional £1 billion for adult and children's social care in every year of this Parliament. That is alongside the £84 million to be spent over five years to keep more children at home safely. We are also going to review the care system to make sure that all care placements and settings provide children and young adults with the support that they need.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): West Berkshire and Wokingham are very appreciative that at last we are going to get a bit more money, which we really need for our schools, and I am grateful for the work the Secretary of State has put in. Does he agree that, to get many more people to fulfil their potential, schools in their careers education should identify self-employment, as well as jobs, as a very good way of fulfilling people's expectations in many cases? That often gets ignored.

Gavin Williamson: My right hon. Friend makes an important point about the need to encourage entrepreneurialism within our education system. We see this in many schools, and of course we also see it in many further education colleges and universities. I was very fortunate to visit King's College London recently to see the brilliant student business incubator model it has there, which is making such an impact. How do we

expand that to more universities, while making sure that schools are teaching the value of entrepreneurialism in what they are doing?

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Is the Secretary of State aware of the excellent families of schools initiative, which works with primary schoolchildren—again, exactly the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood)—in extolling the benefits of self-employment to very young children to instil such values at that age?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend highlights an important scheme that is going out there and selling the virtues of entrepreneurialism at the start of a child's educational learning. That is certainly something we very much want to encourage across the education spectrum.

We all know how important a loving home is to a child's development and we want to give parents all the support we can. We have announced a new £1 billion investment to create more high-quality, affordable childcare provision for families with school-age children, including a £250 million capital fund to help schools to overcome barriers to offering on-site childcare provision. The aim of this Government is always to be there supporting parents and families as they bring up their children.

Thanks to our reforms, standards in schools have been rising, but that does not mean that this is the moment to ease up or stop that progress. Schools should be safe and disciplined spaces, where pupils can learn in a happy and secure way. That is why we are investing £10 million to establish behaviour hubs to help teachers who are having to deal with disruption in the classroom and within a school. We are also expanding alternative provision schools for troubled or disruptive youngsters. We have launched a £4 million alternative provision innovation fund. Projects being run as part of that will guide our plans for this important sector, which needs reform and change.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I am a former teacher, and believe me, behaviour was probably the most important thing in ensuring that I had the space to be able to deliver such content. Does the Secretary of State not appreciate that a lot of these children are behaving in that way because they do not have support, and much of the way in which they used to get that support was through things such as youth services? Has he planned any extra money for youth services and support for young people who are often facing adverse issues at home and desperately need help themselves?

Gavin Williamson: I thought the hon. Lady was going to talk about our youth investment fund, and the half a billion pound investment that has been pledged by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to make a real difference. *[Interruption.]* The Liberal Democrat Member sneers at the mention of half a billion pounds as if this is a small amount of money, but I think most Conservative Members recognise that half a billion pounds is an awful lot of money.

Suella Braverman (Fareham) (Con): Speaking about behaviour and discipline, the Secretary of State and indeed his Minister for School Standards will be very much aware of Michaela Community School, which

they have both visited and have supported over many years. It is an outstanding free school, which I co-founded and chaired. Does he agree with me that such schools—free schools where innovation in education has been pioneered and disciplinary methods have succeeded—are working to revolutionise education in this country, and that had the Labour party got into power, they would be no more?

Gavin Williamson: The Labour party's ideological hatred of free schools is, frankly, quite shocking, as we see those like the Michaela Community School making such an enormous difference to the local community. I would like to pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work she did along with Katharine Birbalsingh, who has worked so hard to create this shining example of what can be done—changing the lives of so many children from some of the most disadvantaged communities in London. That is what we want to be seeing more of, not less, and that is what this Government are going to deliver.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Gavin Williamson: I am going to make some more progress, as I have been very generous in allowing interventions.

We have made great strides with the more rigorous academic programmes of study, but we know that the arts are vital in helping young people learn creative skills and widen their horizons. We also know that the creative industries play an important role in the United Kingdom economy. For those reasons, we will offer an arts premium to secondary schools to fund activities from 2021. We will also continue to fund music education hubs next year, with an extra £80 million.

I would now like to come on to standards. Thanks to Ofsted inspections, we have seen standards in our schools rise continuously since 2010. Plans are in place to take forward our pledge to lift the inspection exemption that currently applies to outstanding schools. That will mean parents have up-to-date information and reassurance about the education being provided by their child's school.

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): I was a schoolteacher up to the last general election and have worked as a head of year in the pastoral system and have worked both in London and inner-city Birmingham. Does my right hon. Friend share my opinion that it is terrifying to think that had Labour got into power it would have scrapped Ofsted, leaving our children in a much more dangerous position going forward?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend and fellow Staffordshire Member makes a powerful point, because what the Labour party was doing was throwing away the ability to ensure that we enforce ever-increasing standards and better attainment for our children. What was even more disturbing were the proposals to scrap Ofsted. Labour was saying that for those children who are most vulnerable—those who are in social care—there would be no independent inspectorate to make sure that their interests were being protected, and it was letting local authorities mark their own homework. That is not what any of us wish to see. I hope that the Labour leadership race will give Labour the opportunity to

[Gavin Williamson]

rethink some of its more imaginative policies and come back with something that works for both pupils and parents.

Since 2010 the Government have been transforming the education system to place more autonomy and freedom in the hands of teachers, giving parents more choice. The free schools programme has been a key part of this and is a stand-out success. Our manifesto pledges to build more free schools, to continue to promote innovation and to continue to drive higher standards in schools, especially in some of the communities that are most deprived and that need to see something better in the education provided.

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): Does my right hon Friend agree that Stoke-on-Trent is exactly the sort of place where we should be building a new free school?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend makes a very powerful case, and I look forward to working with him and other Conservative Members who represent the great city of Stoke-on-Trent to look at how we can ensure that we have the right type of education provision there and that we continue to raise educational standards, which, sadly, under Labour representation on the council and often at parliamentary level, were not as high as our aspirations for that great city.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Secretary of State agree that, although it is not always the best rule, good guidance is evidence-based policy, and is not the evidence still that early-years intervention and pre-school stimulation for children from poorer backgrounds is the best value investment our country can make?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point about the importance of evidence-based investment in education. I know that he has had an interest in education over many years, so I am sure he will be keen to look at some of the opportunity areas we have been investing in, one of which is in Bradford, which is very close to his own constituency, and there is also one on the north Yorkshire coast. They are delivering real results in terms of children's attainment, especially in the early-years environment. I would be more than happy to share information with the hon. Gentleman on the work being done in those opportunity areas.

Let me go back to the subject of free schools. A disproportionate number of the free schools we have created have been built in London and the south-east. I want to see this revolution in education delivery rolled out, spread much more widely through the midlands, the north and the south-west of England, driving up standards and attainment in all our schools and all our communities.

It is obvious that to deliver these world-class standards we need more of the very best teachers to join those we already have. That is why we have pledged to raise starting salaries to £30,000 by 2022, which will put teaching on a par with other top graduate professions. We are also offering early career payments worth up to £9,000 to new physics, mathematics, languages and

chemistry teachers, in addition to generous bursaries of up to £26,000. Simply, we always want to attract the very best into the profession, and that is what we are determined to do.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): The teacher salaries the Secretary of State is talking about will, of course, be welcomed by the profession; they do not match the salaries in Scotland yet, but he is moving in the right direction. Can he confirm that those teaching in free schools and academies will be paid the nationally agreed pay rates, because at the moment they are not?

Gavin Williamson: I thought the hon. Lady was going to raise some exciting prospects. One of the key areas where we can get so much benefit is schools working together right across the country, whether through multi-academy trusts or local education authorities, and I thought the hon. Lady was going to suggest that we have more collaboration between England and Scotland, which we would very much want. The hon. Lady has already heard of our commitment to raise the starting salaries for teachers and to negotiate in terms of teachers' salaries, and to make sure we listen to what the pay review board comes forward with. But I would like English schools and Scottish schools and those in Wales and Northern Ireland to have much more collaboration—whether in the university sector, the FE sector or the school sector, we can all benefit from that. We have seen great attainments, as were celebrated in the PISA results, where we saw English schools making very good progress. It would be good to have the opportunity to work closely with our Scottish colleagues on how we can share best practice from both Scotland and England.

Our future economic prosperity will depend on having a workforce that has the skills that businesses need now and into the future. We will invest an additional £3 billion over the course of this Parliament to support the creation of a national skills fund, which will build on existing reforms, including ongoing work to develop a national retraining scheme. This is on top of additional capital investment of £1.8 billion into the further education estate, investing in the skills and education required for our nation's future.

Talented international students and researchers are queuing up to study in the United Kingdom, and they enrich our universities culturally and economically, bringing fresh ideas and new perspectives. That is why the Government aim to host 600,000 international students by 2030. Our new student visa will help us attract the brightest and best and allow those students to stay on to apply for work here after they graduate.

As we prepare to forge a new place on the international stage we want our young people to have the opportunity to study abroad through exchange programmes. The United Kingdom is open to participation in the next Erasmus+ programme, and this will be a question for future negotiations with the European Union. We do truly understand the value that such exchange programmes bring all students right across the United Kingdom, but to ensure that we are able to continue to offer that we will also develop our own alternative arrangements should they be needed.

I have been focusing until now on the ways that we are going to enrich the educational experience for all our pupils and students, but in just the same way as our

postcode should not be a lottery that decides the kind of schooling our children receive, it should not determine whether we feel safe when we close our front door. For that reason, we are bringing forward legislation to further the recommendations from Dame Judith Hackitt's independent review on building safety, and we will give residents a stronger voice, ensuring that their concerns are never ignored.

We also committed to taking forward the recommendations of the first phase of the Grenfell Tower inquiry report to ensure that the tragedy of Grenfell Tower never happens again. We are working to deliver a rental system that protects tenants and supports landlords to provide the homes the nation needs. We will abolish no-fault evictions, helping tenants to stay in their homes while ensuring landlords are given the protections they also need. We are determined to improve standards in rented accommodation and to professionalise the sector. There is no place in this country for squalid or unsafe rented properties. We will make sure that all tenants have a right of redress if theirs is not of an acceptable standard.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): This may be a question more appropriately directed at the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, the right hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick), who is sat next to the right hon. Gentleman on the Treasury Bench, but he mentions Grenfell and dealing with fire safety issues. The problem is that, at present, there is a difference according to where you live. I know the Government are doing a review, but if leaseholders have a form of cladding that is not of limited combustibility but is not ACM cladding, basically there is no help for them. Many are living in flats that are now unsaleable. The Government really have to address that issue. I look forward to a commitment that that will be done, if not from him then from his colleague next to him.

Gavin Williamson: As the hon. Gentleman said, that is currently being reviewed by an expert panel. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government will go into more detail when he responds to the debate at close of business today.

We, as a Conservative party, understand the importance of owning your own home. As a Government committed to a fairer society, it is crucial that we address the divide between those who can afford their own home and those who cannot. Our first home scheme will provide local people with a discount on the costs of a new home, which will save them tens of thousands of pounds. Our shared ownership reforms will provide a further route to home ownership. We will deliver at least 1 million more homes over the next five years to help more people on to the housing ladder. We will also put an end to the abuse of leaseholds by banning new leasehold houses and restricting future ground rents to a peppercorn.

No less important than people's homes are the communities they live in. We are committed to keeping our town centres vibrant. We are changing the business rate system to give small retailers a bigger discount on their rates, as well as extending the discount to cinemas and music venues, and, importantly, introducing additional discounts to pubs. We will conduct a fundamental review of business rates and we will increase the frequency of business rates revaluations.

It is the Government's intention to unleash the potential of every corner of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland by bridging the productivity gap, levelling up opportunity and prosperity across the nation, and starting a skills and infrastructure revolution. We will create more Mayors across England to devolve power away from Westminster, and we will bring forward a framework for devolution and a White Paper.

I do not want to delay any further in getting straight on with the work of this challenging and ambitious agenda; an agenda that is driven by fairness and that will make a difference to more people, enabling them to look forward to a future with optimism and confidence. In Her Majesty's Gracious Speech, we see the beginnings of a better Britain for everyone. I commend the Gracious Speech to the House.

2.3 pm

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Let me welcome you to the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker. I also welcome the new Members to the Chamber for today's debate. We look forward to hearing some fantastic maiden speeches, so I will keep my speech relatively brief. That will be easy because, quite frankly, there is so little actual substance in this Queen's Speech for us to respond to.

Today, the Secretary of State made his first speech since November. Education was the issue that the Conservatives did not want to talk about in the election. When they did, they had a lot more to say about our policies than their own. I am glad they paid particular attention to an area that gets little attention in these debates: the care of the most vulnerable children. Our manifesto committed to a wholesale review of the care system and a replacement for the troubled families programme. A week later, their manifesto promised a review of the care system and an improvement to the troubled families programme—to think that Ministers once promised to crack down on plagiarism!

I hope that that was not simply a cheap imitation. Will the Secretary of State confirm that their review will include kinship care, and consider the need for national standards for fostering and proper regulation of semi-supported housing? When will the review begin? What will its terms be? Who will undertake it, and precisely what does he want it to achieve? Can he tell us what improving the troubled families programme means, and whether any successor programme will not just fall victim to yet more local government cuts?

Let me offer this in a genuinely constructive spirit. I proposed a simple policy that could transform the lives of children who have experienced care. Many do not have a permanent home address and going to university with only term-time accommodation available is a challenge. Barely more than a tenth of children leaving care go to university and 40% drop out—the highest among all groups of students. Yet those who stay on are as likely to attain the best grades as any other. Providing free all-year-round accommodation for those students would transform their lives. The cost is tiny and would be repaid many times over, not just economically but with something more than money: human potential realised.

The Conservatives made another election promise to the most vulnerable children. Their manifesto pledged to “grant asylum and support to refugees fleeing persecution”,

[Angela Rayner]

yet last week, just two weeks into the parliamentary Session, they rejected an amendment protecting the right of unaccompanied child refugees to be reunited with their family after Brexit. Surely, it is our most basic moral duty to ensure that children can be reunited with their families. If we judge the Government on how they treat the powerless and penniless, then the judgment on this must be damning. It is a betrayal not just of those children, but of the best traditions of this country. Frankly, I hope that Members—even Conservative Members—will urge the other place to overturn it.

The Prime Minister described the Queen's Speech as a blueprint for the future of Britain, so it is telling that education is missing from the blueprint. I have now responded to three Queen's Speeches with three Education Secretaries in three years. Between them, there has not been one single piece of primary legislation. The only education bills produced by the Government are the ones being handed to parents by headteachers desperate for donations for their school gates to stay open. Despite the Education Secretary's boast, the Government will not even reverse the school cuts they have imposed since 2010. As the Institute for Fiscal Studies found, even in the financial year 2022-23, when the new money that was promised is due finally to appear, schools will still be hundreds of millions of pounds worse off than they were in 2010. Capital funding for education, which has already been cut by 40% since they came to power over nine years ago, will continue to fall even further. The money that they are slowly putting in has been deliberately taken away from the schools and the pupils who need it most. They call it "levelling up", Mr Deputy Speaker. What I call it is an absolute joke.

The Government are not targeting help at the most disadvantaged; they are keeping them in their place. As the Education Policy Institute found, under these plans a child on free school meals will get less than half the funding of a child who is not. What of the previous Conservative Government's totemic policy, the pupil premium? The past two Tory manifestos promised to protect it. The past two Tory Governments went on to cut it. This Prime Minister has solved that problem: he has given up even making the promise in the first place. The Conservatives' manifesto contained not a word or a penny for it, so the Secretary of State has the chance to make his intentions plain today. Will they keep the pupil premium, and will they finally increase it in real terms, rather than continue to see it fall year on year?

Another set of pupils deserve more support but are not getting it. By the financial year 2020-21, local councils face a spending shortfall of over £1 billion for children with special educational needs and disabilities. Despite what the Education Secretary said, his Department is not offering to make up that shortfall—and, even then, there is only a one-year deal. Councils and schools have no idea how much more funding, if any, they will get to support pupils with high needs in the years ahead. They cannot plan their provision and ensure that every child gets the support that they need. When will the review of high needs funding be completed, and will the Government guarantee that local government will not simply be handed yet more responsibilities without resources?

What of the parents struggling with the basic costs of school thanks to the stagnating wages, axed tax credits and years of cuts that the Government have overseen?

How many times have we heard Ministers pledge action on the cost of school uniforms and equipment? They first did so in November 2015. We are four years and four Education Secretaries on. Just before Dissolution, the Minister for School Standards told the House that the Government were waiting for a "suitable legislative opportunity". Perhaps the Education Secretary can answer this: if the Queen's Speech is not a suitable opportunity for legislation, what on earth is? In the previous Session, the then hon. Member for Peterborough tabled a private Member's Bill that would have addressed the issue—frankly, she managed more legislation in six months as an Opposition Back Bencher than the Government managed in four years in office. Labour's Welsh Assembly Government have done the same, using existing powers to regulate. I have yet to hear why this Government cannot also do the same, so perhaps the Minister will tell us whether, if they will not act, they will at least support a private Member's Bill from an Opposition Member who will.

While we are on the subject of Bills that are missing in action, perhaps the Government can tell us what has happened to their legislation to regulate home education. The right approach would have cross-party support, but we cannot scrutinise what does not exist, so where is it? The same goes for their school-level funding formula, which they said needs primary legislation. There was also no detail on the expansion of childcare, maintained nurseries, or Sure Start funding. The Secretary of State must be aware that the funding for early years that was announced in the spending review does not even begin to meet the cost of inflation.

The story is the same in further and higher education. The Augar review went from being a flagship to a ghost ship. The last Education Secretary, the right hon. Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds), promised when it was published that the Government

"will come forward with the conclusion of the review at the end of the year, at the spending review." —[*Official Report*, 4 June 2019; Vol. 661, c. 58.]

Both have gone by and we have had just vague words. Further education is meant to be the Education Secretary's passion, but since 2010 the Government have cut funding for this vital area each and every year. In real terms, funding has been cut by over £3 billion. In adult education, with over £1 billion cut from annual funding, the national skills fund will embed hundreds of millions of pounds in annual cuts.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: My hon. Friend is talking about areas that the Government failed to address and Bills that they should perhaps support. In the last Parliament, I introduced a Bill on youth work, which the Government have cut by £1 billion annually. They have proposed a fund of £500 million for estate rebuilding but there is none for youth workers, the people who interact with young people. Is that not another area in which the Government have let down education and young people?

Angela Rayner: I commend my hon. Friend for the work he has done since coming into the House to ensure that we have a great universal youth service. What the Government have done to our youth services is an absolute scandal, not only plunging our youth into lives where they do not reach their full potential, but failing to address many of our young people's concerns.

The funding that the Secretary of State boasted about does not even come close to reversing the extent of the cuts that his Government have delivered. When it comes to Ofsted, instead of weaponising the inspectorate, they should adopt another of our promises: to produce an independent Her Majesty's inspectorate that has the faith of teachers, school leaders and parents and that is resourced effectively so that it can do the job.

The Secretary of State said that education is a mirror on society, and sadly that is true. Our education system today reflects the society that 10 years of Tory Government have left. There is a simple lesson that we have learned: education and austerity simply do not mix.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. A substantial number of Members have put in to speak today and we will have nine maiden speeches. No time limit will be imposed at the moment, but I ask that Members show some self-restraint.

2.16 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con): I welcome you back to the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker; it is a great pleasure to see you back in your rightful place. It is also a great pleasure to talk about a Queen's Speech that will bring stability to this Parliament. Those of us who were here before the election will remember the previous Queen's Speech, when we had anything but stability. This time, we have a programme that is full of good ideas and the right strategies for this country, and this Queen's Speech will be delivered on. Top of the list will be the ability to deliver all the measures in it on Brexit. After two years in which Parliament has been unable to make up its mind, we now have a Parliament that will be very capable of doing so. That is good for the country as we go through the Brexit process. The embodiment of that is the fact that we have so many maiden speeches waiting to be given. I wish all my new colleagues the very best for their careers here, and I wish the best to those making their maiden speeches this afternoon.

I will keep my remarks relatively brief, as you asked, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I have two requests to make of the Secretary of State for Education and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, who are here this afternoon. On education, I do not recognise what I just heard from the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), who spoke for the Opposition. Over the past 10 years, education standards in this country have risen. Step by step, we have turned around a difficult financial situation and we are now able to put back investment into our schools. It has been very welcome that the schools in my constituency are receiving an increase of almost 5% in the coming financial year. My headteachers are very grateful for that and see it as a significant step in the right direction, and they know that that improvement will come over the next two years. I am grateful to the Prime Minister for listening to those of us who said to him over the past year that this is so important for the schools, young people, families and teachers in our constituencies, but I have two requests for the Secretary of State.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman talks about largesse on the part of Government. How does he therefore explain a situation

in Birmingham, where we have twice the average number of children on free school meals? Nine out of 10 constituencies are losing out, 99% of schools are set to lose out in this financial year, and 89% of schools will in the next financial year, with ever more serious consequences for the teaching of our children in the city. It may be that the leafy shires that he represents have been disproportionately and beneficially treated, but that is certainly not true of the great city of Birmingham.

Chris Grayling: What we know is that standards have risen around the country, and this is an exercise in levelling up funding, with a commitment to provide an absolute minimum to every pupil in the secondary sector and every pupil in the primary sector. That surely is the right way to go about it. On top of that, there is directed funding to meet the individual needs of individual areas.

My first request is about one of those individual needs. Will the Secretary of State look carefully at the small number of schools in my area and others with a disproportionate number of special needs pupils? We have a real opportunity here. Headteachers in those schools are saying that they are finding it an increasing burden on their shoulders to deal not just with the special needs issues but with the issues that often surround those special needs pupils. The two Secretaries of State here today would do those schools a great favour if they could consider ways of strengthening the partnership between local authorities and those schools in dealing with the individual challenges presented by the more troubled students. Particularly in the primary sector, some schools are still facing financial challenges because of the sheer volume of special needs in their schools. I am thinking specifically about some, though not many, of the schools in my own constituency.

Jonathan Gullis: I refer my right hon. Friend to the example of schools in Solihull. At Solihull Academy, we saw 13 headteachers come together and pour an equal amount of money into the pot to set up alternative provision for children with special educational needs and attendance and behavioural issues. Is that a model the Government could consider?

Chris Grayling: Absolutely. I mentioned the two Secretaries of State, rather than just the one, precisely because I think partnership is one way to ease pressure on heads in schools and create a better package of support for those young people.

The other area brought to my attention is the funding situation for academy trusts that have found themselves under pressure in the last couple of years. The increased funding settlement will help, but will the Secretary of State for Education reconsider the way we support academy trusts so that we can do everything we can to ensure that they can deliver the full benefits of the partnerships they offer?

I want to move on to housing and local planning. Mr Deputy Speaker, you will know that the Queen's Speech contained further welcome measures to support the growth of first-time buyers in the housing market and the provision of housing in this country. It is much needed. I cannot believe there are many of us who do not deal with the challenges in our constituencies of families who cannot get homes in the social housing

[Chris Grayling]

sector and are struggling even to get into the rented sector, let alone to buy their own home. We need to build more houses. I think that unites most people on both sides of the House.

We have to do that in the smartest possible way, however, and help local authorities that have particular challenges to meet the needs of their areas. I represent three local authority areas. Conservative-controlled Reigate and Banstead has done a very good job of putting together a local plan and delivering a sensible strategy for the future. Liberal Democrat-controlled Mole Valley District Council has only just started bringing forward its plans and ideas. I await the detail in the coming weeks, but I fear that it will still try to build on substantial parts of the green belt, which we must seek to resist wherever possible.

The particular challenge—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government is aware of my concern—is in the borough of Epsom and Ewell, which is the majority of my constituency. It is the most densely populated borough in Surrey, and its open spaces, such as they exist, are almost entirely green belt, so there are relatively few opportunities to build new housing without encroaching on the restrictions around green-belt development and without building disproportionately high buildings that would destroy the character of the area.

There are ways of solving this problem. I have put some ideas to the local borough as to how it can do that. One is by integrating residential and commercial development in mid-height developments in parts of Epsom and Ewell where there is an opportunity to create not just housing but economic opportunities. In the University for the Creative Arts, we have one of the best creative universities in the country, if not in Europe. We can harness the skills of the young people coming out of that university to build new businesses in the area and provide homes adjoining them so that those young people can develop businesses and live close by.

We will need two things to deliver the right approach for the area. The first is wisdom from the Planning Inspectorate. It has to work with us. It is all too easy for it to come in, follow a broad-brush national guideline and not actually consider the local circumstances or work with the local authority and local politicians to deliver the right strategy for the area. My message for the Secretary of State is this: the more he can encourage the inspectorate to take a wise, thoughtful and strategic approach, the easier it will be for those of us who believe we have to provide additional homes to ensure that happens.

The second thing is that, particularly in densely populated areas with limited opportunities for development, there will be a limit to the number of years for which these extra houses can be provided. We cannot build 500 or 600 houses a year in perpetuity. While I believe we have to put our foot on the accelerator and deliver more housing right now, I hope that the inspectorate will not be encouraged simply to come back and say, “You have to make this provision in perpetuity. You have to provide sites going on and on into the future”. The national planning policy framework states specifically that we must provide housing and look after the local economy, but we must also make development sustainable, so there will be a limit to how far into the future we can carry on building in areas that are already intensely developed.

I give this commitment to the Secretary of State: I intend to play an active role in making sure that my constituency delivers the homes we need—that is essential—and that we use the tools in the Queen’s Speech to support first-time buyers, who should have the opportunity to live and work locally, but I also want an inspectorate that is wise enough to work alongside local politicians to deliver that and does not just shoehorn in developments that are inappropriate for the area.

That is all I wanted to say. I am grateful to the two Secretaries of State for the conversations I have had with them over the past few months about some of these issues—I intend to carry on having those conversations—but I am also very proud to be standing here as part of a majority Conservative Government delivering a Queen’s Speech that is full of the things this country needs and ideas that will transform people’s lives. We will hear lots of nonsense from the Opposition Benches, but people should not pay the slightest attention to it. The Government are delivering, will carry on delivering and will make a real difference to Britain.

2.26 pm

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I welcome you to your new position, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I am slightly concerned by the closing remarks of the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) about not paying the blindest bit of attention to those on the Opposition Benches. The purpose of the Opposition is to scrutinise Government, and a Government that has a free rein to do what it wishes is a very dangerous tool, so we should all be aware that while we might not agree politically on different issues, we should be listening and paying attention to points raised, regardless of where they come from.

On education, the Queen’s Speech had a lot of small promises that are not going to deliver the punch required. In our considerations, we have to ask whether education is about personal gain or societal good. If it is about personal gain, why should we be that bothered? If it is about societal good, education must be from early years to employment and must be provided by Government, regardless of the path a young person takes. Every year round about the time of national exam results there is a great campaign called NoWrongPath. There is no wrong path—different young people will take different routes to achieve what they want—but we must be there to support them, financially and in other ways, because this is not just about getting young people to university; it is about positive destinations and employment. Some 93% of young people in Scotland achieve positive destinations, which is the highest in the UK, and that means employment, training and tertiary education. I talk about tertiary education, rather than higher and further education, because in Scotland the lines are blurred, and should be blurred regardless of where someone lives in the UK. It should not be about HE being the gold standard and FE being something different. We need to work in collaboration, and all types of tertiary institutions have their place.

The investment in FE in the Queen’s Speech will not have clout if FE is considered second best to HE. The £1.8 billion to upgrade the infrastructure does not come close to what is required for FE in England. Frankly, it is too little too late. A lot of that money will be used up dealing with a backlog of maintenance problems and

ongoing issues. Given the huge number of locations delivering FE in England, what has been proposed is merely a small sticking plaster to cover a huge, gaping wound.

City of Glasgow College, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), is one of the institutions that have benefited from the £810 million invested by the Scottish Government since 2007. That is approximately 45% of the amount that the UK Government are proposing to invest in FE in England, which is far closer to the figure that is required. Scaled up, it would be £8 billion, not £1.8 billion.

City of Glasgow College benefited hugely from the Scottish Government's investment, receiving £228 million to create a "supercampus" for 40,000 youngsters in Glasgow. The college sits between two higher education institutions, Strathclyde and Glasgow Caledonian Universities. For a long time, youngsters attending colleges felt second best because their institutions looked second best, but City of Glasgow College is the absolute jewel of Cathedral Street in the centre of Glasgow, and no young people studying at that college consider themselves to be second best.

Let me say something about schools. School funding is an ongoing issue. In England, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, school spending per pupil has fallen by 8% in real terms since 2010. That entirely contradicts the Prime Minister, who has said that school spending is at record levels.

Sir Desmond Swayne: The two are not mutually exclusive. School funding is at record levels, although pupil numbers grew faster during that period, putting pressure on and reducing the amount per pupil. Will the hon. Lady accept that, even given that reduction, we still spend more per pupil than any other rich nation in the world—more than Japan or Germany—with the exception of the USA?

Carol Monaghan: But you spend significantly less per pupil than we spend in Scotland. Even with the Government's proposals—even with the increase in per-pupil funding—you are still not coming close to what we are spending per pupil.

Sir Desmond Swayne: And the results in Scotland are not as good as those in England. Not every problem is solved by throwing more money at it. Just look at the studies by the Programme for International Student Assessment which were released only recently.

Carol Monaghan: I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman has mentioned the PISA studies, because that gives me an opportunity to talk about them. Let us talk about PISA. What exactly is it? It is an extremely crude metric that looks at very particular things. What it does not look at are communication skills. It does not look at problem-solving skills, and it does not look at employability skills. Those are the very skills that employers have been asking for, which is why we transformed our curriculum in Scotland. Countries that do well in PISA, such as China and South Korea, also have extremely high levels of student suicide. I do not want that for my young people in Scotland, and not one of us should. China also selects the pupils whom it puts forward for PISA. So there are many things that are wrong with it.

These are the questions on which we should be judging our young people. Are they in employment? Yes. Are they having a positive experience? Yes. Are they developing the skills that employers and businesses are asking for? Absolutely.

Jonathan Gullis: The hon. Lady has mentioned PISA. Does she not share the concern of Conservative and, I hope, Opposition Members about the decline among students in Scotland in maths and science—which provide the vital skills to which she referred—in comparison with their compatriots in England?

Carol Monaghan: When I look at the tiny differences between students in England and students in Scotland—and there are tiny differences—and at the holistic education that has been developed in Scotland, no, I do not share that concern. Scottish students are developing a broad range of skills. Unlike youngsters in England whose curriculum is being squeezed and narrowed, they still have a broad range from which to choose. No: I absolutely defend our Scottish education system. In the last 10 years, our attainment gap has narrowed, while we are still battling with the effects of austerity. The hon. Gentleman is a teacher. I am a teacher too. I have been there, trying to teach children who have had no breakfast. How can we deal with an attainment gap when the kids who we are teaching are so hungry that they cannot concentrate? That is what we should be looking at.

I mentioned teachers' pay earlier. It is a bold statement that, by September 2022, the Government will increase teachers' starting salary to £30,000. Great; fantastic; but Scotland is already there. From this year, after their initial probation year, Scottish teachers will be earning £32,994. That is happening now, but unfortunately this Government are miles behind. If we are talking about teaching as a profession—if we are talking about valuing the very people who make the difference to our young people—we need to pay them properly.

The Secretary of State did not answer my question about the guaranteeing of teaching salaries in academies. For too long, academies have been able to set their own pay scales, and to work outside the scales that are negotiated with teachers' unions and the profession. Academies pay what they want, and that means, once again, that they are able to pay salaries that are below the nationally agreed levels. Yes, in some cases they may pay above, but they often pay below, and that is certainly not the way to encourage others to join the profession. In Scotland we have more teachers per pupil, and that too must be looked at: while the Government are sorting out the salary, they might deal with that as well.

Let me now say something about tertiary education. We in Scotland are often attacked about the number of youngsters achieving entry to university. As I have said, I do not make the distinction, but for the benefit of those who do, I will say some things about universities. The largest-ever number of Scottish students are at universities, and record numbers of our poorest students are going to them: 15.6% of full-time first-degree entrants are from the most deprived areas of Scotland. That is tackling inequality in a real way.

In January last year, the Commissioner for Fair Access, Sir Peter Scott, said that "significant, and welcome progress" had been made on access, and that "Scotland is now the pace-setter among UK nations in fair access to higher education".

[Carol Monaghan]

He went on to say that Scotland's improving widening access figures vindicated our free tuition policy. He said:

"The latest figures vindicate Scotland's policy of free higher education, which of course has other aims apart from making universities more socially inclusive—not least the commitment that higher education should be seen as a public good from which society as a whole benefits and not just as a private investment producing higher earnings for individuals."

Sir Desmond Swayne: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way again. She is most generous.

How can it be a vindication for a Scottish university such as St Andrews—a Scottish university—to limit its intake of Scottish students to 20% of the university population?

Carol Monaghan: Despite that, more Scottish students are achieving a university education than ever before. I am happy with that.

There has again been a nod to the Augar review, which was mentioned by the shadow Secretary of State. "Considering thoughtfully the recommendations made in the Augar review": what does that mean? What does it mean for the higher education institutions that are thinking about their funding for August and September this year? Will it be £7,500, or will it be £9,250? What will the fees be?

Of course we would welcome any reduction in fees for students in England. That would be of benefit, but it will not be of benefit to have student loans with no time limit. At the moment, we write them off after a period of time, but to allow those student loans ad infinitum, as is being suggested, is extremely worrying. We would be burdening young people not with 30 years of debt but with a lifetime of debt.

Scotland's universities are internationally successful but we know that Brexit threatens that, and we have not had the assurances we need at this stage to put our minds at ease.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): Does the hon. Lady agree with my concern that institutions such as Aberystwyth University in Wales still have no clarity as to whether they will receive the same level of investment for research and innovation as they did under the European structural funds?

Carol Monaghan: Yes, absolutely. We have had these generous promises of money to match European funds. I would like to see us continuing in Horizon 2020 or the next version of it. That would be the best way. I am concerned about the funding, because it is important for any research group or higher education institution. However, this is not just about the funding; it is about the collaboration. When we start removing European funding, we also remove the infrastructure around rich collaborations that have been going on for many decades. Also, EU staff account for about 11% of our staff in Scotland, but they are still not sure what their position is.

A recent report from the Royal Society has shown that the UK's share of EU funding has fallen by €500 million since 2015. There has also been a drop of 40% in UK applications to Horizon 2020. We are still in it just now, but we have had that drop because people do not have any certainty. The UK is now seen as a less attractive place to come and do research, with 35% fewer scientists coming to the UK through key schemes. That is

of concern, as is Erasmus and what Brexit will mean for that programme. We know about the benefits of young people coming here on Erasmus and of our young people managing to travel throughout Europe on Erasmus. They are young people for whom this opportunity would not historically have been available, and it will potentially not be available again. It would be useful if the Minister could confirm whether it is the Government's intention for us to continue to associate with Erasmus and whether we are going to pay into it.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): When the Secretary of State opened the debate, he spoke about the importance of Erasmus, but does my hon. Friend find the Government's warm words about Erasmus bizarre, given that they voted against the amendment to the Brexit legislation last week that would have committed them to working with Erasmus?

Carol Monaghan: Yes, and we are talking about very little money. It really is a small amount of money that would allow our continued participation and that valuable and rich experience for young people to continue, so this makes absolutely no sense to us.

I have yet to see any evidence, in the few years that I have been a Member of this Parliament, of this Government really considering education to be a societal good. We saw the abandonment of the nursing bursary. Obviously, we then had a drop in applications. The Government then partially went back on that, but nurses will still have to pay them £9,000-odd a year, regardless of the nursing bursary, so I am not seeing that.

The Secretary of State also talked of collaboration and the sharing of best practice between Scotland and England. That is brilliant. I am really pleased to hear that, and I hope that he is going to match our per-pupil funding, our teacher-pupil ratio, our teachers' pay, including for teachers in academies, and our commitment to further and higher education. I also hope that, rather than giving young people debt through fees of £9,000-odd or £7,000 a year, this Government will look at abandoning tuition fees altogether. Let us look to best practice: look to Scotland.

2.44 pm

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): The first thing to say is that I will not focus solely on education today. As you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, I always focus on my favourite line in the Queen's Speech, which is the last one:

"Other measures will be laid before you."

It gives us the option of talking about whatever we like. I should also, en passant, like to say a personal thank you to the Secretary of State for his announcement of the extra funding for special needs. He may know that I have a special interest in this, a personal interest, and this funding will go to a very important sector.

This Queen's Speech was the longest ever Queen's Speech I have known in terms of duration. At the beginning of the debate on the Queen's Speech before Christmas, my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) said that these had been "troubled times" for Parliament. But that is always the case when this country faces a point of inflection and a change of historic position. Our nation now faces a reset moment on a par with 1945, when the Attlee Government came

in, and with 1979, when the Thatcher Government came in. Both of them had enormous national problems to solve, and we are in the same position. Thatcher's revolution, controversial as it was, was above all a revolution of expectations, in which the United Kingdom once more realised it was able to stand on its own two feet. In truth, we are facing something similar today.

However, in the next decade, Brexit will not be the biggest challenge to the UK Government and our nation. Fast globalisation of trade and massive technological change will create bigger challenges and bigger opportunities even than Brexit. In the past 30 years, that globalisation has raised half the world out of poverty, but that trend is not secure. We as a nation need to be ready to act, both politically to ensure that free trade remains central to the world's economic operating systems, and commercially to seize the advantages in that for ourselves. Brexit is the catalyst in that process; it is not the outcome. Brexit by itself is not enough. To exploit the opportunities given to us by Brexit, we need to overhaul British society and the British economy. That is the challenge in front of us.

High-quality public services, education, healthcare, social support and the rule of law are vital parts of a decent society, but the Government can provide them only if they have the resources to pay for them. That is our first challenge, and the fundamental weakness in all the Opposition arguments so far today. The reason why Labour lost hundreds of thousands of votes in the north of England is that nobody believed it was able to pay for its promises. The public were right, as always, and the Labour party was wrong.

So what will dictate whether we are able to meet our own aims for our society? The key issue that determines the affluence of citizens, the delivery of public services and even the level of opportunity in society is one boring technical term: productivity. From shortly after the war in 1948, when they started measuring it, until 2008, productivity in this country—whether it was total productivity or labour productivity—grew by 2.25% a year. It bounced around a bit, but never by very much. It grew by 2.25%, year on year, every year in the 60 years from 1948 to 2008. Since 2008, it has been at 0.5%.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): On that point about productivity, people in my constituency and constituencies across the country cannot get trains or buses because the infrastructure has been decimated. That is because it has not been invested in for the past 10 years or so, and that has a real impact on productivity up and down the country. How are the Government going to address that?

Mr Davis: I will come directly to the hon. Gentleman's question later in my speech. He is exactly right in one respect: that is a contributory factor for productivity. But he should not look just at the past 10 years if he wants to comment about our infrastructure. The most used phrase by George Osborne when he was Chancellor was to say, while pointing at Gordon Brown, that he never mended the roof when the sun was shining. That is exactly what happened through those Labour years: profligate spending—poor spending, inadequate spending—that nevertheless did not provide the services that we needed.

Now, what has been the effect of that change in productivity? What is the size of the impact? Had productivity continued at the level it had been for the previous 60 years, had we not had the financial collapse, which happened largely under the watch of the Labour Government and the earlier Clinton Administration in the US, then wages, income and the economy would have been about 22% bigger than they are today. The tax take would have been higher, the deficit would have been easier to pay off, austerity would have been more manageable and shorter. All those things stemmed not just from the crash, but from the damage to our ability to recover from the crash as productivity was allowed to collapse. This dramatic and apparently permanent reduction in productivity has had spectacular consequences across the whole of society and the entire economy, and that is what we have to solve.

The productivity problem is a universal problem. No productivity means no progress. How do we deal with that? The answers include education, skills, training, research and investment, and of course, as the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury) rightly said, infrastructure. If we are to reset our economy and our society, we must be unflinching in our analysis and in the critique of our own past as well as those of the other parties.

Mr Betts: The right hon. Gentleman denigrates the efforts, policies and achievements of the previous Labour Government on productivity. Will he therefore explain why productivity went up by over 2% under that Labour Government on a consistent basis? Since 2010, however, productivity has hardly risen at all.

Mr Davis: Productivity had been at that level for 60 years. It is not difficult to keep things the same as they were before; the really hard thing is to smash productivity down from 2.3% to 0.5%, which is what the hon. Gentleman's Government did.

If we are to reset the economy, let us look at what we got wrong, as well as at what Labour got wrong. Take research. The past 30 years, under Governments of all persuasions, have seen the UK decline from one the most research-intensive economies to one of the least. In the past decade, China has overtaken us, and South Korea now spends three times as much as we do. The Queen's Speech committed to establishing the UK as a world leader in science with greater investment—so far so good. In my view, we need to do even more than that in quantitative terms. In the short term, we need to double the amount of research spend not just by the Government, but by the private sector. In the longer run, we need to treble that joint expenditure, and I stress that it should be joint expenditure. We should also address the things that we have not been so good at. It is easy to put money into genetics, artificial intelligence, self-driving cars or IT—the things we are historically world leaders in—but we should also try to ensure that that money goes where it will make a big difference by improving the things that we have not been so good at.

Historically, we have not been so good at what is called translational research. That means taking a good idea from the laboratory and making a great product, which leads to a great company, which leads to more and more jobs, more wealth creation, more tax and the rest of it. We would do well to build on some of the

[Mr David Davis]

great institutions that we currently have. The University of Sheffield Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre, which is essentially an aviation-based operation, is doing fantastic, world-class, world-beating work. We should do similar things with the Warwick Manufacturing Group. There is a great deal of work to do to encourage those operations and build on them. Maybe we should even look to build a Massachusetts Institute of Technology of the north, because that is the sort of thing that we should be considering if we are to fix our economy.

I have some sympathy with one area of Opposition Members' comments, which is the university underpinning of the research and the response to the Augar report. I know Philip Augar very well, and I spoke to him about his review before the report. If anything, it pulled its punches. The truth is that the university tuition fees and loans scheme invented and implemented by the Blair Government and carried on by us has failed. It has done a bad job. It has delivered poor-quality education, high levels of expectations and low levels of outcome. It has landed young people—some are now middle-aged—with liabilities for almost their entire lives, putting a cap on their aspirations. It has not delivered what it was intended to deliver, which was people paying for their component, not the public advantage component. It does not work that way. It has encouraged all sorts of perverse consequences and behaviours in our universities, so we must deal with it. I would argue to the Secretary of State for Education—I know that this is wider and much bigger than just the Department for Education—that he and his colleagues should be radical and brave.

Mr Sheerman: When we do things on a cross-party basis, we sometimes get it right. When we had that agreement on higher education funding—the Dearing report—we said that there should be a balance between who pays: the student who benefits, the employer that benefits, and the country as a whole that benefits. What went wrong was not that there was a student contribution, but it was raised too far and too fast.

Mr Davis: That was not the only thing that went wrong. I recommend that the hon. Gentleman reads the Augar report carefully, because a lot of things went wrong, including the lack of restrictions on what universities could do. However, if he wants to approach the Secretary of State or have his Front-Bench team approach the Secretary of State to offer a joint approach, I am sure that the Secretary State will be very polite and talk it over with them over a cup of tea.

Carol Monaghan: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Davis: Yes, but this must be the last time.

Carol Monaghan: Does the right hon. Gentleman share my concerns about the suggestion in the Augar review that the time limit on paying back should be removed? That could saddle people with university debt for life.

Mr Davis: My point here is that we are not about tinkering with one or two rules. We should be rethinking the whole system. The hon. Lady will forgive me if I do not go down the route that she has laid for me, because we should think about rethinking the whole system.

The Secretary of State was eloquent about the achievements at school level, and he was right. While I am on my feet, I pay tribute to the Minister for School Standards, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Nick Gibb), who did a fabulous job of developing phonics-based education—[*Interruption.*] Oh, he is there on the Front Bench. He did a fabulous job on phonics—one of the great successes of all the Education Departments of the past 30 years. Of course, I take it as a given that we have done better than Labour would have and, of course, we have mostly kept up with our international competitors. However, to use a phrase that came up more times than any other in my school reports, my reaction is, “Can do better.” That was the theme or motto of my school reports, and I think we can do better here.

In the friendliest possible way, we are not doing what some of our competitors, including the Chinese, the Uruguayans, believe it or not, and the Belgians, are doing, which is seizing an opportunity. Technology is such that we ought to be re-engineering the classroom. We ought to be able to re-engineer it so that the best can do better and the least good can be pulled up to the best possible outcome. That would be great for them, great for social mobility, and great for the economy as a whole. We ought to think hard about looking closely at all the things China has done. Something like 1,300 schools are now using artificial intelligence, which is driving its teaching systems and ensuring that every child is diagnosed to find what they are good at and what they are not good at. There is much to be done there.

Productivity, however, will have to be fixed with a universal approach, and that includes, of course, investment. On an international scale, we do investment well. With all the furore and negativity about Brexit, people forget that we are still the third-highest recipient of foreign direct investment in the world—way above any European country—and we have been for years and we will continue to be. We must not damage that. When we come to the question of domestic investment, which has been up and down in recent years, we must ask ourselves what should guide our policies. We have the most productive industries in Europe by far, and the least productive. We have nine of the 25 fastest growing companies in Europe, but we have a long tail of poor performance. One notable aspect of the productivity conundrum that stands out is that it is not uniform.

The key point in this debate is that it is the same regionally, because the golden triangle of London, Oxford and Cambridge has by far the highest productivity in Europe—the average wage in that area is 90% higher than the European average—yet some regions of our economy are down with the lowest performers in the European Union, such as southern Italy and the old East Germany. I hope the Scots Nats forgive me for including Scotland as a region in that context.

We have to do something about that. Where productivity is low, jobs are scarce and, of course, wages are low, which is a fundamental problem that this Parliament needs to attack. It argues for targeted policies like free ports and, to come directly to the point made by the hon. Member for Weaver Vale, for a great focus on—forgive me for the phrase—unglamorous, smaller infrastructure projects designed to sort out problems that are on the deck now. We must de-bottleneck the whole economy, because that is much more likely to be effective than

grand vanity projects, and everyone knows what I am talking about. We can do that because we will have very low interest rates for the foreseeable future. If that is not enough, perhaps we should cancel High Speed 2 to pay for it.

A strategy of modestly sized infrastructure projects—road, rail, air and broadband—will help but, again, it will not be enough by itself. We need to make it more attractive to stay in the regions. We need to turn more of our regional towns and cities into magnet towns and cities, places that attract talent, money and enterprise, and it can be done. If we look around the world, there are dozens of examples. From Bilbao to Pittsburgh, and from Denver to Tel Aviv, cities have transformed their futures. We must ensure that our towns and cities can do the same.

Finally, house building has simply not kept up with the huge increase in population over the past 20 years. Year after year, the combination of a slow planning process, nimbyism and speculative land hoarding has limited the availability of housing. This has simultaneously led to higher house prices, smaller homes—our homes are now half the size they were in the 1920s, and they are the smallest in Europe—massively lower rates of home ownership, and severe rent poverty.

It is hard to solve that in London and the crowded south-east, but it can be solved in the provinces, making them more attractive in the process. The Government are actively thinking about garden villages and garden towns, and we should step up that programme. If we allowed every planning authority in the country to nominate one garden village or garden town of between 1,500 and 5,000 houses, which is big enough to be viable for a school and shops, and so on, we would not solve, but we would seriously mitigate, our housing problem. We would make it attractive for people to live in places other than the south-east. Again, that would majorly improve productivity by attracting talent back out to the provinces.

The problem of productivity is a tough one to tackle but tackle it we must. Research, investment, education, infrastructure, magnet cities and garden villages all have a contribution to make in simultaneously improving the lives of our citizens and helping us to solve this fundamental problem. If we do not solve it, we will not be able to afford to solve any of the others.

If we do all of that, we will have a very good chance of making the Prime Minister's promise of a golden future a reality for all our citizens.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I remind everybody that there are now 35 people on the list, including nine maiden speeches. We want to be fair to those who are making their maiden speeches. I am not imposing a time limit, but please have in mind that you each have about six minutes. That will ensure people at least get in.

3.4 pm

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is good to see you in your rightful place again, in the Chair.

I make no apology for saying that I want to be a champion for local government in this Parliament. Over the past 10 years, local government has had bigger cuts

than any other part of the public sector. When we come to the comprehensive spending review, it cannot simply be about rearranging the amount of money as part of some fair funding settlement; it must actually put more money into local councils so that they can deliver the services that our communities want and need.

With a time limit rule, I had thought that I would not be able to stand again as Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, but I understand the Government might be thinking about removing the time limit. If so, and if the House supports it, I will probably allow my name to be put forward again.

There are things in the Queen's Speech with which I do not necessarily agree. If the Labour party were in government, I am sure we would have done things differently, but my approach to life as a Select Committee Chair was to try to find areas where we can reach agreement and encourage, prod and entuse the Government into going further than they might want to. I will briefly mention three areas.

First, on devolution, I welcome the Government's commitment to levelling up the powers of the Mayors of the combined authorities. I hope the Government might do more and give them all more powers, particularly on skills, training and transport. Those Departments probably have not been as enthusiastic about devolution as others have been.

I would also like the Government to address two other matters in the White Paper. Mayoral combined authorities probably should be rolled out in other areas, but devolution, if it is to work properly in this country, has to be devolution to all councils in all places, not just to those in combined authorities. I hope the Government will seriously consider that. They were going to do it with their 100% business rate retention policy, but it was dropped when we went to 75% retention.

The other key issue is: how can we allow local authorities to raise more of their own funds, rather than simply having more power to spend the money that is handed out to them? We have the most centralised system of local government funding anywhere in Europe, and that needs to change.

Secondly, the Government are offering an all-party approach to social care, which I welcome. The Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee and the Health and Social Care Committee produced a unanimous report in the last Parliament, with 22 MPs from both sides of the House recommending a social care premium and a percentage of inheritance tax as a way of funding social care. The report has been lying around for 18 months. We have a blueprint to get on with it. Germany did it 30 years ago in a cross-party, consensual way, and it has worked there, with the public generally supporting it. I hope there will be a genuine attempt by both Front Benches to reach cross-party agreement. It is on both sides to take this forward in a consensual way.

Finally, I generally welcome the promises on housing, but obviously there are big challenges. The first is the abolition of section 21 evictions. We know that evictions from private sector housing are a major cause of homelessness in this country. The Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee's inquiry into homelessness identified that as a problem.

[Mr Clive Betts]

Equally, if we are to abolish section 21 evictions, we need to think about how we deal with rent increases without having an overbearing rent control regime. That is a big challenge, and it might be something the Select Committee will want to consider. We recognise the good intention, but we want to know how it will be delivered in practice.

At the same time, we want to see legislation on housing courts so that there is an easier way for landlords to evict tenants who simply do not pay their rent. Landlords normally wait for the section 21 time to elapse before doing it, but if section 21 is not available, landlords need to have those powers. It is recognised in the Queen's Speech, but we need a timetable for that to come into effect.

Another issue is how we deal with the problems of leases. Reference was made to a draft Bill at Question Time yesterday, and I think that is probably the right way forward. I know it will take a bit longer, but there are some real challenges, not about how we stop leases on new houses and deal with the unfairness of leases on new flats, but about how we tackle the problems of existing leases, including the unfairness in how some of them have been sold, the unfair service charges and the difficulties people have in buying their freehold. The Select Committee's report recommended action on all those challenges. It is much more difficult to deal with existing leases, and a draft Bill is therefore probably the right way forward to try to make sure that we get all the nuances and the details correct. Hopefully we can also do that on a cross-party basis.

Finally, on the issue of cladding, there is a building safety Bill in the Queen's Speech to implement the recommendations of the Grenfell inquiry and the Hackitt report, on which the Select Committee has had various hearings. There is still a challenge. The Government have put money in to deal with ACM—aluminium composite material—cladding, but there are still too many properties where, because of disputes between freeholders and leaseholders, the cladding has not been removed. The Government need to put their weight behind getting that work carried out.

The second issue to address is what to do about other forms of cladding, such as zinc cladding and high-pressure laminate cladding, which many experts believe are as dangerous as ACM cladding. Although they will not be allowed on new buildings, they are still on existing buildings. Where leaseholders have this on their homes, they often find that they cannot sell those homes and are stuck in them. That is a real problem and the Government need to undertake a more comprehensive review of that issue.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I am glad that the hon. Gentleman is making the point about the cladding in buildings, because this issue affects some properties in my constituency too. We have different building standards in Scotland, but the UK Government's advice note 14 is still having an impact on people's ability to get mortgages on their properties. Does he agree that urgent action needs to be taken by the Minister on this?

Mr Betts: Yes, I do. People cannot sell their properties and they cannot get mortgages on them, and this whole area presents a real challenge. It is no use Ministers saying,

“We don't think this is quite as dangerous”, because the fact is that that cladding on a building means that people will not buy, and people cannot get a mortgage and are stuck. The Minister needs to act at some point on that. The freeholders have not got the money to pay for this and neither have the leaseholders, and people are stuck in unsaleable properties, which is a real difficulty for them.

Kevin Hollinrake: I very much hope that the hon. Gentleman does stand again to be Chair, because it has been a pleasure to serve on the Select Committee under his tutelage over the past four and a half years. He mentions not only the problems of local authority financing and their finances, but the social care premium. Does he see those two things as being correlated? The biggest issue for local authorities is the funding of social care, and if a different solution is provided for that, the financial pressure on many local authorities is relieved.

Mr Betts: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about that, although perhaps I should call him my hon. Friend for this purpose, given how we have worked together on the Select Committee. The problem with the great and rising demand for social care is that it means that there is proportionately less money to be spent on important things such as the environment, road repairs and refuse collection, the things that everybody receives from their local council. Many people then start to say, “Why am I paying my council tax? I am getting less and less for paying more and more.” That issue can be addressed by a social care premium as well.

Finally, on the cladding issue, it came to my attention over Christmas—I did a bit for the “You & Yours” programme—that the National House Building Council is refusing to pay out on a warranty for properties where the cladding put on was not the right type but it had been improperly passed by the building inspector. The NHBC said that it was not its building inspector and the warranty applied only in cases where its building inspector had done the work. That is a major loophole in people's circumstances. When people have bought a house and got a warranty, they think that that warranty is going to cover them for defective materials. However, if that defective material was passed off by a building inspector that was not the NHBC's inspector, as in this case, they are not covered. I hope the Secretary of State will look at that issue too. I recognise the time limit, Mr Deputy Speaker, but these are major issues that arise from the Queen's Speech. I hope that there will be some cross-party working, perhaps through the Select Committee, that will help us move forward.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I call Robert Halfon. If it is easier for you and you wish to remain seated, please feel free to do so.

3.13 pm

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and many congratulations to you.

I strongly welcome this Queen's Speech. I believe that skills, social justice, standards and support for the profession should be the four interlocking foundations of this Government's education programme. There is enormous talent all over the country just waiting to be unleashed, but to do that we must help lower-skilled workers to

train and boost their wages. About 6 million adults are not qualified to GCSE level. Many end up in low-paid jobs, their prospects dragged into the quicksand. A wave of lost opportunity is also about to come crashing down on the next generation, as a third of England's 16 to 19-year olds lack basic skills. In addition, according to PwC, up to 28% of jobs taken by 16 to 24-year-olds in the UK could be at risk of automation by the early 2030s, so we must find answers quickly.

First, the Government should turbocharge adult learning. Overall adult learning is at its lowest level since 1996, and employer training has stagnated. Why not develop the national retraining scheme to focus on training for low-skilled workers into roles that align with our labour market? We need a world-class apprenticeships programme. The levy could be reformed so that it supports more apprenticeships in small and medium-sized enterprises and getting school leavers into areas of skills shortages. Access to levy funds should be limited for firms that are simply accrediting existing skills rather than adding new value, and more generous allowances should be made to employers who are upskilling low-skilled workers. There needs to be a much clearer progression route from lower to higher apprenticeships.

It is time for a healthier balance between technical and academic learning. One way to solve some of the problems in higher education that my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) pointed out in his speech is by rocket-boosting degree apprenticeships. They should be the crown jewel in a revamped technical offering: students earn while they learn, there is no debt and they are almost guaranteed to get a good skilled job at the end of it, and we meet our skills and productivity needs. Apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships should be hard-wired into careers advice.

Social justice must be the beating heart of our education policy: a bold, assertive agenda that has compassion and aspiration right at its core. Despite the good work of the Government, too many cohorts are being left behind. Disadvantaged pupils are 19 months behind by the time they do their GCSEs, and some groups are particularly vulnerable; whereas the average national attainment 8 score is 46.5, the rate for pupils with a special educational needs statement or education, health and care plan is 13.5, with the figure for looked after children being 18.8, and for white working-class pupils it is 28.5.

Everyone across the country should have access to a good school, but a child living in one of England's poorest areas is 10 times more likely to go to a substandard school than one living in its wealthier areas. According to Ofsted, between 2006 and 2019, 415 secondary schools had at least four inspections that were not good or outstanding, despite various interventions aimed at improving them. Schools in many deprived areas also struggle to attract experienced teachers, who are so instrumental in driving up quality. In the most disadvantaged quintile of areas, 67% of secondary schools are rated good or outstanding for the quality of teaching, whereas the figure is 93% in the wealthiest quintile. These obstacles to learning should be dismantled. We should support the development of local teachers and incentivise highly commended initial teacher training providers, such as the Redcar and Cleveland Teacher Training Partnership, which was rated outstanding by

Ofsted. By offering teaching bursaries, retention payments, salary bonuses and mentoring to good teachers in challenging areas, we can avoid the flight of local talent.

Educational standards are improving. The proportion of six-year-olds passing the phonics check increased from 58% in 2012 to 82% in 2018. More rigorous apprenticeship standards are replacing older frameworks. In the past 10 years, 1.8 million more pupils studied in good or outstanding schools. We have to build on that and export rigour to every part of our education system, including technical education. I welcome the extra funding for further education and, in particular, the £2 billion commitment to improving capital expenditure, but FE financial resources have lagged behind other education sectors in the past few years. We should carefully calculate and meet the required levels of investment beyond that, including in respect of the resources that FE providers need to support English and maths retakes—after all, pupils should not be leaving school without those basic skills in place.

The Government should also offer top-quality childcare. Almost half of disadvantaged children are already behind when they start primary school, and good-quality childcare can help to plug this gap. Children who attend high-quality settings for two to three years are almost eight months ahead of children who attend none. However, some of our early years workforce is underqualified. There is considerable scope to scale up apprenticeships, and we should use higher-level apprenticeships to address skills shortages in early years and improve quality.

The Government can help to support the profession by offering more flexibility to teachers to hone their trade and by helping schools to cover off-timetable time. There should be more emphasis on peer support. Although 30% of novice teachers in England are assigned mentors, the figure is higher in some OECD countries; for instance, in New Zealand it is 56%.

Finally, skills, social justice, standards and support for the profession must be the four pillars of our education programme. We have to extend the ladder of opportunity and invite those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds to climb to the top so that they can get jobs, prosperity and security, and meet the skills needs of our nation. We need to nurture that raw talent and focus relentlessly on addressing social injustice in education. In that way, we can build the brightest future for everyone.

3.20 pm

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), with whom I often agree and whom I will refer to later.

At the start of this new Parliament, with lots of maiden speeches, I decided to look back at my own maiden speech four and a half years ago, in which I focused on the proud industrial past of the people of Bristol South and the economic divisions that are rife in my constituency. I said that the biggest challenge we faced was to equip people in Bristol South with the skills and knowledge they need to secure a fair share of Bristol's great economic growth and prosperity. I spoke in support of greater devolution, driven by people in communities, and the creation of a western powerhouse.

Four years on, what does this Queen's Speech offer us? We hear the rhetoric about the Tories' love for northern former Labour constituencies and the promise of jam, but do not be fooled. The Tories have dominated

[Karin Smyth]

the south-west and the west for decades. They continue to take voters for granted, and they have not invested in the west country. The West of England Combined Authority boasts on its website that it is a net contributor to the Treasury, but there seems to be some doubt in the Office for National Statistics about whether it still is. I suspect we may have gone backwards in the last four years, but I am checking that statistic. Whether we are talking about electrification, wider transport infrastructure or investment in education and skills, we are being held back by the Government, and the combined authority has failed to deliver any meaningful change.

Young people in Bristol South are the least likely in the country to go to university, despite the fact that there are two universities in the city and other Russell Group universities nearby. That is a scandal for our city, and I have to keep repeating that statistic. How have the Government helped? We have evidence that early years is a key indicator of future success, but the Government have cut the legs from underneath Sure Start. Shockingly, there is nothing in the Queen's Speech about the maintained nursery sector or its contribution to future attainment. All primary schools in Bristol South have had their budgets cut since 2015. More than £15 million has been taken out of our schools—money that could be used to employ teaching staff and support staff, and to buy teaching resources. Of course, cuts of that magnitude have had a severe impact on learning. The new allocation may be welcome—we have yet to see it come through—but it in no way repairs the damage that has been done.

There is virtually no A-level provision in Bristol South. Further education is the bridge to opportunity, be it access to A-levels or to level 2 and 3 adult education. Shockingly, from 2012 to 2018 there was a decrease of more than 40% in the Government's direct funding to our further education college. Providers are ready and willing to support the industrial strategy and improve our poor productivity, but they are reeling from the last decade of cuts and struggling with the complicated funding routes that the Government still insist on. That is making life really difficult.

Apprenticeships are a way to support young people who are not going to university, and to support adults who want to improve their opportunities. I have been a vocal supporter of the Government's apprenticeship programme. I have worked with the right hon. Member for Harlow and his successor Minister to try to progress apprenticeships, and I hope jointly to chair the all-party group on apprenticeships during this Parliament. The Government have got it badly wrong with the implementation of apprenticeships, particularly by making the process complicated for small and medium-sized enterprises, which are the bedrock of our industry in Bristol South. The Government need to address that in this Parliament.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. I fully concur about the lack of investment in education, not only in the west of England but across southern England and in many other places. My constituents are deeply concerned about the shortage of teachers and the fact that the Government are not providing enough funding for schools. There is a lot of concern about the Government's rejigging of the funding formula, which in many English

towns is seen as a way of taking money from urban areas and redistributing it, wrongly, to better-off areas in the countryside.

Karin Smyth: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend.

I will move briefly to climate change. Following Labour's motion in the spring, we are agreed as a House that we face a climate emergency. The Government have a target but no path to achieving it. I suggest that if they start to align a strategy on skills and apprenticeships to the green jobs of the future, that will be of tremendous benefit to the people of Bristol South.

Bristol is home to some great innovators and enterprises working on the green agenda—for example, in the construction industry. I have supported the City of Bristol College, the West of England Combined Authority and the Government to bring the Construction Skills Centre to Bristol South. In fact, when the right hon. Member for Harlow visited Bristol South we pointed to a piece of land that we wanted to ensure was used for the centre; we hope to cut the turf on the site at Hengrove later this month.

Bristol and the west country are building, but we are short of labour. Good training in construction jobs and apprenticeships will directly help my constituents into jobs. At the centre we need training for the future, including training in green building and green technology, so that we meet the climate change targets. Currently there is little investment in training on new materials, techniques and technology, which will equip young people for the jobs of the future. The Construction Skills Centre in Bristol South provides a tremendous opportunity; I am willing to work with the Government to make the most of it.

Finally, the Government stated in the Queen's Speech that there will be a constitution, democracy and rights commission. In my view that is long overdue. In my speech in 2015, I warned that we all needed to heed the message from the Scottish referendum; that was before the Brexit referendum. As vice-chair of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, I warned throughout the Brexit debate of the dangers of ignoring voices from across these islands, but also the voice of England within the United Kingdom.

In July the Public Accounts Committee report into funding in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland noted that the baseline funding and the Barnett formula were set some 40 years ago and that spending per head of population on public services in England is the lowest in the four nations at £9,080. It is not just the money. My English constituents have no democratic control or accountability over our health service, our schools, our transport or our skills. The core institutions of our community are run by unaccountable and labyrinthine bodies, be it clinical commissioning groups, multi-academy trusts, local enterprise partnerships or the many ad hoc partnerships that have grown up over the last 10, 20 or 30 years. These bodies are a law unto themselves and their civil servant masters in London have no accountability to us locally.

I will continue to support apprenticeships, early years and the City of Bristol College to provide post-16 adult opportunities. We desperately need to secure decent funding to support young people at their post-16 transition, to help them to make the right decisions and nurture them, as we do those transitioning into reception classes

and into year 7. We need the combined authority to better use its influence to get providers to work together to make use of the available funding. Public service infrastructure is vital to reversing the education and skills deficit, and the Government need to be much bolder about the ambition for devolution in England so that we can build the western powerhouse that I talked about four and a half years ago and give people in Bristol South the opportunity that they deserve.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Will Members observe the usual courtesies, please? To make his maiden speech, I call David Johnston.

3.28 pm

David Johnston (Wantage) (Con): Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, for letting me give my maiden speech this afternoon. I have to confess that I am glad to go first out of those giving their maiden speeches today, because the quality that I have heard so far in my days in Parliament, from both sides of the House, has been so high that if I had had to listen to several while sitting here, I might have signalled to you that I was changing my mind and would do it in a couple of months instead.

I have the privilege of succeeding the right hon. Ed Vaizey as the Member for Wantage. I did not know Ed before the campaign last month, but I would hear on the doorstep about what a good constituency MP people thought he had been. Of course, far beyond the constituency he did so much to promote the UK's creative and tech industries, and I feel sure he will continue to do that in his post-parliamentary life.

For those who are not familiar with Wantage—I know that some Members are familiar with it—it is located in Oxfordshire. The constituency starts, at its eastern border, in the historic town of Wallingford, which is a place of key moments in our history, not least the Archbishop of Canterbury of the time being the last remaining resistance to William the Conqueror before he became King—it was at Wallingford that the archbishop submitted to his authority.

As we move further west, we come to Didcot, which is the largest town in the constituency. This is usually the point at which people who are not sure where Wantage is or whether they have been in the constituency say, “Ah yes, Didcot!”, because they have changed trains at Didcot Parkway station. I encourage people to leave the station and come to see all that Didcot has to offer. A couple of years ago, it was judged England's most normal town. I feel rather proud to represent England's most normal town.

Further west, we come to Wantage itself, birthplace of King Alfred the Great. A statue of him stands proudly in the market square. North-west of that is Faringdon, which is another very picturesque market town. It holds a special place in my heart because it is where they held the meeting to select the Conservative candidate for Wantage.

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): A historic moment.

David Johnston: Indeed; another one.

On the far western border we have Shrivenham, which is a place where we have so many of the military families, past and present, who serve our country so well.

Ed's departure is my considerable gain and I feel extremely lucky to represent the people of Wantage. All across the constituency we have beautiful villages; we have cutting-edge science and technology in Harwell campus and Milton Park; we have small and medium-sized enterprises and multinational businesses; and we have first-rate farming that demonstrates every day how high the standards of British agriculture are.

If the key challenges of my constituency can be summed up in one word, it is infrastructure. In different parts of the constituency, that means different things. In some places it is about road safety and trying to reopen Grove station, which was one of those lost under the Beeching cuts; in other parts it is about GP appointments and school places. In the more rural areas it is about broadband. I know that lots of these issues are familiar to Members on both sides of the House. So, there is lots in the Queen's Speech for me to welcome, because improving infrastructure runs through it.

The reason I wanted to speak today is because of education. As some Members of the House know, I had never been a political candidate before last month; I had been chief exec of a charity, trying to improve education and employment opportunities. There was an immediate contrast for me—a surprising baptism by fire—because when I was the chief exec of a charity and I spoke at events, people in the audience would nod encouragingly at the seeming wisdom of my remarks, but the second I became a political candidate, they would shake their heads disparagingly at the seeming stupidity of my remarks. I had to get used to that very quickly, and I am grateful to Opposition Members for not doing it today, given that this is my maiden speech. I am sure I can look forward to that in future.

I attended a school where only 20% of people passed any five GCSEs, never mind five good GCSEs. My mum left school at 16 and got a job as soon as she could. My dad left school at 14 and joined the Army as soon as he could. After university, I spent the next 16 years running organisations to provide opportunities to young people from similar backgrounds and far more challenging backgrounds to get better education and get a better job—in short, to try to improve social mobility. I would like to bring social mobility back into the debates in this House as much as I can, because last year it was referred to fewer than half the number of times it was in 2016, yet many of us in this House have stories of having been socially mobile ourselves. We all represent parents in our constituencies who are concerned that their children may not have as good a life as they had. That should be at the core of what we should be doing here.

There is lots in the Queen's Speech for me to welcome. First, there is the improvement in the per-pupil funding across schools, which helps to correct a historic imbalance wherein some areas were given a lot more money to deal with the challenges of their pupils than other areas. I have looked at what it will mean for the schools in my constituency, and it is a significant increase. I hope that some of the money can be used to attract teachers to teach in more challenging areas, where they are most needed.

I also welcome the raising of the starting salary for teachers, because it is important that it keeps pace with the starting salary offered particularly by private sector graduate schemes. It says something important about

[David Johnston]

the value that we place on teaching as a profession. From my point of view, it should be regarded extremely highly because it is crucial to the future of the country. Running through the Queen's Speech is greater emphasis on skills and technical education. I hope that we can finally achieve parity between vocational education and academic education.

Education is important to social mobility, but what happens in schools and colleges is not the only thing that matters for young people. Improving social mobility is not just a job for Government. I hope that our charities, our local authorities, our universities and employers will continue to increase the role that they play in providing opportunity for young people. I have worked with thousands of young people who needed that opportunity—they needed the door to be opened, then they would show what they could do. It is absolutely true that talent is everywhere; opportunity is not. The Queen's Speech goes a considerable way in extending opportunity to places that have lacked it for far too long.

3.36 pm

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The maiden speech from the hon. Member for Wantage (David Johnston) was inspirational. I liked what he said—it even made me want to come to Wantage and have a look round, rather than just changing trains there. Given what he said about social mobility, there are all kinds of cross-party groups that I immediately want him to join so that we can work on those issues together. I am sure that he will make a great contribution to the House in the years to come.

I made my maiden speech quite some time ago. I am the longest continuously serving Member on the Opposition Benches. I hate the term Father of the House; I am a senior Member. I dimly remember my maiden speech, and I want to return to the theme of that speech. We had had a bitterly divided general election. We do all the usual ritual things in the two parties—the Government and the Opposition—and we say pretty cruel things about each other, but we have a responsibility. The Government have a majority and a mandate for five years, so we must all get on with representing our constituents and working in the best way possible, which they would admire.

I notice when I knock on people's doors that many of my constituents are fed up with the knockabout nature of this place. It is always them against us; "We are totally right, and you are totally wrong." I have spent a lot of my career in Parliament—I served for 10 years as Chair of the Select Committee on Education—proving that by working cross-party we can make a difference. Working together we can come up with all sorts of good ideas, innovations and good policies that any party can adapt and adopt, and make a difference to our constituents.

We all want the very best education system in this country. We all want the best policy making possible. Many of the things that we have to do over the next five years will need cross-party participation, and I hope that we can secure that. There is a lot of ground for partnership in education in particular. I have been involved in a number of cross-party initiatives. I was asked to be involved in the new look at apprenticeships. There was a commission of inquiry, and we took

evidence—I gave evidence too—and for the first time we secured an employers' levy for training and apprenticeship. It was a big step forward, with cross-party support. Who would have thought that a Conservative Government would introduce that? I admire that initiative. There are some problems that have to be sorted out, because the levy is not working in quite the way we had intended, but it is right in purpose and we just have to get it right in the detail. Certain training providers are being squeezed out, and some of the levy is going to places we did not quite expect it to go to. We have to refine and improve all policies, and I will certainly work to improve that one, because the work that has been done on apprenticeships is inspirational and making a great difference to so many people.

I want to push one particular point today, and that is the fact that all of us, of whatever party, know that we do not have a bad education system. It goes back to 1880, when we first introduced compulsory education for children aged under 10. All those years later—140 years—a lot of children in our country are getting a pretty good education. I have three daughters, a son and 12 grandchildren, so I have a pretty good view of what is going on, from my seven-month-old granddaughter to my 18-year-old granddaughter and lots in between; I am pretty well connected with the market. A lot of people are getting a good education and standards are going up, which I applaud. The right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), who is just leaving the Chamber, is an old friend of mine, and he and I agree absolutely that our standards have started to improve steadily, even with respect to the international comparisons.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his contribution so far. He mentioned the international dimension. One of the great advantages of our education system in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is the offer to overseas students. Does he recognise the contribution that overseas students make to the education system across all regions of the United Kingdom, with partnerships, and the exchange of cultures and our educational standards? Does he also recognise that many countries across the world wish to send their students to the United Kingdom to get our education, because it is so good?

Mr Sheerman: I absolutely take that point. When I chaired the Education Committee, we did an inquiry on the importance of overseas students, who provide roughly 10% of the income of universities. That is a massive contribution. Universities are so important in our communities. The University of Huddersfield makes a remarkable contribution and is the largest employer in my constituency, and those of us who have universities in our towns and cities know just how lucky we are. Thank goodness we have universities; long may they thrive and survive. The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), a former Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, mentioned the importance of research, and that point was absolutely right.

Let me return to the broader education system. We usually judge the success of our education through evidence-based policy. How do we drive it? How do we assess it? Is it evidence-based policy? Is it going in the right direction? Are we using public money in the right way? On the other hand, we obsessively look at other countries all the time to see if we are as good as them.

The programme for international student assessment, and all that, is very important. There are deficiencies in the PISA methodology, but the fact is that those are the methods we use.

Generally, yes, our education system is improving, but a substantial proportion of children in this country are not getting the education or the opportunities. They are in particular constituencies, and we know which ones; we have all the bruises, cuts and everything else. *[Interruption.]* I am coming to the end of my speech. We know where those underperforming areas are and we have the methods—with passion and leadership—to sort them out. Our country is divided, and the Children's Commissioner said only three months ago that 20% of children leave school with no qualifications at all. If that is the divide in our country, we have to understand that underperformance on a cross-party basis. We know the way to tackle it—and together, let's do it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I am relying on people who are not making maiden speeches to show courtesy and compassion to those who are about to do so by taking only six minutes. For those who are not conversant with the system, let me explain that if I put on a time limit, it will apply to everybody henceforward, and it would be better for those making maiden speeches if they do not have to watch every second on the clock, whereas experienced Members who have had the opportunity to speak many times in this Chamber—and will probably, if they behave today, have that opportunity many more times—are well able to limit their remarks to six minutes. I am asking them to do so, starting with Sir Robert Syms.

3.45 pm

Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): May I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (David Johnston) on a very good maiden speech? The measure of this is that when somebody speaks, one thinks, “Actually, I would like to hear from him again”, and one does not necessarily say that about every colleague. I also have to say that I think this House will miss his predecessor. Wantage is in good hands, and I look forward to hearing from my hon. Friend in future.

The past two and a half years have been some of the most painful times in politics that I can remember. I am pleased that the British people were given the chance to break the deadlock and elect a Government with a majority. For those of us who are back, the atmosphere is totally different. The fact that the Government can get on and deliver Brexit is a wonderful thing and good for democracy.

To turn to the debate, one of the things that has always concerned me in Poole is how badly some of our schools have been funded over the decades. It is very difficult to argue that a child in Poole should be given less of an opportunity than someone else in the country. The Government have had, on two or three occasions, an opportunity to improve funding a little. I am glad that the Secretary of State has taken on board representations from f40 and others and we are going to make further progress over the next few years. However, I take on board points made earlier that funding is not all. Discipline, uniforms and leadership play a big role in the classroom. I am pleased to see that standards are improving and I hope we continue that as a drive for the future.

I have a few concerns. This country is a great magnet for foreign students in terms of English language schools, of which we have many in Dorset, and colleges and universities. Sometimes the immigration system behaves in a way that is not helpful to our earning billions of pounds-worth of money from abroad and bringing people to have a great experience in our colleges and universities. Sometimes, those people are a softer target than the people the system is trying to crack down on. I hope that we not only encourage foreign students to come to the United Kingdom but make the immigration system a little more flexible in the way that it treats them. Students from Saudi Arabia do not need to work when they come to the UK but sometimes students from Colombia do. If we limit people in the hours that they can work, we sometimes penalise those from poorer states. In a post-Brexit world, we have to encourage people to come to the United Kingdom. They bring in billions of pounds-worth of money. They create lots of jobs in the United Kingdom. It is seen in the accounts as foreign invisible income. It is about education as well as other things like insurance and banking. That is what we really need to encourage.

In Poole we have people who home educate, and they get very nervous every time the Government and civil servants review this. There is a role for home education within our system. I know that Ministers understand the concern when the central civil service wants to have a good look at what is going on. Sometimes it is for reasons of bullying and sometimes for religious reasons, but home education, in a free society, ought to be very much part of the system. We are starting a process of repair through fairer funding for our schools. We need to encourage foreign students because they benefit our country greatly. We need to have a diverse education system because that is the best thing for our nation.

I turn to the other subject of this debate: local government. I wish we did not make local government officers bid for so much. They spend hours putting in bids that they cannot possibly win, rather than contributing towards governing their local area. We need to be a bit more flexible on that.

The real challenge is home ownership. We need to provide security for those who rent, but we must also reverse the reduction in home ownership that has occurred over the past 10 to 15 years. The Government need to be turbocharged in this area. Many young people want to buy, and we have to do everything in our power to assist them, so that they can get on the home ownership ladder, which makes such a difference. Having equity in a home can lead people to start a business, and it changes their whole view of life. If Conservative government is about anything, it is trying to help people to buy their own home and have a full stake in society.

I welcome the Queen's Speech, which has many exciting things in it, and I think that we are going to have a good four years of government in which we make progress. With those few words, I look forward to hearing more maiden speeches.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I am delighted to call Rachel Hopkins to make her maiden speech.

3.50 pm

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech during this part of the debate on the Queen's Speech, because like many Members on both sides of the House, local government is close to my heart, having served as a local councillor in Luton for over eight years. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), I too will champion local government in this Parliament.

As a born and bred Lutonian, it is a real privilege to have been elected as the Member for Luton South, where I grew up and where I live today. I thank the people of Luton South for giving me this opportunity, and I will serve all our diverse communities from across the constituency to the best of my ability, from Dallow to Wigmore, from Caddington to Biscot—the area where I grew up and where my parents still live.

Some have commented that I followed my father's footsteps to this place, and while that is a notable achievement, it is important to explain that the women in my family were equally strong role models, with both my grandmother and my mum being elected as local councillors and serving their communities first. While those were the women who showed me the way, Luton as a place is now leading the way for other girls and women, with not only two female Members of Parliament—my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) was also elected—but the leader and deputy leader of Luton Council being women too. And of course, I must get on record the excellent achievement by my party in returning a majority of women to Parliament this time.

Saying that, women being in demand and leading the way in Luton is not completely new. Back in the late 19th to early 20th century, Luton was the centre of the straw hat trade in England, with many hat factories being based in Luton South. It was the nimble-fingered expert women straw plaiters who were sought after to make the famous straw boaters. Indeed, it is the hat trade and the straw boaters made in Luton that resulted in Luton Town football club being known as the Hatters.

I am proud that my constituency is home to our football club, which plays an important community role in our town through its community trust. While I experienced the somewhat quaint charm of Kenilworth Road watching Luton Town *v.* Fulham on Boxing day, I really look forward to watching my first match in the new stadium at Power Court. I must add that, despite the Government's cuts to local authority funding since 2010 having a huge impact on local services, and particularly planning departments, the diligent and professional work of Luton Council planning officers ensured that the proposals for the new stadium at Power Court and development at Newlands Park were approved.

This gives me an opportunity to reflect on my predecessor, Gavin Shuker. While decisions that he made ultimately afforded me the opportunity to serve, he too was a born and bred Lutonian. Gavin also spoke up to support the football club's plans to build a new stadium, and we would both agree that it will be vitally important to the regeneration of our town. I looked back at his maiden speech, and he talked about being educated in Luton schools, as was I. We both studied at Luton Sixth Form College, which may be situated in the constituency of

my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North but serves young people across Luton South too. I am proud to be a governor of Luton Sixth Form College and I will continue to be a champion for sixth-form colleges in this place.

My predecessor talked about the importance of access to good-quality comprehensive education for our young people being integral to social mobility, but I would go a bit further and say that it is actually vital to tackle social injustice. In Luton, we are acutely aware of how social injustice can have a detrimental impact on people's lives. Last year was the centenary of when the people of Luton burned down Luton's town hall—it is in my constituency. That was a protest by ordinary people who were totally excluded from the peace day banquet being held by the rich bigwigs in the town hall. The cost was beyond their means, as many had returned from serving their country in the war to face unemployment, and when they were refused permission to hold their own simple celebration in Wardown park, their protest got a bit out of hand. One hundred years later, last year, we commemorated this in a more positive way, through an excellent programme of arts and cultural events exploring democracy and people power, devised and performed by, with and for the people of Luton. Arts and culture changes lives and improves wellbeing, and I will continue to champion access to arts and culture for all.

Luton South is very well connected, and I say that in transport terms and not in terms of who someone might have met at boarding school. It has an international airport, the M1 motorway and of course the railway line that runs north to the midlands and Yorkshire as well as south to London and the south coast. I have travelled by train from Luton station all my life, including commuting for work for over 20 years, but, sadly, it has not changed that much. The repeated licks of paint simply do not cover up that it is out of date and run down. We need a 21st-century station, accessible for all, as the gateway to our town in the 21st century, and I will continue the campaign, together with my Luton Council comrades, to get one.

On a final note, many have said that Luton is much like a working-class town from the north but down south. Others have said that with its hyper-diverse communities, areas of deprivation and complex needs, it is like many London boroughs. But to me, my friends and all the wonderful constituents of Luton South, it is quite simply home.

3.57 pm

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): Madam Deputy Speaker, I am delighted to see you in your place. I am also delighted to be able to participate in the Queen's Speech debate today and strongly support the measures proposed in it.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins) on a passionate and confident speech. I congratulate her on the passion for her town that she brought to her speech. We knew her father well, and he was a regular participant in the Chamber, but it is nice that she praised her mother too, as an inspiration, which I think is very good. I look forward to listening to her further in other debates, and I congratulate her on what was an excellent maiden speech.

I was rather disappointed with the Front-Bench speeches from the Labour party and the SNP. They were not constructive, they did not come up with any policies and they did not acknowledge some of the things this Government have really achieved in the last nearly 10 years. There is the increase in standards across England, which has been considerable, and the increase in funding per pupil, with the Government making sure that all schools get a fair allocation of funds.

I think that too much negativity is not good. I was going to say to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), who has just disappeared, that he was rather constructive and moderate—I am sorry he is not here to hear me say that—on this occasion.

There are three areas that I want to highlight: first, working class boys; secondly, social mobility; and, thirdly, colleges. I agree totally with the former Chair of the Education Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), who highlighted how important colleges are in our education provision, because they have been rather a Cinderella service compared with secondary schools, primary schools and universities. What we need is for them to be the engine for the training and development of people so that we meet the skill shortages we have in our society; they are desperately needed.

However, I want first to highlight the fact that during the general election, on the doorsteps across the country and the doorsteps in Bexleyheath and Crayford, the electorate were determined to praise what the Government have done, which is considerable, but to highlight the other things that they want done as well. Of course, Brexit was a top priority. My area voted heavily to leave the EU, and my constituents support our Prime Minister, as I do, and his approach and determination to get Brexit done. They know the Prime Minister will deliver.

The Queen's Speech set out an ambitious international agenda, focusing on building a new partnership with the EU, forging new trading relationships, protecting our national security and playing an active role in the international community. However, now that we are finally leaving the EU it is vital that we implement the people's priorities on the NHS, crime, housing, education, the environment, immigration, housing and so forth; these are real things that the people want dealt with and this Government will do it.

As a former teacher and lecturer, I know about the importance of good schools, good teachers and educational opportunities, and we want that for all our young people all across the country.

Jim Shannon: As the right hon. Gentleman is looking forward to the future, does he welcome the starting again of the Northern Ireland Assembly and accountability being back in the process there? That has enabled new schools to be announced today, two of them in my constituency, which is again an example—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. That is a long intervention; did nobody listen to what was said about the maiden speeches?

Sir David Evennett: I am delighted that the Assembly is back in operation, because that is good news for Northern Ireland and for the whole United Kingdom.

I want briefly to highlight the fact that every child deserves the best start in life regardless of their background or where they live. Access to good schools is essential to build the foundations for success in future life. I am concerned about the underachievement of many working-class boys; this topic has not received enough attention in the past. This particular demographic is falling ever further behind and it shows no sign of catching up with its peers. The difference in attainment between richer pupils and their disadvantaged classmates has closed since 2011, but when results are broken down by ethnicity, it appears that the improved results among poorer pupils are largely down to the achievement of non-white children; this is exacerbated when gender is taken into account.

I welcome the fact that girls are achieving so much more now. In my constituency, we have a very good secondary school, Townley Grammar, which is excellent and is offering girls tremendous opportunities, but the boys—the working-class heroes we should have in the future—are not achieving and the Government must look into that. I welcome my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's positive approach to education, I welcome his speech today, and I welcome the fact that he understands the need for colleges to have more money and for working-class white boys in particular to be helped to make sure that they can fulfil their potential. If we do not do that, it will be a tragedy—a tragedy for them, for their families and for society and our communities. Even more importantly, we owe it to them to make sure that they have the same opportunities as the rest of the country and other cohorts within the age group.

This Government have done well in increasing funding for education, and have done well in setting standards in Ofsted and in the academies programme that my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) introduced in 2010 to 2012; that is a real achievement, of which we can all be proud, but we need to address other areas for the future, particularly the colleges, working-class lads and social mobility. Our society requires the opportunity for people to move up the social scale; we have not had as much success in that as I would like.

However, I am sure that we will be moving forward with the programmes in the Queen's Speech and the agenda on education and opportunity. I believe strongly in the Queen's Speech and that the Government are on the right track, and they will have a lot of support not only in Bexleyheath and Crayford but across the country.

4.4 pm

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): It was not so long ago that I gave my maiden speech, and my hon. Friend the Member for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins) made an excellent maiden speech today. On that note I would also like to start by thanking the people of Lewisham East for giving me the privilege of representing them once again in this place.

The Queen's Speech contained many promises for education, policing and our NHS. They all sounded fine until we looked further. The Government talk about investment in our public services, but who was it who targeted them with devastating funding cuts? Who was it who brought our NHS to the point where a child with pneumonia had to lay on the cold floor of an A&E department? Who was it who made severe cuts to our police service and have since decided to do a U-turn and

[Janet Daby]

reinvest in our police service? And who put a huge strain on our education and brought many schools to their knees? It was this Government. Lewisham Council has faced one of the most severe cuts in its funding, with over 60% of its budget slashed. I see the painful results when I hold my surgeries and open my emails, and see pleas from families asking for help with all sorts of issues.

The main focus of my speech this afternoon is special educational needs. Before the election, I took on the case of a young boy who needed an education, health and care plan plan to support his special educational needs. A child full of life and aspirations was facing bullying because he was not receiving the support he required to progress. The family ultimately took their case to a tribunal, where their appeal was successful. Last year, a staggering 89% of such cases that went to a tribunal hearing had a successful outcome for the appellant—an astounding 261% increase since 2011. There are also many more families around the country who have been unable to take their cases to tribunal. This is no fault of their own, but is instead due to a lack of resources to fight a system that is clearly working against them.

As with most of the problems we face with this Government, it all comes back to funding. Local government is severely underfunded. At the same time, youth violence is persistent. We have had unprecedented cuts to youth services and to the youth offending service. With a lack of assessments in prisons, many young people face having their special educational needs going unnoticed. The funding currently available for special educational needs is simply inadequate. The Government are not providing the money to meet this education and health demand. Meanwhile, local authorities like Lewisham have a high percentage of children with autism. They need increased funding, instead of expecting to face a further funding shortfall.

Lewisham has, on average, experienced a cut of £257 per pupil. Conisborough College in my constituency has lost as much as £386 per pupil. The charity IPSEA—Independent Parental Special Education Advice—highlights that the funding available is often not directed to pupils on the basis of need, given the disproportionate numbers of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities who end up excluded from school or otherwise out of education. The Institute for Fiscal Studies states that the Government's education funding will only be enough to keep spending per pupil the same as it is now—underfunded. It is in the midst of a cash crisis, making it increasingly challenging to provide children with the support they need.

It is important that the Government allocate the funding needed to enable local authorities and schools to meet their statutory obligations and to reduce the bureaucratic nature of the system. In the midst of a mental health crisis in young adults, we must do more to address the increasing lack of support in further education colleges. We need to create a fair system that provides the necessary support to children and young people with special educational needs. Children and young people in this country and in my constituency have ambitions. It is our responsibility to ensure that no one is unfairly held back.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I am delighted to call, to make his maiden speech, Tom Hunt.

4.8 pm

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is an immense privilege to stand before you for the first time as the Member of Parliament for Ipswich. I would like to start by thanking my immediate predecessor, Sandy Martin, for the service he has provided the people of Ipswich over many decades, first as a local councillor and most recently in this place as the town's Member of Parliament. It is no secret that Sandy and I disagree on many issues, but no one can doubt the care he has for Ipswich. I note that one of Sandy's final interventions in this place was to lead an Adjournment debate on provision for those with special educational needs in Suffolk. This issue is very close to my heart, as I will come on to later in my speech, but I assure the House that Ipswich has not lost a strong voice on this issue, but gained another.

Looking back over the years, Ipswich has elected a number of towering figures to represent it. Having knocked on tens of thousands of doors across the town, I have been fortunate enough to hear many stories about the public service that they carried out. Two Labour representatives spring to mind: Jamie Cann and Kenneth Weetch. Only recently I found out that Jamie Cann used to have a favourite phrase, "to put a tickle on them", to describe the incessant way in which he would hound officials for responses to inquiries from his constituents.

More recently, Ipswich was represented by the Conservative, Ben Gummer. In the years that he was an MP, he made a major impact in our town and in this place. It was touching to hear on my door-knocking travels of all the different stories and ways in which he had personally helped the people he represented. He was a dedicated public servant and I have no doubt that he will return to public life in the future. He was ambitious for our town and what it could achieve and his contribution will never be forgotten.

All MPs for Ipswich are lucky to be part of the story of the oldest continually existing English town in the country. I use the term "English town" deliberately because there are those in Colchester who insist that their East Anglian settlement predates our town. Fine place though Colchester is, that town was of course established by the Romans and its history has not been continuous because of its sacking by a red-haired queen from the fens.

Since Roman times, the area around Ipswich formed an important trading route inland to rural towns and settlements via the Rivers Orwell and Gipping, and international trade continues to be at the heart of the Ipswich economy. Approximately 5,000 of my constituents are employed at the port of Felixstowe, Britain's busiest sea container port. Around 48% of our country's containerised trade passes through the port of Felixstowe. We also have the port of Ipswich, which employs around 1,000 of my constituents and is the No. 1 grain exporter in the country. It is important that as part of the Brexit negotiations, links are maintained with our European neighbours. However, it is also vital that as we finally regain the ability to control our international trade policy, we set our sights high and our horizons broad as we look to maximise the trading potential of our great country. I want Ipswich to be at the heart of this and I am excited by the possibility of Ipswich becoming a free port.

I have mentioned Colchester and the animosity around the history, but when it comes to football we look north to our East Anglian neighbours in Norwich. Shortly after my selection as a candidate, I was warned that being a Norwich City fan would cost me precisely 2,000 votes. I made it clear that that was not the case: I am in fact a lifelong supporter of the Toon Army, and as a result I share an enduring admiration for Ipswich Town idol, Sir Bobby Robson, one of the greatest figures to have ever graced the beautiful game. However, knowing that the cover-up is always worse than the crime, I did have to acknowledge from the outset one thing that had previously been buried away. I confessed that as a seven-year-old I was led astray by my father who was trying to flog a Škoda Felicia in a Norwich City match day programme. To catch readers' attention, a yellow and green wig was thrust on my head as part of the accompanying photo. Given my young age at the time, I hope that Ipswich Town fans will forgive me for that infraction and that they can rest assured that I will be staunchly behind the Blue Army in any future East Anglian derby. The name Ipswich Town FC means that Ipswich is known by millions of football fans around the world, and with FA cup and UEFA cup victories under Sir Bobby in 1978 and 1981 it has a far more stellar trophy cabinet than Newcastle United.

The people of Ipswich, such as those working in the ports, are by and large humble, unpretentious, welcoming and honest. They can also be straight-speaking and direct. There is a very strong sense of local identity and they care deeply about their town. However, at the same time, many do feel it has been left behind and is some way off being the place it could be and achieving its true potential.

As a town, we are ethnically diverse, and it is my view that Ipswich benefits from this diversity. We have a sizeable Bangladeshi community who enrich our town no end, including a number of small business owners. They are entrepreneurial and hard-working and our town would be far poorer without them. We have a brilliant Indian community whose contribution is vast, particularly within our NHS, with many working as doctors, nurses and pharmacists, supporting some of the most vulnerable within our community. We all need to work together to begin to believe that the town's best days are in front of us, not behind us.

I welcome the fact that so many northern communities have new Conservative MPs representing them in this place, often for the first time. We hear understandably how many within these communities feel that their areas have been left behind, but many in the town I represent feel exactly the same, and their concerns should not be forgotten in the stampede rightly to invest in the north. It is hardly like Ipswich and East Anglia have been basking in it.

We need fairer funding for our schools; under Governments of both colours we have not got the investment we need in our transport infrastructure; we have one of the worst-funded police authorities in the country; we have had big problems with crime and antisocial behaviour; and knife crime and county lines have destroyed the lives of many young people within my constituency. We must be calculating and ruthless in going after the gangs who sponsor this evil, and we need tougher sentencing to serve as a deterrent. Justice must be done and be seen to be done.

Closely related to the sense of being left behind is looking at opportunities for our young people and working to ensure that all of them, regardless of the circumstances they were born into and of any special educational needs they have, are given every opportunity through our education system to achieve their full potential. We must not stop until we have an education system that leaves no child behind. We need an inspection regime that is fully behind this principle and schools and teachers who have the resources, freedoms and flexibility as far as possible to tailor education around the specific needs of the child.

As I said before, this issue could not be closer to my heart. When I was 12 years old, I was told I had a reading and a writing age of an eight-year-old and that I risked having to leave my school. I was diagnosed with both dyslexia and dyspraxia. I was lucky, as I had great support around me, including a couple of key individuals at school who saw something in me and helped me to turn things around. The sad reality is that for too many young people with special educational needs this is not the case, through no fault of their own. As well as fighting for Ipswich, if there is one thing I can do in public life, it is dedicating myself to helping these children to ensure that they have every opportunity to achieve their full potential and that their talents are not lost to society, for to be unconventional is to be brilliant.

There are three things that Members should know about me. First, I will always put my constituents first and be ambitious for the town. Ipswich is a fine town and its people deserve a fighter and a champion. Secondly, I will do everything I can to break down the barriers that prevent those with special educational needs from achieving their full potential. Finally, I will always love my country. I remember sitting on my gran's lap as a six-year-old and asking her what she remembered about the second world war. She was over 80 at the time and I knew she had worked as a teacher in Dover before being moved to north Devon when the Battle of Britain commenced. I remember her saying, "Your granddad was late for dinner". I asked why and she said, "He was down on the docks dishing out soup to the men coming over from France in the funny little boats." I am of course referring to Dunkirk.

I also remember what she went on to say, all of a sudden becoming quite serious: "Tom, you must always remember that to be British comes with special responsibilities, because of course being British means you're part of the greatest country on earth." This is something I took on board that day and is something I have always believed and still believe to this day. From time to time, events happen that reinforce this view and it is why, at this moment in our island's story, I look forward with confidence at our post-Brexit future. People can bet against us all they want. More often than not, they will be proven wrong.

4.19 pm

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ipswich (Tom Hunt), whom I congratulate on a very gracious and eloquent maiden speech. It is also a pleasure to see you returned to your place, Madam Deputy Speaker. I congratulate you on your elevation to Chairman of Ways and Means.

In the limited time available, I want to speak about some of the challenges facing us in St Helens and the wider coalfield communities in the north of England,

[Conor McGinn]

but I also want to speak about what constitutes those communities and why we have reasons to be optimistic. To outline the state of play in St Helens is to paint an unattractive and difficult picture: our local authority is losing £90 million a year in funding, and with a low business rates base we cannot even begin to mitigate that and have had to freeze spending on all but essential services; our schools have lost £5.3 million in the last year, which is the equivalent of £211 per pupil; early years provision has suffered as well; 4,000 households in my constituency are on universal credit; and we had the highest rate of suicide in the country. I am pleased to say we have taken steps to address that, as a result of which it is no longer the highest, but our rates of depression are also higher than the national average. We have seen knife crime increase, we have lost 1,700 police officers on Merseyside, and youth provision has declined as well. This week the NHS announced that it would erect temporary structures outside Whiston Hospital because of a lack of space caused by the demand placed on its services. Record numbers attended our A&E department last week, which is no wonder given that in St Helens people can wait up to 28 days for a GP appointment.

That is the reality of 10 years of Conservative government. However, I have always put St Helens and the people who live there first, and I think it fair to say that I have a very constructive and good relationship with the Minister for the Northern Powerhouse and Local Growth, the right hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry), and with the Secretary of State. When it is in the interests of my constituents and the community in which I live and which I represent, I want to work collaboratively with the Members—from whichever side of the House—who I believe have the best interests of those communities at heart.

Ours is a very proud and resilient community. The towns of St Helens and Newton-le-Willows are anchored and rooted in tradition, but they are changing as well, in terms of sport, arts, culture and all the other things that make a community, such as families and the role of faith organisations, which are very strong in St Helens. The churches provide care for the elderly, run food banks and operate parent and toddler groups. I hope that the leadership debate in my own party, but also the implementation of the programme for government in the Queen's Speech, will give due consideration to the role of faith organisations in communities, which has too often been overlooked and not properly valued. We do not have to “do God” to “get” faith, and to understand the importance of the part that those organisations play in our communities.

In the last Parliament, I chaired the all-party parliamentary group for the coalfield communities. I was delighted that before the election we were able to publish 10 priorities for the former coalfields, alongside the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and the Industrial Communities Alliance. I think that all Members will have received copies this week. I urge the Secretary of State and the Minister for the Northern Powerhouse to look carefully at what is not a nostalgic hark back to what those communities had and unjustifiably lost—they still feel deep and justified pain about that—but something that looks to the future, and considers what those communities need to thrive again.

There are opportunities, and there are reasons to be optimistic. The pit at Parkside, the former colliery site in my constituency, was the last in east Lancashire to close. For nearly 30 years we have been waiting for plans to develop it, and I am glad to say that those are now advancing, alongside the infrastructure that we need to bring jobs and growth back to St Helens. The jobs that we bring will be not the jobs of the past but the jobs of today and tomorrow, and a new green industrial deal and strategy will be an important part of that. St Helens is, of course, famous for its glass industry. We led the world in the past, and we can lead the world again. Glass Futures has a hugely impressive programme, and is planning to base a £40 million research facility in St Helens.

I am delighted that Ministers are present to hear me say that we have been invited to apply for funding from the town deals fund, and I will be attending a board meeting along with stakeholders representing the whole community. The bid has invigorated a sense of civic duty and political leadership in St Helens. I hope that it will be as competitive as we believe it will be, and that the Government will look on it favourably.

I do not come from St Helens, or from Newton-le-Willows. That may come as a shock to those who have been listening to my very thickly disguised Lancashire accent. [Laughter.] However, I love living in the area, and I am very proud to represent it. My family are part of the community and my children go to school there, so I have a personal investment in building a better future for them and, indeed, for every family in St Helens. I should be really grateful if the Government helped me to do that.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I am very pleased to call Ben Everitt to make his maiden speech.

4.24 pm

Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a genuine honour to rise to give my first speech and to speak for the first time representing my 91,555 electors. Rising for the first time gives me the opportunity to congratulate you and welcome you to your Chair. It also gives me the opportunity to follow in the tradition of paying tribute to my predecessor. My predecessor was Mark Lancaster MP, who was well respected across the House. He entered Parliament in 2005 as the MP for Milton Keynes North East. Throughout that time, he was a colonel in the Territorial Army, and he still is today. He saw action in Kosovo, Bosnia and Afghanistan.

Mark also had a distinguished ministerial career. As a Defence Minister, he rolled out the armed forces covenant and was instrumental in the modernising defence review. In our constituency, his work was very much appreciated, particularly his work on categorising the drug khat as a category C narcotic. His work was welcomed and he is remembered fondly by our communities in the constituency. I asked around for amusing—and shareable—anecdotes about Mark and I received a lot of responses, none of which hit both of those categories. Suffice it to say that he was an excellent MP and an excellent Minister, and that he remains an officer and a gentleman.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), who is no longer in the Chamber, mentioned the golden triangle of growth and opportunity that comes up from London to Oxford and Cambridge. Of course, the middle bit of the north side of that triangle is Milton Keynes, which I represent along with my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart). Milton Keynes is a wonderful place. Its economy is worth £12 billion a year to the Exchequer, and it is one of the most productive places outside London. One third of the employees work in knowledge-intensive industries, and it is one of the fastest growing places not only in the UK but in Europe. For that reason, Milton Keynes will play a significant and important role in the UK's post-Brexit industrial strategy and in our place in the world.

The maiden speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (David Johnston) was a tour de force. In fact it was a tour de Didcot. I am not going to give the House a tour of Milton Keynes, because there is plenty to do, but if Members were to take a tour of Milton Keynes, it would probably take them about 10 minutes by car. As my wife says, everything is 10 minutes away in Milton Keynes. It is a very functional city.

Mine is a constituency of three parts. There is the city itself—home of the concrete cows, of course—then there is the rural bit, at the northern end of my constituency. As a lad, my first job was sweeping yards on farms and driving tractors in fields whose produce was destined to be exported through the ports mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Tom Hunt) as part of Britain's contribution to the world. That part of the constituency is incredibly important to me. The third bit is what I call the frontier of Milton Keynes, and I will get to that in a second.

The city of Milton Keynes is the No. 1 destination for business and finance investment outside of London. It is a hub for finance, tech, innovation and industry, as evidenced by the recent opening of Santander's tech innovation hub, which is worth 6,000 jobs in the constituency.

There is much more to Milton Keynes than business and finance, however. People can shop, ski, dine and drink. In Milton Keynes, our groceries are delivered by robots, and our cycleways are shared with driverless cars. We are a city that is going places. Our city boasts more waterways than Venice and green spaces that are 10 times the size of Hyde Park and, of course, it is home to the Concrete Cow Brewery—I can recommend the MK IPA.

The rural north of the constituency is geographically the most substantial part of the constituency. It features well-run, well-managed, environmentally sustainable farms that not only contribute to our nation's food supply, but husband the countryside. It has wonderful villages—vibrant, lively communities—and two beautiful market towns. The market town of Olney is slightly older than Milton Keynes—only a thousand years or so—and the market town of Newport Pagnell, where I spent a considerable amount of time talking to people during the election campaign, is beautiful in a way that only those of us born in market towns can describe. There is something special about market towns, but it is difficult to convey. I spent a lot of time talking to people in Newport Pagnell and, although I did not agree with everybody on matters of policy and politics, we all agreed that

Newport Pagnell should remain a market town and not become a suburb of a wider urban metropolis. It is important to retain that character.

That brings me to the third segment of the Milton Keynes North constituency that I mentioned: the frontier. This is the bit of Milton Keynes that is so new that we are still building it. It is a wonderful place. It is a great place to live, work, bring up a family, and grow a business, but we are suffering from reckless over-expansion. Thousands of houses are being bolted on to the side of Milton Keynes. The city, of course, is famous for its grid system and its roundabouts, but the roads are clogging up due to those thousands of new houses on the edge of Milton Keynes. We need our growth to be sustainable, appropriate, affordable and proportionate, and I will strongly champion that, not only for Milton Keynes but for many other places.

Of course, like any other town, Milton Keynes has issues such as knife crime. It is devastating and heartbreaking when a young life is extinguished by a blade, and we need to sort this situation. The extra 20,000 police officers will definitely make a difference, and 183 of them are already in recruitment for our local force. They will be complemented by a further 69 uniformed police officers and 140 extra back-office staff to do intelligence gathering, and that really is the key. We need to re-task our police to get tougher on the postcode gangs and to break up the scourge on society that is knife crime.

We also have an issue with homelessness, and my first constituency meeting as the MP for Milton Keynes North was with the Milton Keynes Homelessness Partnership. It does fantastic work and I am sure that it, like me, welcomes this week's announcement of an extra £700,000 from the Government for Milton Keynes to support our fight against homelessness. Interestingly, my meeting with the partnership was set up by a man called Festus Akinbusoye. Festus is a board member of the YMCA. He is also a self-made man and an adviser to me and other MPs on issues such as community safety and knife crime. Festus was previously a resident of the YMCA in Milton Keynes. Nearly two decades ago, when he had nothing but a roof over his head, the YMCA allowed him to get his life together and make a success of himself. He is now a self-made man, he is an adviser to MPs, and I am very proud to say that he is also chairman of the Milton Keynes Conservative federation.

Milton Keynes, like the Conservative party, is a place of opportunity. These opportunities come from our companies such as Aston Martin, and William Cowley, which makes the vellum upon which the laws we make in this place are inscribed. Then there are the new technology companies like Starship Technologies, which makes those robots that deliver groceries. There are plenty of catapult companies working in artificial intelligence and driverless cars, and, of course, Milton Keynes is home to the most electric car charging points of any UK town or city.

We have 14 outstanding primary schools in the constituency and many wonderful secondary schools, at which it was a pleasure to speak during the campaign. With the schools, with the people, with the entrepreneurial spirit and with the right kind of investment in sustainable, affordable, appropriate growth, the second part of Milton Keynes's first century can be even better than the first.

4.36 pm

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Milton Keynes North (Ben Everitt) on a very good and well balanced maiden speech. I liked Mark Lancaster and, from what we have heard today, we have a worthy successor in the hon. Gentleman.

I acknowledge the achievement of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in getting the Assembly back up and running. We should support the Government when they do the right thing.

I also acknowledge the election result. Opposition Members need to recognise the message when the electorate produce a majority on that scale. We cannot just condemn policies and ideas because someone else suggests them; it is about analysing what is being done, exposing the downsides and offering credible alternatives.

I was first elected in 1997, so I understand the euphoria of Conservative Members, but government is tough and it gets tougher. Westminster is not just about party or the Chamber. There are lots of all-party parliamentary groups in this place, and they require people to work together. It is not all tribal, and sometimes those all-party groups can be just as influential as anything we hear from the Dispatch Box.

I gently say to the Secretary of State for Education, who is not in his place, that government also requires some humility. I welcome any promise to raise spending on education, but I remind Ministers that many schools in Birmingham are already facing deficit budgets. Raising pupil spending is welcome but, unless real adjustments are made to recognise disadvantage, per capita increases may only serve to cement that disadvantage.

I welcome the Secretary of State's admission of the problems faced by pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, such as problems with access to schools and transport, shortages of teaching assistants and a lack of speech and language therapy. We are failing these children. Education, health and care plans are being delayed to save money, and in most places the concept of the local offer is meaningless. We need to review this aspect of the Children and Families Act 2014. We need to know that the high needs funding block will be ring-fenced and that all the money will go to youngsters with special needs. We need to know that local authorities and health bodies will have the money to reinforce the aspects of the Act for which they are responsible.

I hope that the new student visa will make it easier for people to come here to study, but PhD students do not find it particularly easy to stay after they complete their doctorates. They are often young and at a stage where they do not earn much money. Unless we incentivise them to stay and perhaps make a life here, we will be risking the very talent and expertise we need. I hope the Government will say more about how the proposals for post-study work opportunities will operate alongside the points system.

On social care, I hope the Government move quickly, as too many people are being denied proper help and cannot afford the costs of care. Any plans that involve local authorities need to spell out proper funding arrangements and obligations. We require good common standards applied to commissioners and delivery bodies. Home care and home support should mean the same in Birmingham, Bournemouth or Burnley. It is ridiculous

that the same job title can cost and mean something so different in different places. It leads to people being trapped in hospital beds because necessary home support is unavailable or woefully inadequate.

New laws to make schools, police, local authorities and health groups work together to prevent crime sound remarkably like many of the early measures of the Blair Government to me. Those had success because they were backed up by extra resources and I simply say that there is no point in commanding underfunded agencies to take on more responsibilities. If the police make an arrest as part of an operation in Birmingham, they cancel the operation while the offenders are carted across town to the only police station with cells. Schools are already providing a range of welfare services for children and families, which used to be a local authority responsibility, but the schools are not being funded for doing that. In addition, as we all know, local authorities and clinical commissioning groups are devoted to rationing services to save money. Joint working needs proper resources and the proper measurement of anticipated outcomes.

I can detect that, much as you would love to hear more and more from me, Madam Deputy Speaker, you are indicating, in your new elevated position, that I should perhaps withdraw now.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman because his courtesy is not only to the Chair and the Chamber, but, in particular, to Members who are about to make their maiden speeches. I am delighted to call James Daly to make his maiden speech.

4.43 pm

James Daly (Bury North) (Con): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. My seat of Bury North is made up of the townships of Ramsbottom, Bury and Tottington, and we are blessed with brilliant teachers, teaching assistants and other professionals who support all our children through their educational journeys. But we must do everything to ensure that children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and those with special educational needs have the best chance to thrive and succeed throughout their lives.

In my maiden speech, I will highlight my own experiences of outstanding educational practice by nurseries, schools and further education providers in my constituency. It has been an honour to serve for the past six years as chair of governors at Bury North's only state nursery school, Hoyle Nursery School. We are situated in one of the most deprived wards in the borough of Bury, and most pupils come from deprived and disadvantaged backgrounds. They have limited life experience and on entry to the school most children are significantly below the expected developmental level for their age group. However, in the past four years, we have had two outstanding ratings from Ofsted, which is a tribute to the leadership of Val Kay—it is an honour to mention her name in this place; sadly, she passed away earlier this year—and the current headteacher, Rachel. I will quote from the most recent inspection report:

“Children get off to a flying start at this outstanding school. Staff...want the very best for each of the children. They believe that there is no limit to what children are capable of achieving.”

What better statement on education could one have?

A bespoke curriculum is put in place to ensure pupils are on track and ready for the next stage of their learning. We have a specialist special educational needs unit and fully inclusive educational provision to ensure there are no barriers to progress, no matter what issues the children have. I was going to say that no matter what their background, children make good progress at Hoyle Nursery School, but they do not; they make amazing progress, including the much-cherished pupils with special educational needs.

I am also a governor at Springside Primary School, which is another fantastic school in my constituency. Like many schools, Springside has had its issues, but following our recent Ofsted inspection we have moved from “requires improvement” to “good”. It is a good school, delivering good education to children in my area. That has been achieved by concentrating on an inclusive curriculum, supporting the developmental goals of all children and providing a bespoke curriculum for SEN pupils to thrive and succeed. I am proud to be associated with the school.

I will also highlight Bury College in my constituency. Last Friday, together with the Minister for the Northern Powerhouse and Local Growth, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry), and my hon. Friend the Member for Bury South (Christian Wakeford), I went to the college to support the proposed new £6.74 million health, innovation, science, maths, engineering and technology centre. The proposal is supported by £2.25 million from the Government growth deal fund and will provide a high-quality educational facility, delivering training and skills to equip young people in my constituency and the wider area to succeed in their working lives, specifically in careers in the NHS. It is a fantastic project and I thank the Minister for his input into it. I want to take every opportunity to praise those who are doing everything possible to improve the lives of the people of Bury North, including the Minister, who said:

“I think it’s an extraordinary story of ambition by the college and its leaders but also a partnership between the college and Government investing in the future of young people across this region.”

As the Member for Bury North, I will do all I can to continue to support all schools and educational providers in my constituency to deliver an outstanding educational journey, providing all Bury youngsters with the life skills and qualifications they need to thrive during their working lives. I should also say that we have many fantastic private sector nursery providers who are delivering outstanding educational provision.

My predecessor, James Frith, served on the Select Committee on Education in the last Parliament and was a vocal advocate for improvements to the education system. I have known James for many years and we both served as councillors together in Bury. I wish to pay tribute to his formidable campaigning skills and thank him for the courteous way he behaved towards me in the general election campaign. He is a good man; I wish him and his family well for the future.

It would be remiss of any Bury MP not to talk about the disgraceful circumstances that have led to Bury football club losing its football league status this season. Some 135 years of history and tradition have been ignored by the football authorities. The Football Association and the English Football League should prioritise the

fans of clubs, who are the lifeblood of their existence. Thousands of people in my constituency continue to see Bury football club and its Gigg Lane home as central to our town’s identity. The club’s current predicament has impacted on local businesses and the wider economy, but more than that it has increased social isolation for those I have met and spoken to who have long supported their hometown club—some for 70 years—and now no longer see the friends they have made over a lifetime.

I pay tribute to everyone in Bury and elsewhere who is fighting to ensure that football returns to Gigg Lane, and I hope all Members in this House support the campaign. I will work together with others to ensure that the interests of football fans are properly defended by the football authorities and that football fans are not penalised due to the unscrupulous actions of owners. Let me quote my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins), in his role as Chairman of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee. Talking about Bury football club, he said:

“From the evidence we have received, we believe that the EFL’s failure to enforce its own rules and regulations both prior to and following”

the current chairman’s

“takeover of the club contributed to the problems that ultimately led to Bury’s expulsion.”

What an indictment that is.

Like all other Members, many other issues impact on my constituency. Due to the time, I shall comment on only three: first, I will continue to campaign to protect the green belt in my constituency; secondly, I will work with stakeholders to improve bus services, specifically the much-needed direct link between Ramsbottom in the north of my constituency and Manchester city centre; and thirdly, I will speak up for my Kashmiri constituents, who are concerned about human rights abuses in Kashmir.

It is the honour of my life to be given the opportunity to represent the residents of Bury North. I am delighted that Bury has elected two Conservative Members of Parliament for the first time since 1992. Although my hon. Friend the Member for Bury South is not here, I am sure we will make a formidable team, speaking on behalf of our borough. I have been a councillor in my constituency for more than seven years and a partner in a small business based in Bury, where I have worked for the past 12 years. I spent nine of those years as a criminal defence legal aid solicitor, representing the most vulnerable before Bury magistrates court.

We have touched on those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with special educational needs, but I wish very briefly to mention Mathew. I began representing Mathew in court when he was 12 years of age. He was a young man from a terrible background, but he had more talent in his finger than I have in my body. At 12 years of age, he gave the best mitigation in a court room that I have ever heard. For seven years, I tried to keep him out of prison and, ultimately, I did not succeed. It is one of the great indictments of our society that, if Mathew had been born to a middle-class couple, he would be stood where I am now. We must do everything to make sure that Mathews do not fall through the net.

In conclusion, I pay tribute to my wife Joanne for her support and selflessness, which has allowed me to be here, and to everyone else who has supported me. For many years, I have played cricket, spectacularly badly,

[James Daly]

for Brooksbottom cricket club in my constituency. I urge the parliamentary cricket team to come to Brooksbottom to test the wicket out—

Ben Everitt: And to play you.

James Daly: Yes. I have loved cricket since being a young boy, but have not had the talent to match my aspiration. Over all the years I have played for Brooksbottom, I have not yet scored 50—after 10 years. I will continue to strive. The joy of being part of a team, working to a common goal and never giving up may be an apt description of my cricket, but I hope it is also a characteristic of my representation of my constituency.

I have one final secret that I would like to let you in on, Madam Deputy Speaker. In Bury North we have the finest football coach in this country. He is called Danny Grundy and he is the manager of Walshaw Wildcats under 8s. Above all else, I look forward to watching them on Saturday in the top-of-the-table clash with Shawside.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): It is a great pleasure to call Wendy Chamberlain to make her maiden speech.

4.54 pm

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): I begin my maiden speech, perhaps unusually, by congratulating the hon. Member for Bury North (James Daly) on his excellent maiden speech. We can certainly agree on ensuring that deprived children and those with additional support needs are supported. I note his work on the board of governors of Hoyle nursery and commend its achievements as well as those of Springfield Primary and Bury College. I commend the hon. Gentleman's commitment to education. I appreciate his telling us about his cricket-playing career and the fact that perhaps it does not live up to expectations. I play the amateur Scottish sport of shinty and would be happy to tell Members all about it. I do not play particularly well, so stand well back. I look forward to hearing from the hon. Gentleman again during his time in Parliament.

It is a great honour to make my maiden speech as the new Member of Parliament for North East Fife. I pay tribute to my most recent predecessor, Stephen Gethins, who served North East Fife with distinction from 2015. It is clear from my few days here that he was well liked and well respected by Members across the House. I recognise the work of his parliamentary team, both here and in the constituency. It is easy to forget in the heat of an election that when Members lose or resign their seat that has a direct impact on their employees, so I wish all of them the best for the future.

I thought of Stephen last week, as he is a committed European and a strong supporter of the Erasmus scheme. He will be saddened that the House voted against the scheme, which has nothing to do with the EU's institutions, which will simply deprive British students of the chance to enjoy studying across Europe—something from which Stephen benefited.

There is much that Stephen, his former SNP colleagues and I agree on regarding Europe and the UK's role within it. North East Fife as a constituency voted to

remain within the UK and in the European Union in recent referendums. Maintaining Scotland's place in the UK is best for the economic and social wellbeing of these islands, and it is incumbent on everyone who believes that to demonstrate it not only in our words but in our actions. It was my friend and colleague, Lord Campbell of Pittenweem, who turned North East Fife into a Liberal Democrat constituency, to which it has returned with my election. He is held in much affection in the constituency, but North East Fife has a longer Liberal tradition, with Prime Minister Herbert Asquith representing the seat in its previous form of East Fife. Asquith and I might differ in our views on universal suffrage, but 100 years on from Nancy Astor it is a huge honour to be the first female Member of Parliament to represent the constituency. I could not have achieved that without the support of the Liberal Democrat campaign for gender balance, the Parliament Project and the 50:50 Parliament #AskHertoStand campaign.

I am aware that I come from a position of privilege. I am white, heterosexual and cisgender. I was in a position where I could afford to take an unpaid career break during the election campaign, then leave my employment directly after my election. I know that for many who have an ambition to enter politics, whether at local or national level, that is simply not possible. I urge the House to consider how it continues to increase diversity not only in the Chamber but throughout politics and across all areas of diversity, including disability, ethnicity and socioeconomic background—we should not limit ourselves to a gender perspective. Local government in particular needs increased diversity. I had the privilege of serving for 12 years as a police officer. Like the police service, we should seek to ensure that we are truly reflective of the communities we serve and represent.

North East Fife is a diverse and beautiful constituency, taking in Levenmouth, the Howe of Fife, the East Neuk, the royal burgh of Cupar and communities on the south banks of the Tay. It is home to Leuchars Army and former RAF base. St Andrews is the home of golf, which will again welcome the Open in 2021. It is also home to St Andrews University, Scotland's oldest university, established in 1413. The university is the area's major employer, and was recently ranked by *The Guardian* as Scotland's top university, and second in the UK—a considerable achievement, I am sure Members agree.

My constituency's other industries include tourism, farming, agriculture and our vital fishing communities. One area that combines a number of these is the growth in distilleries in the constituency that are providing both produce and visitor attractions. My predecessor mentioned our whisky distilleries in his maiden speech, but I would also like to mention North East Fife's increasing number of gin distilleries, such as Eden Mill, Pilgrim's, Darnley's of Kingsbarns and Lundin Links. Having come to this House directly from the drinks industry, I hold a general certificate in distilling and would be more than happy to tutor Members accordingly. I am also noticing a theme to my party's maiden speeches, given that my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper) referred to the number of pubs in her constituency yesterday.

North East Fife is a largely rural constituency. As well as presenting many of the opportunities I have outlined, this also means that it has challenges, particularly around transport, rural poverty and accessing public services. I am delighted to see that the reinstatement of

the Levenmouth railway is now moving forward. This will see one of the local communities that is most poorly served by public transport properly connected to the central belt of Scotland. I commend the work of the members of the Levenmouth Rail Campaign for their efforts in this regard.

I am my party's spokesperson on political and constitutional reform, and believe that transformation is required in local government in England in order to ensure better representation. Alongside the introduction of a written constitution and renewed support for the devolved Administrations, these steps are urgently needed. Local government in England is confusing and often unaccountable, and that also speaks to the Westminster electoral first-past-the-post system. It took 330,000 votes in the general election to elect me or one of my Liberal Democrat MP colleagues, whereas it took just 38,000 votes to elect a Conservative. To elect the only MP for the Greens—the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas)—took 866,000 votes. On a personal level, I would much rather that people voted for me and my party because they liked and agreed with me and my party's policies the most, rather than because we are the option that they disliked the least.

We have myriad electoral systems, resulting in confusion and disengagement. Ultimately, when we then ask for binary answers to complex questions, we should not be surprised if they come out with results that we were not expecting. The sinews of our parliamentary democracy are being strained, and it is our role as parliamentarians and legislators to ensure that these systems are fit for purpose. Without solving that democratic deficit in the voting systems, which differ in all four nations of our country, we continue to weaken the bonds of the UK. Is that fair? In the Brexit referendum, two of our nations voted against such a step, yet we are set to leave the European Union on the hardest of terms. There has been no attempt by this Government to treat this as a process of four nations. This has failed the devolved Administrations, weakened our democracy and undermined the United Kingdom. And yet, the Government's own electoral reform proposal in this Queen's Speech will make it more difficult for people to vote, by introducing voter identification. If the Government think that making it more difficult to vote is the answer, I would respectfully ask, "What is the question and where is the evidence?"—remember, I did mention that I had been a police officer. In an era of social media, when MPs are more accessible than ever, surely our voting system should be too. That means giving EU citizens the guarantees they were promised about the voting rights post Brexit, and following the devolved Administrations by delivering votes at 16.

In this Parliament, I look forward to representing the people of North East Fife and working with Members across the House to deliver the changes to our democracy that will make the United Kingdom fit for purpose as we enter the third decade of the 21st century.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I remind the House that my request that speeches should be short applies to those making maiden speeches as well. What I had hoped we could do is have maiden speeches of approximately eight to nine minutes and other speeches of approximately five to six minutes, but that does not seem to be working. If we do not get co-operation on that, I am afraid that there will have to

be a very short time limit on everyone's speeches, but I hope that we can manage better than that. I am delighted to call Paul Holmes to make his maiden speech.

5.4 pm

Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker—I will do my best to follow your instructions.

I congratulate the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain), my hon. Friends the Members for Milton Keynes North (Ben Everitt) and for Wantage (David Johnston), the hon. Member for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (James Daly) on making excellent maiden speeches. Being so far down the list of speakers there is a bit more pressure on my shoulders, but I congratulate them and wish them well.

May I just be personally indulged as I say how pleased I am that my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) is sitting next to me while I make this speech? He gave me my first proper job in politics—he is mad—but he had a fantastic result on 12 December and it is an honour to have him sitting next to me. I will not emulate everything he has done in his career but I am delighted he is sitting next to me.

It is an honour to make my maiden speech as the Member of Parliament for Eastleigh, and it is a privilege to speak in this debate on Her Majesty's Gracious Speech. I am delighted to speak today on the subjects of education and local government, because through both my time as a lead member for education on Southampton City Council and as a former special adviser at the Department for Education under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds), I know the tireless work that our teaching staff in all education sectors put into changing the lives of local people, and we owe them a huge debt of gratitude.

I would like to welcome the announcement of minimum levels of funding for both our primary and secondary schools, as well as the further education sector. That will benefit colleges such as Eastleigh College and Barton Peveril College which provide fantastic services to our young people. I congratulate the Secretary of State and Ministers on securing such funding. I know that they will understand that there is much more work to do on the recruitment and retention of teachers in all sectors, but I am encouraged by the announcements they have made. I also have a passion for social mobility, which I know Ministers share. After all, it was social mobility that allowed a council estate boy like me to sit in the mother of all Parliaments today.

It is a tremendous privilege to represent Eastleigh in this House. I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor—my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Mims Davies). Many people in this House say that their predecessors cast a shadow over their successors. Well, I have the living embodiment of my predecessor in this Chamber every day. She laid the groundwork for many campaigns that I continue to champion, and I thank her for her service.

Of course, I would like to thank my local association, my long-suffering association Chairman, Jerry Hall, and all of my activists who worked tirelessly for the result that we achieved on 12 December. I would very quickly like to thank my team—Sue, Emma, Ben and

[Paul Holmes]

Charlie—who are already working tirelessly for the constituency of Eastleigh and answering phone calls as we speak.

Eastleigh is a fantastic place. Indeed, I would argue that it is the most distinct and striking constituency within the UK, starting in Eastleigh town centre, which was created at the turn of the last century to build and develop the London and South Western Railway. It was originally called Barton village. Eastleigh was renamed by a kind local benefactor who donated £500 to the building of a local church. That is why we have the Eastleigh name today, and long may it continue. Eastleigh aerodrome, or Southampton airport as it is now called, built and flew the original Spitfires and has a long and proud aviation history. Southampton airport is a crucial local employer. As we heard this morning, we must continue to nurture it as such, including the regional airlines that operate out of it.

Also in Eastleigh town centre is Cosy Café, which I would argue supplies the best ham and cheese omelettes in the whole of Hampshire. They certainly kept me going through the campaign, and I look forward to the emails from many of their rivals in the town centre now offering me the chance of trying many more delicacies.

The constituency also covers small villages such as Botley, where Cliff and Steve at the Dolphin inn ran a very successful meat draw—so successful that on the first time that she visited, my mum, who is in the Gallery today, won a huge leg of lamb, which we very much enjoyed on the final weekend of the campaign. Pubs like the Dolphin inn provide a necessary backbone to the villages in Eastleigh, and they should continue to be supported. Another village, Hamble, is home to the finest sailing club in the country. Netley is home to the famous Netley abbey and castle. My constituency is steeped in important local history and I pledge to protect it.

Eastleigh does face many challenges, though, I say to Ministers on the Front Bench, the biggest of which is the vital need for infrastructure. The local Liberal Democrat council has failed to deliver a local plan for over a decade, and the one currently with the planning inspector would be a disaster if adopted. It includes the building of over 5,000 houses on ancient woodland in Bishopstoke, which would present an irreversible decline in the green space and wildlife in the area. I therefore ask my right hon. Friend the Minister whether he will commit to meet me in the coming weeks so that I can outline the grave concerns that my constituents have about that plan. They have not been consulted properly, and Ministers should know that I will do all I can to reset the clock and build a new local plan with them.

Eastleigh also needs added infrastructure. My predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex, rapidly made clear the need for the vital Chickenhall Lane link road and an urgent resurfacing of the concrete sections of the M27. We also need urgent upgrades to Hamble Lane, which would stop many of my constituents sometimes waiting for over an hour to travel just 2 miles. I am sure the Minister will agree that this is a very small price list to keep my constituents in Eastleigh happy, and I look forward to him writing the cheques in the coming weeks.

I thank the House for indulging me in silence today; I am sure that that will not continue. Once again, I welcome the announcements made on education funding and recognise the commitment made to infrastructure spending by the Prime Minister last week. My constituents in Eastleigh can expect me to be a constant champion of their interests. I know that this Government are a Government who will listen to those concerns, and I intend to act on them.

5.10 pm

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Paul Holmes) on his speech, which gave much laughter. I wish him luck on receiving those cheques, and I hope that those of us on the Opposition Benches will get some as well.

One of the most important responsibilities of any Government is the protection of society's most vulnerable people. It is not some utopian ideal to believe that we must protect our young and look after our elderly. It is, in fact, a basic measure of a just and compassionate society, as well as a statutory duty for local councils. Sadly, in both those respects, this nation is falling short. In the past decade, we have seen the number of children in care increase by 28%. There are now more than 78,000 children in care in England alone, and as of 31 December last year a total of 529 young children were in the care of St Helens local authority—63 more than the previous year and approximately double the national average. It is an unfortunate reality that there will always be children in need of care. However, I am sure that Members would agree that those numbers are far too high. Demand is outstripping provision and resources.

Another fundamental reason why care is so pressured is a lack of funding right across local authorities, affecting youth services and education. Support staff are no longer in schools to help keep children in mainstream education, which drives them out. Last year, councils had to overspend by £800 million to keep children safe. In St Helens, the greatest financial pressure on the council is children's social care costs, and particularly looked-after children. In just 10 years, expenditure on those children is expected to have risen from £10.5 million to £25.5 million this year. That is an increase of £15 million—143%. I ask Ministers to consider the challenge presented to that local authority, and there are many more like it.

Often we are not necessarily speaking about good-quality care, as more and more councils are being forced to rely on unregulated care, care not registered with Ofsted and out-of-borough care, away from the child's support network. I have spoken about these issues before, so I will not go into too much detail; Members can look at what I have said. But those young people who are being placed in unregulated or unregistered care because of a lack of other provision, many of whom have learning difficulties, are far more likely to be vulnerable to predatory groups such as county lines gangs, which are so prevalent in communities like mine. This situation has worsened since I last spoke.

It is not just our youngest who are being let down by a lack of funding. On the opposite end of the spectrum, our adult social care system is on the brink of collapse. Vulnerable adults are also facing the impact of austerity policies. Some 44% of expenditure by Knowsley Council

is on adult social care and adult services budgets, and in St Helens we have seen a 40% net reduction in available resources due to austerity cuts. Every £1 million of shortfall equates to 62,500 hours of domiciliary care. In the past two weeks, an additional 52,000 hours of domiciliary care have been commissioned by St Helens Council—not far off £1 million—which can be at between £12 and £20 per hour. This shows an increase in demand as finances are being cut, with more pressure on the care system and people not receiving the care they need.

Without this care, many are driven into hospitals, leading to increased pressures on hospitals. Just on one day last week, Whiston Hospital pleaded with the public not to go to A&E. It had 35 ambulances parked outside waiting for space—space, rather than beds, because the corridors were filled with patients receiving inappropriate care on stretchers. It is now applying to install a two-storey Portacabin to create 60 beds. And this is in an outstanding hospital in this country that has been built for only 10 years.

Councils continue to see their responsibilities increase, with the deprivation of living safeguards, the independent living fund, the Care Act 2014 and transforming care—to name a few. Despite this increase in responsibility, local councils have not seen their funding increase in line. In fact, much more they have seen it decrease. Knowsley, which is one part of my borough, has seen £100 million in cuts in its budget since 2010, with St Helens making £90 million of cuts. The increase in social care funding recently announced for 2020-21 is welcome, but it is not enough to meet current, let alone future, demands. However, there is no news on 2021 onwards. How can local authorities properly plan to meet this statutory duty?

We have heard declarations from Members on the Government Front Bench, including the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, that austerity is over. The Queen's Speech refers to cross-party consensus on social care reform. I therefore call on Ministers to put this into action. The Government must release the long delayed Green Paper on the future of social care funding. They must also begin a bottom-up review and restructure the way in which we fund social care for children, young people and adults. We must also see an end to austerity and an increase in local government funding that matches the ever-growing responsibilities and pressures that it is facing. It is councils that are looking after the public, not us. They are facing the problems, and we have to provide the resources and structures to enable them to do so.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I now call, to make his maiden speech, Jonathan Gullis.

5.17 pm

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): “Ay Up Duck” is how I should start, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I hope my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) will be happy with my pronunciation.

May I start by saying what an honour and a privilege it is to make my maiden speech today, and to represent the people of Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke? I could not be prouder to serve and, as I said to the *Stoke Sentinel* at 5.30 in the morning of election night, I will “work my bum off” to deliver the change that my constituents deserve.

I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Ruth Smeeth. She will be remembered as a tireless campaigner for our armed forces, against holiday hunger and fighting antisemitism. The abuse that she has suffered as a result of her Jewish heritage is a disgrace. I know she will continue in her work to combat antisemitism and all other forms of racism, and she can count on me to stand shoulder to shoulder with her on such issues.

As a teacher, a school trade union representative and a Tory, I realise I am not the typical stereotype, and I could not think of a more fitting debate in which to make my maiden speech. Education is by far the most powerful tool we have to improve social mobility. In my own family, I have seen this at first hand. My mother, who joins me in the Gallery today, got into a grammar school off the estate in London. My father, having failed his O-levels, took up work as a caretaker to attend night school, ending up at Durham University with a Masters. The hard work, resilience and determination of my parents has allowed them to achieve more than what many, and indeed they themselves, would have anticipated had they been confined to the lazy stereotypes placed upon them. Teachers serve the young people they educate outside the bounds of academia, often assuming the role of mentor, providing intellectual and emotional support. For most of us there is that one stand-out teacher who changed the way we think and made a difference to our lives. The teacher who inspired me is Dr Simon Peale. He was the head of history and politics at my school. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth (Christopher Pincher), who cannot be here, will know him well, because he is now the leader of the Labour group on Tamworth Borough Council. His teaching was so effective that, despite him coming to campaign for my predecessor, I was able to make it on to the Green Benches today. But, in all seriousness, his dedication to his students, extensive subject knowledge and passion for the job stuck with me, and I would like to thank him for all that he did.

Getting education right across Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke is crucial. In 2018 the progress 8 scores showed a majority of children underachieving and only 1% of students getting AAB at A-level compared with 12% across the rest of the west midlands. However, signs of improvement are beginning to show: today, over 80% of schools are rated good or outstanding, and 2019 GCSE results showed a 6% increase in the pass rate for English and maths across the city of Stoke-on-Trent. And with the Government's support via the Stoke-on-Trent opportunity area, more breakfast clubs and a 4.7% increase in per pupil funding, the city is on the up.

I say the city is on the up because for too long it has been perceived negatively. Football pundits talk about whether players can perform on a cold Tuesday night in Stoke-on-Trent and last week Piers Morgan wondered whether the Duchess of Sussex would ever want to face opening a community hall on a wet Wednesday in Stoke. In addition, the town of Kidsgrove has been passed from pillar to post in Boundary Commission changes and is now being nicknamed the forgotten town. Well, I say that Stoke-on-Trent is a city to be proud of, Kidsgrove will no longer be forgotten, and it is time that we started talking about Talke—a bit of cheese.

If Members are looking for somewhere to spend their next bank holiday weekend, they need look no further. After enjoying a cheesy Staffordshire oatcake they can

[Jonathan Gullis]

make their way to the mother town of Burslem, birthplace of Lemmy from Motörhead, 16-time world dart champion Phil “the Power” Taylor and Robbie Williams. They can also go for a walk around the award-winning park or pop down to Vale Park and see Port Vale FC play, or see local businesses such as Synectics Solutions, Titanic Brewery and Autonet, which together employ thousands of local residents.

Burslem was the heartbeat of this city and hosts its ceramic industry from Royal Stafford to Moorcroft. In neighbouring Middleport we can see Steelite and go on a tour of Middleport Pottery. The place is home to “The Great Pottery Throw Down” on Channel 4 and was used for filming on the TV series “Peaky Blinders”.

Next, we can visit another of the original six towns, Tunstall, where we will soon be able to visit the newly refurbished town hall, go shopping at the indoor market and see another ceramics giant in Churchill China.

We can then make our way to Kidsgrove and Talke. Here we can walk along the beautiful Trent and Mersey canal to see the Harecastle tunnel; at one and a half miles long it was once the longest in the country, responsible for taking the coal to the kilns. We can also see the site of the old sports centre, which, thanks to the efforts of Kidsgrove sports centre community group and the Conservative-led Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, will be refurbished and reopened next summer so it can retain its place as a key community asset.

It is said that world war two was won in the skies, as alluded to by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Paul Holmes), thanks to a little plane called the Spitfire. In Talke my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh can visit the Reginald Mitchell peace garden, named after the Spitfire inventor and yards from where he was born. Reginald Mitchell is heavily celebrated across the Potteries and in 2003 was voted the greatest midlander in the BBC’s online TV and radio vote.

Lastly, we have Chatterley Whitfield colliery. It is one of the most complete former colliery sites in Europe and has been designated a scheduled ancient monument. It was the first colliery in the country to achieve an annual output of 1 million tonnes, which was achieved in 1937 and again in 1939. The colliery ceased production and closed its doors on working miners in March 1977. The hard work undertaken by the Friends of Chatterley Whitfield has seen some buildings brought back to use, sell-out tours on heritage weekends and important documents saved. However, this important piece of heritage is still at risk of being lost. The potbanks would not have fired if it were not for the coal brought from the deep mines at Chatterley Whitfield. The Potteries would not have existed. I made it a central pledge in my campaign to protect and preserve the site with a long-term plan. The loss of such a site would mean that future generations could be denied an invaluable opportunity to learn about their past. I will not stand by and let that happen.

Talking up an area is very important, but it is crucial to acknowledge the challenges we face. We need more school places, better public transport and to bring more high-skilled, high-wage jobs to Stoke-on-Trent, Kidsgrove and Talke. We must invest in the city by opening up free schools to offer more parental choice. We must reverse some of the Beeching cuts by opening up the old mineral

line and ensure the city of Stoke-on-Trent becomes the core of the tech revolution. Silicon Stoke is an ambition to put this city at the centre of future skills and jobs. We are rated as having some of the best 4G download speeds in the country and we are leading the way by rolling out 60 miles of full fibre broadband across the city, thanks to Swedish firm VX Fiber and this Government’s investment of over £9 million. According to council officers, that could generate a £625 million boost to the Stoke-on-Trent economy, meaning more jobs and higher wages.

Stoke-on-Trent, one of the great cities of the industrial revolution, knows what it means to be at the centre of the country’s economy. I wish to see the city reignited at the heart of the coming technological revolution. One of my roles as a Member of Parliament is to represent the people, the place and the history of Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke. I will pursue relentlessly the potential and ambition of my constituency, and I will shout at every turn about how amazing the city is and the opportunities it possesses. Make no mistake: we are on the up.

5.26 pm

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis). That was an excellent maiden speech, joining a series of excellent maiden speeches made across the House. I wish all new Members well in their time in Parliament.

This is my first speech since returning at the general election, so I would like to take this opportunity to thank my neighbours for electing me again and giving me the privilege of being our voice here in Parliament. I stood for election on a set of promises, and I intend to make good on them. Uppermost of them was to fight for our schools and for the best resourcing for our schooling, so it seems apt to start there.

I was pleased to see in the Queen’s Speech talk of more resources for schools, but we have to understand the context in which we have that conversation. Austerity has harmed Nottingham in very many ways, but nowhere more than through cuts to schools. Since 2015, £20 million has been lost from our children—nearly £400 per head. Those are cuts that will not heal. Over the past 10 years, Ministers have come to the Dispatch Box to say, in very much the same triumphal spirit in which the Secretary of State started this debate, that there will be more money for schools. However, the reality has not matched that. Growing costs, whether through the growing number of pupils or the growing complexity by which some of those pupils need educating, have hoovered up that extra money and the reality has been real-terms cuts. We need to keep a laser focus on that. I certainly will, particularly in two regards. The first relates to what the funding does for class sizes.

Ministers on the Treasury Bench argue that more money is going into schools and those on the Opposition Benches say there is less, so we get into that sort of political back and forth. The reality on the ground in my constituency is that in pretty much every primary school, school class sizes have increased. At Bulwell Saint Mary’s, there have been an extra two and a half pupils per class between 2015 and 2018. At Rosslyn Park, where I have been chair of governors for the past decade, it is also two and a half. It is nearly two at Henry Whipple as well. This is the story across my

community. Until that number starts going down, we are going to continue to talk about it. Any new money seems to go to better-off communities. Over the past five years, the average cut in poorer communities has been nearly £400, but for the best-off it has been only a third of that. If the new money goes into schools that are already doing better, it will only widen inequalities.

I do not want to spend my time solely talking about money, because we have to get on to other issues, too. I want to raise something that does not get talked about very much at all. It is one of the unspoken disparities in our education system: the outcome for boys, particularly white British boys in working-class communities. All primary school governors know that rush at key stage 2 to try to get to 65% in combined reading, writing and maths. In challenged communities like mine, that is really difficult. We have worked really hard and achieved that: we are broadly in line with the national average. However, hidden within that is a real disparity.

In my community, 70% of girls are meeting the target but only 59% of boys are making it. Let us look at some of the poorer schools. I will not name them, because this is not about picking out those schools for criticism; it is a broader problem. Nevertheless, in some of our primaries we see the following: 76% of girls meeting the age-related expected standard as against 35% of boys; 79% playing 40%; and 92%—what an outstanding achievement for the girls in one of my primary schools—as against only 56% of the boys. In all, boys have worse outcomes in 26 of the 29 primary schools in my constituency that I can get data for, and in 17 of the 29, the difference is greater than 10%. In general, the poorer and less diverse the ward, the bigger the gap. This is not a Nottingham North or a Nottingham peculiarity and we have to do something about it.

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation, who is in his place, was on the Education Committee in 2014 which identified this problem and the root causes—low expectations of these children, poor absence rates and discipline, and curriculums that do not appeal to them. When we read that Education Committee report, it is striking that nothing has changed in that time, so I call on the Government to pick up the cudgels on this critical issue and have better curriculums based on international best practice; specific, targeted resource to augment the pupil premium; a focus on catching up for boys who fall behind at key stage 1; and the deployment of the best teachers in the most challenged schools, incentivised to work in the hard environments. Of course, we also need the full reversal of the per-head cut for each pupil that every school in my community has experienced.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. As colleagues will be aware, there is pressure on time, so after the next speaker, I will put a five-minute time limit on speeches. In the meantime, it is with great pleasure that I call Tom Randall to make his maiden speech.

5.31 pm

Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris). This is my maiden

speech and I reflect on the fact that many seek election to this House, but most do not succeed. Of those who do, many do not have the opportunity to represent the place where they grew up and the place that they consider home. That I have been successful on both counts is particularly humbling, and in my time in this House, I look forward to representing all the people of Gedling to the best of my ability.

I am the fourth Member of Parliament for Gedling since the seat's creation in 1983. I do not remember Sir Philip Holland, although he is fondly remembered by some of my older voters. He also represented the predecessor seat of Carlton. He was a vociferous campaigner against the proliferation of quangos and was, among other achievements, a valued member of the Public Accounts Committee.

Sir Philip was succeeded by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), who held a number of junior ministerial positions in his time as Member for Gedling and is still regarded there as an effective, hard-working MP—something that he found for himself when he very kindly came to help my campaign in December.

My immediate predecessor is Mr Vernon Coaker, a teacher who served Gedling for over two decades, including time as a Minister. Mr Coaker is well regarded locally across the political spectrum. As I have got to know Conservative colleagues here over the last few weeks, they have all spoken warmly of him as a fair opponent and have particularly praised his work on the important issues of human trafficking and modern slavery. I said at my declaration that, in undertaking my responsibilities as a constituency MP, I can ask for no better role model than my predecessor, and I am happy to restate that on the Floor of the House today. Vernon Coaker gave his maiden speech on 10 June 1997. In it, he made a confession: he said that the name Gedling often provokes the question, “Where?” I regret to inform the House that more than 22 and a half years later, I find myself in much the same situation, so allow me to recap.

Gedling is a constituency in Nottinghamshire, lying to the north-east of the city of Nottingham. It comprises two principal towns: Arnold and Carlton. Arnold is a market town that was once home to many factories connected to the hosiery industry, but is now primarily residential. It was the birthplace of Thomas Hawksley, a civil engineer whose work on water supply projects ensured that thousands of people across many towns had access to safe drinking water. It was also the birthplace of Richard Parkes Bonington, a Romantic landscape painter, many of whose works can be found in the Wallace Collection.

Carlton, similarly, was home to textile factories but is now primarily residential, as are the smaller towns of Netherfield, Colwick and Mapperley. The suburban nature of Gedling is broken by the pretty villages of Burton Joyce and Stoke Bardolph, the latter on the River Trent, which have retained their rural charm. At the centre of the constituency lies the equally pretty village of Gedling, which gives its name both to the constituency and the wider borough. Gedling was home to a colliery and the site is now an attractive country park from which, on a clear day, one can reportedly see Lincoln cathedral. The rather unusual name “Gedling” derives from the Saxon chief Gedl, who sailed up the River Trent and settled in the area. I do not know what

[Tom Randall]

Gedl would have made of modern politics, but I like to think that, as a Saxon and presumably fair-haired leader, free of the Norman yoke and leading his people to a new political settlement, he would look favourably upon my work in my first weeks here, voting with colleagues to get the withdrawal Bill through and honour the decision the people of Gedling took in the 2016 referendum—a decision that should be respected. I also look forward to supporting the Government in their commitment to recruit a further 20,000 police officers—I am pleased that recruitment has started—as well as to the promised increased spending for the national health service.

We can only guess at what Gedl would have made of that common feature of modern life: the repetition of slogans. During the course of the election campaign, there were two that I repeated with even more conviction than “Get Brexit Done”. They were that Gedling is a great place to live, work and raise a family, and that Gedling made me who I am. I grew up in Arnold and, like many thousands of schoolchildren, I went to schools I happened to be in the catchment area for. At what was then Redhill Comprehensive School, a good school that now, as Redhill Academy, is an even better one, I learned the transformative power of education. My education opened many doors for me, the son of working-class parents, including the doors to this Chamber. If we are to truly level up, we must ensure educational opportunity for all. I welcome the Government’s commitment to increasing funding for schools and starting salaries for teachers. As its future was at stake in this election, I welcome the return of a Government who will ensure that Ofsted will continue as the body to maintain standards in education.

I look forward to supporting colleagues on these and all the other issues contained in the Queen’s Speech and I trust that, whether the next maiden speech by the Member for Gedling is made in four and a half years or 45 years’ time, right hon. and hon. Members will know exactly where Gedling is.

5.37 pm

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Gedling (Tom Randall) on his tour de force. I just googled Gedling and it looks delightful. I will certainly consider it as a destination for the next bank holiday. I am sure everyone will agree that it has been instructive sitting in the House this afternoon.

I made my maiden speech in the education part of the Queen’s Speech debate. As I said then and as I say now, as a former teacher, it is this issue and my driving passion to ensure that every single child, no matter their background, reaches their full potential that has brought me here. Of course then, whenever I see a Queen’s Speech, I scour it for the education bit. This time, I had to keep looking, because it was one sentence—one sentence in Her Majesty’s Gracious Speech on education—and it concerned an announcement that had already been made on school funding.

We do need more money. We have been debating this in the House cross-party—I give everyone their due—for a long time, but 83% of schools will have less money per

pupil than in 2015, so we welcome any new money, but as has been said, we must keep an eye on what else schools are being asked to pay for—not least the very welcome rise in the basic rate for teachers’ salaries.

There is something else I find depressing about the Queen’s Speech and the speeches from Ministers. I believe that we now need a national debate on education. We are spending more money on it and I think the public deserve to know if we are getting the best value for money. As far as I can see, the Government’s policies are ideological, not evidence based. They need to be driven by what actually works. This morning we heard about behavioural standards and a rigorous curriculum, but those were buzzwords when I first started teaching, and even before that. We know so much more now about what works.

In his opening remarks, the Secretary of State mentioned PISA. My master’s was in comparative education at the Institute of Education, and I learned a few things about PISA then. It has its place and I would not like us to withdraw from it but, that said, we are in the middle of the table. There is a lot of rhetoric and a lot of warm words about world-class schools, but if the Government care so much about PISA, they should look at the evidence.

We are in the middle of the table, and those at the top do not care that much about PISA. What they are doing is innovating and breaking down the walls between subjects. It is clear from the latest report, published just a few weeks ago, that they are putting social and emotional wellbeing right up there with high-quality content: not as an adjunct, not as an afterthought, but as a driver. Children who are emotionally secure learn better. That is an obvious thing to say, but I do not think that we are prioritising it in this country. So far the approach has been haphazard, and I am sorry to say that we are seeing the same approach in other matters to do with education. Erasmus has been mentioned today. I am sad that the House chose not to support the amendment that I tabled last week.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): The hon. Lady has talked about the PISA rankings. Is it not right to pay tribute to the teachers as a result of whose hard work the UK is performing better in reading than France, Germany, Japan and the United States? Should we not pay tribute to them for those great achievements?

Layla Moran: I could not agree more. Our teachers are heroes. Day in, day out, teachers in secondary and primary schools, especially primaries—I still do not understand how they do it; those people have the patience of angels—are doing an incredible job, and I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me the chance to say so. That said, however, they are doing it under enormous strain.

The thin end of the wedge is exclusions, which currently represent a huge crisis in our education system. Vulnerable children are falling through the cracks of a system that is under extraordinary strain. As I said earlier, I went into politics because I was appalled that there was such a strong link in this country between where people go and where they come from. This House is becoming more representative when it comes to women and a bit more representative when it comes to black and minority ethnic people, but how representative is it when it comes to socioeconomic backgrounds? That, I think, is the one thing that we do not talk enough about in this place.

In our schools, it is the kids who come from poorer backgrounds who are consistently falling through the cracks. The rate of permanent exclusions increased by 52% between 2013-14 and 2017-18, returning to levels not seen since the end of the last Labour Government. In secondary schools, for every 10 pupils on the school roll, one temporary exclusion is issued. Pupils with moderate special educational needs are five times more likely to be excluded than those without them, and more than 50% of children with SEND who are excluded have social, emotional or mental health difficulties. Black Caribbean and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are the most likely to be excluded, and pupils on free school meals are four times as likely to be excluded as their classmates from more affluent backgrounds.

I do not believe for one second that those children are in any way less able than anyone else. There is something wider going on here. I think that we need to look at our own system. There are perverse incentives in it, to do with accountability and the inspection regime, that encourage teachers to “off-roll” difficult students before GCSEs. Headteachers are desperate, because of the punitive way in which Ofsted uses results, to take some of them out of the system so that their ratings do not fall. We know that that is happening: Ofsted itself has alerted us to it.

Ultimately, who sets the regime under which Ofsted inspects? Who gives Ofsted its money? It is the Department for Education, and the direction for that is driven by this place. Schools are judged on academic progress. Incidentally, it is the support staff who are the first to go in these leaner financial times. People talk about behaviour, and we heard the Minister talk earlier about the fact that the Government were putting some more money into local government support—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I should just say that I should have said the limit was six minutes. The hon. Lady has just had seven; it was adjusted in the end.

5.45 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Congratulations on your election, Madam Deputy Speaker—although there was no need for an election. It is always a pleasure to speak when a fellow Yorkshire MP is in the Chair.

I have been casting my mind back to when I made my own maiden speech. I found it a daunting experience, and I am pretty daunted now by having to follow some of these amazing maiden speeches. They have been truly exceptional, and I congratulate all those who have made their speeches today, and the rest who will make theirs over the next few days. I give them my very best wishes for their future in this place.

I would like to speak principally about levelling up. That is something that clearly encompasses the two main themes of today’s debate: education and local government. “Levelling up” is an excellent phrase that has come from somebody who is very good at articulating phrases to achieve their political ends. It is something that I and many other colleagues on both sides of the Chamber have been banging on about for years. It is based not on grievance but on sound economics. It is about opportunities for people in the north, but it is also a huge opportunity for UK plc.

The solution to levelling up is pretty simple. It is about more public sector investment and more private sector investment. However, “simple” and “easy” are two separate things. The Government are now committed to a huge, £100 billion investment in infrastructure. It has not been easy, over the past four and a half years, to persuade the Treasury to do that, but it is committed to doing it now. However, the trickier problem is ensuring that we get private sector investment, too. Public sector investment on its own simply will not do.

Investment in the north—and not just the north but the regions of England and the other nations of the United Kingdom—is not about political opportunism. It is about sound economics and has the support of some of the economists that I have a great deal of faith in. Jim O’Neill, for example, is an ardent remainer, but he said earlier this year that being in or out of the EU was not the most important thing, and that our productivity performance and our geographic inequality were the most important issues we needed to deal with. Andy Haldane, the chief economist at the Bank of England, noted in a recent speech that the regional income gap between the richest and poorest regions in terms of average incomes was now larger than it had been at any time in the early 20th century. That gap narrowed in the first 80 years of the last century.

David Smith, the economist who writes in *The Sunday Times*, has welcomed the £100 billion investment in infrastructure and talked about the change we need to make to the Green Book to ensure that northern and midlands projects, and projects in the south-west and other parts of the country, are stacked up better. He identified the fact that the gross value added—the productivity—in London is about £50,000 per person per annum, whereas in Yorkshire and Humberside and the north-east, it is just over £20,000 per annum. There is a clear relationship between average incomes and productivity, so it totally follows that if we get the productivity right, average incomes will grow. However, as David Smith said in his column this weekend, public investment works only when it is in harmony with private investment. Another very good economist, Mark Littlewood of the Institute of Economic Affairs, has been quite scathing about infrastructure investment. He has pointed out, for example, that Doncaster has very good road and rail communication links but still has a long way to go to match the productivity and prosperity levels of London and the south-east. So infrastructure alone will not solve this tough, long-term and expensive problem.

If we are to repay the trust of all the people right across the north who voted Conservative, including in places such as Darlington, where I spent a lot of time campaigning over the election period, we must ensure that real incomes grow and that we get better jobs, and all that can be derived from higher productivity. We must see higher public sector investment and higher private sector investment.

The public sector is relatively straightforward. We have been campaigning for some time to get £120 billion spent right across the north with a 30-year plan. That is what will hopefully be announced at the Budget, but we need a raft of other policy ideas to encourage private sector investment in some of the left behind towns. Free ports are a great policy, but Darlington and many other constituencies will not benefit from them. We perhaps need enterprise zones in town centres rather than business

[Kevin Hollinrake]

parks, and incentives to retrain the long-term unemployed. We need an SME-first policy. Preston City Council, for example, has radically shifted the amount of money it spends with SMEs, and we know that SMEs invest a much larger proportion of their income back into the local community. We need more public sector jobs. We need to consider our high streets and business rates. Building homes at a discount is an excellent Government policy.

Key to all that is devolution. We must ensure that we hand powers back to the people who know the towns best and will represent them most effectively. We need to do all these things to get private sector investment as well as public sector investment.

5.51 pm

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): May I add my congratulations to those who have made maiden speeches? I, too, have loved the geography lesson.

I was a proud local councillor for 17 years and held senior roles in education, children and young people, so I know the important role that local government plays in people's day-to-day lives, and the fundamental importance of education cannot and should not be ignored. However, I am worried that education does not seem to be a key concern for the Government. Most of my local schools face huge cuts to their budgets and are no longer able to provide the staff and resources our young people need.

Ministers over the past 10 years have paid lip service to equality issues, but if they truly believed in equality, they would not move funding away from the children in greatest need. They talk of fair funding, but some areas need more cash to make up for societal inequalities. It is tougher in areas such as mine for children to realise their full potential and tougher still for parents to subsidise their children's education, as they are now often asked to do.

Pupil funding may well have gone up, but schools in Stockton-on-Tees will see a £6.2 billion shortfall this year, meaning a loss of about £210 per pupil. Yes, we need to invest in education, but we must also invest in public services, particularly those on the frontline, and we cannot ignore the role of local government in young people's lives. The early years are incredibly important, being formative years of a person's development, but the Tory and Lib Dem Governments of recent years have decimated our Sure Start programme. While Governments have done a little better on childcare in recent times, huge gaps in provision still exist, and it is those with the least who often get the least support. Yesterday, a Conservative Member talked about an increase in resources for social care, but they did not say that much of it had come from extra, buck-passed taxation in the form of council tax.

Despite warm words over the years, particularly in the 10 years that I have been an MP, areas such as mine have been left behind. Despite the Government patting themselves on the back about unemployment figures, the rate in my Stockton North constituency has gone up to 5.2%. It was 4.3% just a year ago. There is a lack of confidence in Britain, and it is the Government's responsibility to fix it and to allow industry to flourish. Local authorities must be given the resources to build infrastructure, create jobs and rebuild that confidence.

We must also address health inequalities. Children in my town centre wards are more likely to live in poverty with smoking parents and to exist on a poor diet, and they achieve less as a result. However, public health budgets have been slashed under this and previous Governments, and programmes to reduce smoking, reduce obesity, and give people a better chance in life have largely disappeared. I recently advised the Prime Minister that the average man in my constituency dies at 64, before getting their pension, yet the average man in his constituency lives 14 years longer. For the 10th Queen's Speech in a row, I ask the Government to provide us with the modern hospital we need in Stockton, a hospital that was cancelled 10 years ago despite being a national priority.

We need to do so much more. Many people in my area cannot get home at night because there are no buses, yet the Tory Mayor spent tens of millions of pounds buying Teesside airport. Under his stewardship, or lack of it, losses have tripled to nearly £6 million a year, and all we have so far for our taxpayers' money is two holiday flights to Bulgaria. He still pays a fortune to a private company to run the airport for him—the debts continue to mount up.

I am proud of Stockton Borough Council, which has been held up as an example of how to redevelop town centres, and Ministers and others visit to see what the borough is doing. The town was featured on the BBC last night as an example of best practice. The council delivers innovative ideas across many other services, but it, too, worries about the future of children's services and social care.

Industry also needs a Government who care and provide support, but this Government have failed on a grand scale, particularly when it comes to Teesside. When it came to the SSI site and British Steel, the Government failed to act and steel production ceased. When the Sirius mine asked for a Government guarantee to help it trigger international investment, the Government turned a blind eye. When it came to civil service jobs, this Government moved them from tax offices, the public landing right service and others in our area. And all the while their public spending cuts have cost thousands of jobs at Stockton Borough Council, and many more elsewhere.

We desperately need real investment in this country and in the infrastructure we need, but it is the inequalities that trouble me most of all. We need to address the inequalities, and areas like mine must have the support they need. We need the new Government to act.

5.56 pm

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): I spoke about local government after the last Queen's Speech. The political environment was then very different, and my speech was made more in hope than expectation. How life can change. The environment is now completely different, with a new Government with a strong majority and a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make a real and significant difference—an opportunity to be reforming and radical.

Local government has often been underrated and underappreciated, yet it can be and often is very effective. Following the great recession of 2008-09, local government adjusted remarkably well in what were very difficult

financial circumstances. Indeed, the importance of local government and its ability to deal with things should not be underestimated.

If the Government's agenda is to become a reality, local government will be one of the vehicles that will help to deliver their policies. However, it is becoming increasingly apparent that local government and its powers and structures are in serious need of an overhaul if it is to deliver the policies and services we want to see.

The new political environment therefore gives the Government a unique opportunity to change the present arrangements, and doing so could achieve two fundamental things. First, it could improve the balance of power between central Government and local government. As has often been said, we are a heavily centralised country and we need to rebalance the relationship between central Government and local government. Secondly, we have an opportunity to rebalance the national economy, with greater economic growth and development in the regions. Those are two things that successive Governments, of both political colours, have failed to do over the past 20 or 30 years.

I encourage Ministers to be imaginative, ambitious and bold. If they are, future generations will reap significant benefits and the country as a whole will be much more balanced and, I suspect, much better off. I therefore welcome the proposed White Paper, but I encourage Ministers to start the reforming process now, rather than later.

The key elements of reform are threefold: structural change; devolution; and investment. For some time, I have been convinced that the structure of local government needs changing. First, we must move towards having more unitary councils. Unitaries are generally larger, so they have greater heft when it comes to policy initiatives. They are generally more efficient, transparent and better understood by voters. They can also lead to substantial savings, which then benefit the services they provide. Secondly, I am a firm believer that the introduction of Mayors for both cities and more rural areas would be beneficial. We have a lot of maiden speeches today and we have heard older Members referring to their own maiden speeches. Interestingly, when I made mine, 10 years ago, I said that I thought the innovative idea of elected Mayors would be beneficial to this country and, in particular, to devolution. I believe they give clear, visible leadership—in effect, there is nowhere to hide—and they have the potential to attract individuals with vision and ambition. The Mayors we already have are evidence that that is correct. Combined with reformed structures, proper devolution needs to take place, with real power and proper responsibility, including tax-raising powers, given to Mayors and authorities. These reforms will help to lay the foundations of a renaissance in the regions.

The third element is equally important: investment—hard cash. Of course cities and regions must help themselves, but help from central Government will be crucial if it is to have a real impact. Funding is needed for infrastructure, such as rail, roads, digital, and education and skills, but policy changes also matter. The creation of free ports—here I wish to make a pitch for Carlisle Lake District airport/freeport—would send a powerful message of the Government's intentions. In addition, local government must ensure that it works to attract private investment,

hence it is important to have attractive public realms, good schools, quality housing—in effect, an appealing social environment.

Economic success will drive the regions. I could be parochial and suggest that Carlisle and Cumbria is almost a case study, with some recent real achievements and positives: the garden village; road investment; the Borderlands; and town centre funding. Yet to truly unleash its potential it requires Government help: structural reform, whereby seven councils may come down to two; powers to invest; and the opportunity to have a Mayor for Cumbria, to give it visibility and leadership. I look forward to working with Ministers to achieve that. To conclude, if we are truly to bring in a new age and unleash the potential of our regions, I encourage Ministers to be ambitious, brave and bold. Above all, let's get on with it.

6.2 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) has already focused on the education aspect of the Queen's Speech, so I will seek to confine my remarks today largely to housing, communities and local government. Before I touch on that, I do, somewhat unusually for an Opposition Member, want to welcome one aspect of the Queen's Speech, which is very close to my heart. Hon. Members will be aware that I campaigned heavily in the last Parliament for greater parental leave for the parents of premature and sick babies, not least because my own two children had extended stays in neonatal care. So I am genuinely delighted to see a commitment in the Queen's Speech to bring forward an employment Bill with provision for "extended leave for neonatal care".

The ministerial team at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy know how often I have been battering on about this, and I look forward to working with Ministers when the employment Bill is published to make sure that we truly help those families who have babies in neonatal care.

I want to turn now to aspects of the Queen's Speech relating to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. I understand that three specific Bills fall under its remit, including the building safety Bill and the fire safety Bill, which have come about following the tragic events at Grenfell Tower in the summer of 2017. These, of course, are about largely devolved matters, and the Scottish Government have already taken prompt action on building regulations, including introducing new regulations that make Scotland's high-rise buildings even safer. That is particularly pertinent to my constituency, where we have high-rise blocks in Parkhead, Sandyhills and Cranhill. Many of the measures announced in these Bills are to be welcomed, and I commit the Scottish National party to working constructively during the passage of that legislation.

On the issue of fire safety specifically, I want to welcome yesterday's news that the Government will finally be bringing forward delegated legislation to introduce five-yearly electrical safety checks in the English private sector, effective from April this year. Scotland introduced electrical safety checks first, back in 2015, following an effective campaign from Electrical Safety First, a charity that I very much commend. However, I say gently to

[David Linden]

Ministers that it is disappointing that the duty in England will not include the regular testing of many portable appliances supplied with lets, something that already happens in Scotland.

I turn now to housing more broadly. We look forward to seeing the details of the new renters' reform Bill; I have no doubt that the Government will be playing catch-up with the Private Housing (Tenancies) (Scotland) Act 2016, which came into force in 2017. That Act enshrines in law further protection for tenants, as well as security and clarity around the issue of rent increases.

We note there are proposals to bring forward a social housing White Paper about the supply of social homes, but as I said yesterday to the Minister for Housing, the right hon. Member for Tatton (Esther McVey), the British Government will not make a dent in solving the housing crisis if they remain shackled to the ideological plaything that is the failed right-to-buy scheme.

I turn briefly to local government. It would be remiss of me not to put on record the incredibly difficult position in which Her Majesty's Government has placed the Scottish Government, alongside Scotland's 32 local authorities. The hugely delayed UK Budget means that the Scottish Government, and therefore our local authorities, are having to set an almost blind budget, which helps no one. To add insult to injury, Scottish Ministers only found out about the UK Government's 11 March Budget on the same day last week as the media; that is hugely unhelpful. The 11 March date is significant because it is the legal deadline by which Scottish councils must set local tax rates. However, we are where we are; it would be deeply disappointing if we ended up in this situation next year.

Finally, I refer to the proposed UK shared prosperity fund, which was trumpeted to much fanfare but receives little reference in the Queen's Speech. Media speculation thus far, which is all we can really go on at the moment, suggests that the fund will be used by the Government to splurge and to try to shore up some of the new Tory seats gained from Labour in the north of England. I gently say to the Minister and the British Government that we will be fighting tooth and nail to ensure that Scotland gets its fair share of funding from the shared prosperity fund. It is high time that the British Government outline a way forward as they have been scant on the details so far.

Perhaps it is the constitutional distraction of Brexit that means that this Government are playing catch-up with Scotland on domestic policy so often. I do not know. I do know that I look forward to the coming parliamentary term, and ensuring that the SNP holds the British Government to account and makes sure that they get on with the day job, rather than obsessing about Brexit, bonging Big Ben and narrow nationalism.

6.7 pm

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): It is an honour to speak towards the end of the debate. We have heard many incredible speeches today from those who are making their first remarks in the House. I and others are slightly in awe of following people who have spoken with such quality. I cannot mention them all, but I pay tribute to my southern neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (David Johnston), who spoke for

the first time today. He spoke incredibly fluently and persuasively, without notes, which is extraordinary for a maiden speech.

My hon. Friend spoke persuasively about social mobility, which matters hugely to all of us. I have done a little family research. About 100 years ago, as far as we can tell, the Courtses were semi-skilled or unskilled workers in the midlands and the fens. For those ancestors the prospect that I would become a barrister, or perhaps go through the doors of this Chamber and stand in Parliament, must have been utterly fanciful. It cannot have dawned on them that that would happen. My paternal grandfather was a cobbler and my father got to university through going to the local grammar school. In due course, I went to the Bar and was then was honoured to be elected to come here.

What has made the difference? It is unlikely that the family has become more industrious or more intelligent as time has gone on. I suggest that the answer is straightforward: it is education. The advent of mass education available to all has meant that people's talents have been able to be unlocked. That is why social mobility and education matter so much to all of us. My wife is a governor at the local primary school and my mother was a teaching assistant for many years, so I am acutely aware of it.

We have a strong base upon which to build. Since 2010 the Government's record has been extraordinary—we only have to look at the increase in standards to see that. Nationally, 1.9 million children are in good or outstanding schools—that is 86% of children in good or outstanding schools. In my constituency area of west Oxfordshire, the figure is around 95%, which is an incredible record, an incredible improvement and a base on which we can build. That improvement is the result of academic rigour and some of the policies put in place, and it is also the result of the dedication and talents of teachers, families and, of course, the students who have gone through the system in that time.

I am acutely aware that cost pressures since 2010 have been significant for teachers. I have a good working relationship with all the teachers in my constituency. I have visited a great many of them and I have tried to understand the issues in real detail. School funding is not the most straightforward aspect of policy for anybody to get to grips with for the first time, but it seems that teachers are now expected to do many more things that they were not expected to do in the past, or it may be that aspects of budgets were paid for by the local authority but are not now paid for. There are of course good reasons for that, and we all know them. Even now, I think we are paying approximately two thirds of the entire education budget towards servicing debt interest—it is more than the defence budget. That is why we have had to take the difficult decisions that we have taken over the past decade, but in this Queen's Speech we can see the fruits of those difficult decisions and of the British people's industriousness as we can start to reinvest. I am really pleased that with this Queen's Speech the Government have listened to people like me—constituency MPs who have come back and reported on what they hear from the education frontline.

I am delighted to welcome the levelling up funding. It is welcome that all schools are receiving significant—in some cases very significant—increases in funding to level up throughout the country, particularly in rural

areas such as Oxfordshire, which has historically been underfunded. What is also welcome is that that funding is to be invested in some of the educational areas that I know, from talking to teachers, have caused difficulty. For example, special educational needs provision is demanding for teachers in time and resources, and it is very welcome that much more money is being put into that. Similarly, the various initiatives to help those from disadvantaged backgrounds to make the most of their time to ensure that they also profit from the education system are very welcome as well.

In the short time remaining, I wish to make one point about the type of education that we offer. Probably the biggest thing that employers in my constituency will say to me when I speak to them is that they could expand and grow their business, but they just cannot find enough people to hire with the right skills. In an area such as west Oxfordshire, which is very high-tech, with aviation, Formula 1 and all sorts of science spin-offs coming out of the University of Oxford, there is a real need for people who have not only the academic ability but often the technical ability as well. The focus on T-levels and other vocational skills is very welcome.

The last point I wish to make is about practical work experience. I am grateful that the Royal Air Force has invested in a STEM programme at Carterton Community College. Meaningful work experience with companies in the real world would be of great value to employers and schools alike.

Broadly, I welcome everything in the Queen's Speech, particularly the focus on education, which I hope will open doors for others, as those doors have been opened for me.

6.13 pm

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): This ambitious Queen's Speech lists a whole series of draft Bills on wide-ranging areas, but it raises more questions than answers, and there are glaring omissions in respect of local government and education.

The section on education makes much of increased funding for schools. Increased funding is welcome, but after years of austerity not enough is being offered to reverse the damage that has been done. There are now fewer enrichment classes on offer, fewer teaching assistants, fewer student services staff and less funding for building maintenance. Creative arts supplies have also been affected, although I was pleased to hear the Minister's arts premium proposal, which I look forward to finding out more about.

The truth is that under the Government's funding plans 83% of schools will be worse off in real terms in April 2020 than they were in 2015. The Government have failed to resolve the even greater crisis in further education and sixth-form colleges, which have suffered real-terms cuts that have run longer and deeper. They have failed even to mention the nursery school sector.

Thangam Debonnaire (Bristol West) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the failure to recognise the difference between a real-terms and cash increase is frustrating for headteachers? In schools in my constituency, headteachers tell me that they do not have a real-terms increase—they have a real-terms decrease, even if, in some schools, it looks like a cash increase. They are

frustrated by the Government's attitude of saying that everything in the garden is rosy because there has been an increase in funding. They have had years of cuts.

Bambos Charalambous: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. The Government should come clean—this is a smoke-and-mirrors trick—and put back the money that they took out, in real terms.

The Government must face up to the fact that not enough teachers want to stay in the job. Headteachers across my constituency of Enfield, Southgate regularly tell me how difficult it is to recruit and retain staff. The additional workload and stress generated as a result of being judged on SATs results and Ofsted inspections is one the main reasons given by teachers for leaving the profession, which is why Ofsted and SATs should be replaced by a new system of accountability that gives a true picture of schools and students.

The impact of child poverty on a child's education is indisputable. Children cannot learn when they are hungry, surviving in cold or damp homes, or enduring severe overcrowding. When I see parents with their children coming to my surgery showing me pictures of serious damp and rodent-infested, overcrowded accommodation I know that unless action is taken their children's future is at risk. An estimated 4.1 million children are still trapped in poverty, and that figure is expected to rise to 5.2 million by 2022. The Government can make as many promises as they like about school funding but unless they tackle child poverty head-on the education of children will suffer.

If Members want an example of how the Government behave towards schools they need look no further than the announcement last year that teachers would receive a 2.75% pay rise. On the last day before the summer recess, they sneaked out a statement proclaiming that they would fund only 0.75%, leaving schools with strained budgets to find the rest. That is what we have come to expect from Conservative Governments. Local government has been treated exactly the same. I remember the Tory-led coalition Government transferring a raft of responsibilities to local authorities, including the council tax support scheme. However, they gave local authorities only 90% of the funding needed to administer the scheme. Is that what we should expect from the Government under the new funding proposals?

The Queen's Speech states that the "Government will invest in the country's public services and infrastructure",

but there is little mention of funding for local government. Late last year, the Government released a technical consultation on the review of local authorities' relative needs and resources—the next stage in the so-called fair funding review—which could be a precursor to the biggest single shift in money from the most deprived areas to the most affluent. That is because the fair funding review proposes to remove the consideration of deprivation from the core foundation formula, despite the Government's own research, which shows that deprivation is the second-best predictor of the cost of basic services.

In my own area, Enfield Council is a good Labour council that continually strives to protect frontline services. It covers areas of severe deprivation, including some in my constituency of Enfield, Southgate. Central Government have cut funding to Enfield Council by 60% in real

[*Bambos Charalambous*]

terms since 2010. When the Government make those extreme cuts to Enfield Council's budget, they are making a clear choice—they do not see the needs of local people as a priority.

The Government have tried to mask the cuts by saying that councils can raise money through increases in council tax and the social care precept. First, the amounts that can be raised in that way are nowhere near enough to compensate for the cuts since 2010. Secondly, they hardwire regional inequality into the system, because it is the richer areas that are able to raise more through increases in council tax. Despite being one of the areas where the riots took place in 2011, Enfield Council has been forced by central Government cuts to slash its spending on youth services by 88%, from £3.5 million in 2011-12 to £411,000 in 2018-19. In its last budget, Enfield Council had to make further cuts of £18 million across all services. If Enfield had not had 60% of its budget cut since 2010, the council would be funding those services, our local crime figures would probably be lower and fewer young people in my constituency would feel that their futures had been thrown away before they had even begun. The Government must realise that by acting in haste to cut local government funding they will repent at leisure, because they will have to find more money for the burgeoning prison population and its after-effects.

In short, the Government can promise all they like, but unless they are prepared to fund local government properly again and to undo the damage that has been done since 2010, the promises in the Queen's Speech ring hollow.

6.20 pm

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): Let me echo the comments that have been made by colleagues on both sides of the House about the many excellent maiden speeches that we have heard today. Some of those new Members are still here, and I think we can look forward to hearing more from a number of robust representatives of their constituencies over the years ahead.

One of the things I do each year in the conference recess in October is organise a community consultation, to give constituents the chance to set out their concerns to me and to shape my priorities in Parliament. There were something like 40 different events involving more than 1,000 people last year, but one of the things that I am always keen to prioritise is meeting young people who are not yet old enough to have a vote, but whose lives will be shaped by many of the decisions we make, so I met year 12 and 13 students at Sheffield Park Academy and King Edward VII School, students at the University Technical College Sheffield, and students in further education at Sheffield College. I have to say that these discussions are some of the liveliest and best informed meetings that I hold each year, and they are a great advert for why our democracy would be strengthened by extending voting rights to 16 and 17-year-olds.

It seemed to me that today's debate was a good opportunity to raise some of the students' concerns, as people who are at the very heart of our education system. Those concerns were not simply about education, although some were and I will come to those points. I represent a very diverse, socially mixed area, but right

across the constituency the students I spoke to were overwhelmingly opposed to our departure from the European Union. I think they were widely representative of young people across the country, so I urge Government Members to recognise the views of that generation as we seek to navigate the difficult months ahead.

The top concern of these young people was the climate emergency. Some had been involved in the school students' actions, although the majority had not and their concern was just as deep. They are looking for us to take the sort of radical measures needed to tackle the crisis that are absent from this Queen's Speech, which repeats the 2050 net zero target; that commitment fails them. The Queen's Speech also wrongly describes the Government's policies on climate change as "world-leading", which they simply are not.

I think that the students I talked with would be concerned about the Government's reaction to the Flybe problems that we were talking about earlier. A strategic intervention to support a company is clearly something that the Government should be looking at, but I think that a general response to encourage and provide further financial subsidy to the most carbon-emitting mode of transport would worry those students. Aviation already enjoys the advantages of tax-free fuel, and offering a further general concession across the industry to deal with the problems of one company would be a mistake.

Alex Cunningham: I have just been reflecting on the fact that 44% of the flights at Teesside rely on Flybe, as do, as we heard earlier, 90% of those at Southampton and two thirds at another airport. It is absolutely critical for our country that that company survives, so intervention might be the way forward after all.

Paul Blomfield: I very much agree with my hon. Friend, but a strategic intervention to address the needs of one company is very different from a generalised further additional subsidy to a carbon-emitting industry. We also ought to look, in a way that goes well beyond the ambition of this Government, at much more investment in rail to enable us to take more people out of the air and on to other modes of transport.

The students I spoke to were clearly concerned about their education and had very strong views about it. They did want to see more spent on schools. I know that the Queen's Speech has a line about levels of funding per pupil in every school being increased, and the Secretary of State, who is now in his place, took that up in his opening comments. However, the Government's ambition will fail Sheffield students unless, at the very least, they restore the funding for the 8% real cut that we have seen over the past nine years for our schools.

Last year, I brought a group of headteachers with a petition from every headteacher in the city to meet the Schools Minister. I am grateful for the time he gave to them and I am sure he will have seen the concerns that they expressed about the consequences of the funding cuts in their schools. They have had an opportunity to look at the money that they think will be available to them under the Government's plans and believe that it will still leave 80% of Sheffield schools worse off in 2020 than they were in 2015.

Thangam Debbonaire: Does my hon. Friend agree that the effect of these cuts has fallen particularly on funding and provision for children with special educational

needs, and that no amount of protestations from the Government Benches changes the salient fact, which is that our headteachers are telling us that they simply do not have the money to do the job not only for children in general, but particularly for children with special educational needs, who are suffering and struggling as a result?

Paul Blomfield: My hon. Friend makes a really important point. That was one of the issues that we discussed with the Schools Minister and about which the headteachers from Sheffield felt passionately. I had a sense from many of the speeches on both sides of the House that there is a recognition that the Government's proposals for special needs additional funding will fall well short of what is needed, and I hope that Ministers will pay full regard to that.

The students I spoke to also had concerns that went beyond funding and on to the content of their education. They wanted to see more time spent on citizenship education and on teaching life skills. I hope that Ministers will reflect on their concerns and ask themselves whether the straitjacket of the national curriculum, linked to the focus of Ofsted and the funding constraints on our schools that reduce diversity of subject choice, is enabling them to provide the rounded education and preparation that our young people want for the increasingly challenging world that they face.

There is nothing in the Queen's Speech on young people's mental health, but it was a significant concern for the students I talked to. The growth in mental health problems among young people is one of the most worrying issues that I have seen over my nine years in this place. We know that there is a crisis. Students talk to me about the difficulties in accessing support and about the long wait between going to their GP and getting their first appointment with child and adolescent mental health services. A YoungMinds report recently said that 75% of parents saw the mental health of their children deteriorate significantly during that period.

The students had a very helpful suggestion on how the Government could take a modest step towards tackling this area by providing a counsellor in every secondary school funded separately and additionally to the money that the schools currently get. That could make a difference by providing crucial early intervention and by reducing the pressure on school budgets; headteachers are already diverting money intended for teaching to address the crisis in mental health.

I see that you are urging me to wind up, Mr Speaker. I had been given the indication by Mr Deputy Speaker that some time was to be welcomed.

David Linden: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the important need to ensure that we tackle mental health issues in young people. Does he, like me, welcome the investment from the Scottish Government, which will see 250 new mental health counsellors going into schools, to ensure that we tackle this early on in the process and support young people with mental health issues?

Paul Blomfield: All resources diverted to mental health will be welcomed, and on that point, I am happy to conclude.

6.31 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): We have had a good and well-informed debate. Local government matters. Our councils keep our streets clean. They make our towns and cities safer. They protect and support the most vulnerable in society, and they maintain our open green spaces. When we all inevitably grow older, they should also allow us to have dignity in older age, but the fact is simple: without the resources that they need directed to the areas that need it the most, that is not possible. I want to pay tribute to councillors of all political persuasions and none, and the dedicated officers and staff who work day in, day out to deliver our public services in our councils across the country.

It has been great to listen to contributions from 30 Back Benches today, including my hon. Friends the Members for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), for Bristol South (Karin Smyth), for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), for Lewisham East (Janet Daby), for St Helens North (Conor McGinn), for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer), for Nottingham North (Alex Norris), for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham), for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous) and for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield); the right hon. Members for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), for Harlow (Robert Halfon) and for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Sir David Evennett); and the hon. Members for Poole (Sir Robert Syms), for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran), for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), for Carlisle (John Stevenson), for Glasgow East (David Linden) and for Witney (Robert Courts).

I pay a special tribute to all the Members who spoke in this Chamber for the first time. Their excellent maiden speeches show that, on whichever side of the Chamber we sit, we share a common purpose: to represent our constituents and our constituencies in the best way that we can. I congratulate the hon. Members for Wantage (David Johnston), for Ipswich (Tom Hunt), for Milton Keynes North (Ben Everitt), for Bury North (James Daly), for Eastleigh (Paul Holmes), for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) and for Gedling (Tom Randall). They made excellent contributions on education and social mobility. We were given tours of their constituencies and told snippets of information that we might not already have known. In the spirit of cross-party co-operation, we can all raise a glass of Concrete Cow—but the hon. Member for Milton Keynes North is paying. I would like to thank those Members for their kind words about our former Labour colleagues Sandy Martin, James Frith, Ruth Smeeth and Vernon Coaker, who all served those constituencies diligently during their time in the House.

I will have a gin on the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain). My ears pricked up when she described not just the whisky but the gin distilleries in her constituency. Now we know the secret of "squiffy" Asquith. It is great that my hon. Friend the Member for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins) brings so much knowledge of local government to the Chamber. She will no doubt use that expertise of not only local government but her constituency in debates in the years ahead. Like her, I served on my local council and I am proudly wearing my Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council badge, which was given to me by the Mayor of Tameside. Like her

[Andrew Gwynne]

constituency, mine has a link with the hatting industry because, like Luton, both Denton and Stockport were important centres of hat manufacturing. Of course, it is not just Luton Town football club who are the Hatters, but Stockport County football club.

In my maiden speech almost 15 years ago, I spoke about my time in local government and the pride I felt representing my home community—where I have always lived, where I grew up, where I went to school and where I brought up my own family. I know that the Members who spoke today who have had the privilege to serve in local government know of this pride and the important contribution that councillors make, despite the financial pressures that they continue to face.

The consequences of a decade of Government funding reductions to local government are visible to all in the unrepaired roads, the uncollected bins, the cuts to adult learning and the diminished public services in many parts of England. According to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, over the last 10 years, almost a fifth of the UK's libraries have closed. There are almost 10,000 fewer librarians now introducing the next generation of young people to the stories that inspired us all when we were young.

The money spent by this Government on Sure Start—one of the previous Labour Government's greatest achievements—has been slashed in half, with catastrophic outcomes for the children and families most in need. The Sutton Trust estimates that as many as 1,000 Sure Start centres have closed since 2010. Less visible, however, are the stresses that have been placed on core services—planning services, building regulation, adult social care and child protection. These issues are also, sadly, far less visible in the Government's plans in the Queen's Speech.

Then we have the crisis in children's services, which I spoke about yesterday in Housing, Communities and Local Government questions. Last week, we found out that in the past decade there has been a 139% rise in serious cases where the local authority believes a child may be suffering or is at risk of serious harm. The Local Government Association responded by stating:

“These figures show the sheer scale of the unprecedented demand pressures on children's services and the care system this decade.”

On the steps of Downing Street in August last year, the Prime Minister claimed that he had a plan to fix the crisis in adult social care. I take on board the comments by the Select Committee Chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East, about the need to find a resolution to this, because the crisis in social care—both adult and children's social care—is what is dragging our local authorities towards the cliff edge.

Kevin Hollinrake: Yes, we need a resolution, but I think the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) said that we need a cross-party solution. The Select Committees came up jointly with a cross-party solution—a social care premium. Will the hon. Gentleman commit the Opposition to supporting any Government move in that direction?

Andrew Gwynne: Of course, the effect of the general election is that the hon. Gentleman's party is responsible for delivering on public policy. We will work with his party to ensure that we do solve the social care crisis,

because if we do not solve the social care crisis, local government suffers but, more importantly, those people who rely on social care—whether it is children or adults—suffer. It is incumbent on this House to come forward in this Parliament with solutions that we can all support.

In response to the funding crisis that is growing in several town halls across the country, the Secretary of State announced a finance settlement before Christmas that, sadly, barely keeps the wolves from the door. Of course, any extra resource for local government is welcome, and I welcome the fact that we have additional resource going in this year compared with previous years, but even the chair of the Local Government Association resources board called it the “least worst” settlement of the past decade—hardly a ringing endorsement. According to research from the House of Commons Library, while in 2018-19 there was an 8.1% cut in local authority funding, this year's settlement represents a fall of 0.2%. In real terms, the settlement represents a cut in funding while demand for local services continues to grow. These figures are only possible if local authorities increase council tax by the maximum level possible, meaning eye-watering, inflation-busting tax increases for ordinary households. That is unfair on those areas, often with the greatest need, that are unable to raise sufficient sums from council tax increases. It is also economically incoherent, because the fact is that many areas will never be able to raise the money that they need through council tax alone.

On top of this, we have the Government's fair funding review. I fear that, unless the Government change tack, this risks causing further problems for many of those councils that are already struggling. I urge the new Members on the Government Benches to pay real attention to what the Government are proposing in their fair funding review, because their constituents will be forced to bear the cost of some of these changes, particularly in urban areas where the changes will impact the most.

Funding for social care for older people is due to drop in London, the west midlands, the north-east and the north-west at a time when demand for these services is rising. We on the Labour Benches will be urging the Government to change direction. Local government is the beating heart of our communities. We will work closely with the Government where we support their measures, but we will watch very carefully as the Government's plans become clearer. I give the Secretary of State my word: we will support positive changes that can generate cross-party consensus, because local government and the communities we represent need that approach, but we will also robustly scrutinise and challenge the Government on finance, on regional disparities, on inequalities, on financial fairness and on need, because our communities expect nothing less.

6.43 pm

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): It is an honour to close this debate, which has been characterised by many impressive maiden speeches. They began with the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (David Johnston), who recalled his predecessor. It made me think back to the first time I encountered Ed Vaizey, which was when I, as a, I guess, very young-looking new MP was sworn in here, in front of the whole House, after Prime Minister's questions; it was after a by-election. The House was very

silent and then there was a heckle from across the Chamber—it was Ed Vaizey saying, “Is he here on work experience?” Everyone laughed. However, I am delighted that on all sides of the House there are now far more MPs who are younger than I am. I was also struck by some of the superb maiden speeches that Members gave, including those Members on both sides of the House who bring direct experience of education, whether as teachers, school governors or having supported schools in other ways, such as my hon. Friends the Members for Wantage and for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis). I am sure all of them will be great contributors to debates in this House.

With regard to my own Department, Members on both sides of the House bring direct experience of local government: my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (James Daly); the hon. Member for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins), following in her great family tradition; my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Paul Holmes); and my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Tom Hunt), who has been involved in the mayoral combined authority in Cambridgeshire. I share and echo the comments of the shadow Secretary of State in paying tribute to all those, from all political parties, who contribute in the democratic process as councillors and council officers across the country. It was also a particular pleasure to listen to the maiden speech of my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Tom Randall). I enjoyed working with his predecessor, Vernon Coaker, and I very much look forward to working with my hon. Friend in the future.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Sir Robert Syms) said early on in the debate, we stood at the general election on a platform of breaking the deadlock that was holding the country back. The election result has, without question, delivered that. It has enabled us to get Brexit done and honour the outcome of the referendum. It has probably contributed to breaking the deadlock in Northern Ireland, as referenced by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). I am sure that is welcomed by all of us across the House. It has provided certainty to businesses and individuals across the country, and it has enabled us to get on with delivering on the public's priorities: levelling up across the country and making Whitehall work for local communities.

As my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary said, and as we heard in numerous contributions from across the House, the central role of high quality education in ensuring that young people can fulfil their full potential has been very clear and is shared on a cross-party basis. We heard about the importance of funding schools properly. The Government are doing that, with every pupil in every school seeing an uplift and by providing a fair floor for all, beginning with £5,000 per pupil in secondary schools.

We also heard, again on both sides but perhaps more on the Government side, that funding alone is not the outcome. The outcome is better standards. Under this Government, 1.8 million more young people have been in good or outstanding schools since 2010. That is underpinned by outstanding teachers, such as the one referenced by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North. They have played a role in all our lives and, no doubt, in getting us here to this House. We will repay that by ensuring that they have higher starting salaries and rigorous and transparent inspections

by Ofsted. They will also see a willingness to innovate and set teachers free to create new and exciting schools, such as the Michaela free school co-founded in London by my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Suella Braverman).

On both sides, we heard that further education colleges and quality apprenticeships matter. That is why we are providing a £400 million boost for education for 16 to 19-year-olds next year and 20 new institutes of technology.

Karin Smyth: I was just wondering where all the women had gone from the Tory Benches. Maybe they are off at a party somewhere else. On apprenticeships, I am looking forward to chairing the all-party group on apprenticeships with the hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan), but I understand that there will not be a dedicated apprenticeships Minister. That would be a concern. I am a strong supporter of apprenticeships, but we need to address what has gone wrong. It makes a massive difference to my constituents and I wonder whether the Government would like to address that.

Robert Jenrick: Absolutely. Unusually, in this Government it is the Secretary of State himself who has chosen to take on that responsibility as a sign that apprenticeships matter to this Government, as they have since 2010.

We heard throughout the debate that we have a special responsibility to support those with special educational needs. That is why we are funding local government to provide those services with a 12% year-on-year increase.

I shall now answer the points that relate to my Department. Last year we built more homes than we have built for 30 years—241,000 new homes and 1.5 million since 2010. We built more affordable homes per year on average than the previous Labour Government and more council houses were built last year than in 13 years of the previous Labour Government put together. However, there is no room for complacency and we know there is a great deal more to do. That, I hope, is set out in the ambitious legislative programme of the Queen's Speech.

We will take this forward in a number of ways—first, with further planning reforms. We have announced a White Paper on planning reform, which I will introduce in the coming months. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) said, we need a fair planning system that allows new homes to be built, encourages densification and gentle building upwards, and ensures that homes are built in the right places with a planning inspectorate that listens to local communities and is brownfield-first.

Robert Halfon: I am grateful for the towns fund, from which Harlow can access up to £25 million. My right hon. Friend talks about changing planning law. Will he also look at changing permitted development rights, so that we ensure that we have quality homes—not ghetto homes—and that London councils do not use it to send their most vulnerable families to my constituency?

Robert Jenrick: Absolutely. My right hon. Friend showed me some of those properties when we visited Harlow last year, and we will take forward reforms to permitted development rights in future.

[Robert Jenrick]

We will also invest more in infrastructure. We did that in the last Parliament with our housing infrastructure fund, and we have been very clear that more investment in infrastructure is required, as we heard in numerous speeches, so that we build communities with the forethought of planned towns and cities such as Milton Keynes, which we heard about in the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Ben Everitt).

Layla Moran: The Secretary of State will know well that there are issues with South Oxfordshire District Council that relate to the housing infrastructure fund bid that we put in. Will he consider meeting me and council leaders to ensure that we develop a plan to deliver that money and that infrastructure funding?

Robert Jenrick: I would be happy to meet the hon. Lady—in fact, I have written to her council leader suggesting that we speak as soon as possible.

We will also invest more in affordable housing. We know that we cannot meet our objectives without more affordable homes. The Government have built 450,000 so far and we intend to go further. We will be replacing our affordable homes programme with a new one and we have lifted the housing revenue account borrowing cap so that councils across the country can build more homes. We want better designed, safer, more beautiful homes, rooted in communities, and we are creating a design code so that every community can have a right to demand good-quality, well-designed homes that work for them.

We are also going to boost home ownership, as a good in itself, because we believe that a home is more than four walls and a roof—it is about someone investing in their future and their family, and putting down roots in a community. As my hon. Friend the Member for Poole said, it is about building an ownership society. We will do that with our next step, on first homes, with a 30% discount for local people buying homes in their community, which was championed by my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake).

We will also ensure that homes that we build in this country are safe. We have learnt a great deal following the tragedy of Grenfell Tower and we know that our building safety regime needs urgent reform. We have two Bills in the Queen's Speech, one of which is a building safety Bill, which will be the biggest change to our building safety regime in this country for 40 years. That will be a complex piece of legislation that I hope—as the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), the former Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee said—will command cross-party support so that we can build a robust system that lasts into the future.

Kevin Hollinrake: On my right hon. Friend's next step on homes—I appreciate his reference to me—it is an excellent policy that will make home ownership much more affordable for lots of local first-time buyers. Will he consider blending it with Help to Buy to make it even more affordable and therefore even easier for people to get on the housing ladder?

Robert Jenrick: I will consider that a Budget bid and pass it on to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. We will certainly blend it with things such as shared ownership and reform that model to take out some abuses that we have seen in recent years.

In addition to the building safety Bill, we will bring forward another Bill on fire safety sooner than that to ensure that we act urgently on the recommendations of the judge in the Grenfell inquiry. Again, I hope that those Bills can command cross-party support. We will answer some of the questions raised by numerous Members on the position of leaseholders not only through publishing a draft Bill shortly to outlaw leasehold for new homes and to reduce ground rents to a peppercorn, but by listening to the recommendations of the Law Commission and the Competition and Markets Authority to ensure that leasehold works for everyone and is a fair and sustainable system into the future.

Mr Betts: Will that include proposals to help existing leaseholders as well as future leaseholders?

Robert Jenrick: The draft Bill we intend to publish shortly will be about the future. A second piece of legislation will follow, following the reports from the Law Commission and the CMA, which is the right way to approach the task.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) and my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton, among others, in different ways spoke of levelling up. It is a challenge that we have confronted as a country since the second world war and which Conservative Prime Ministers since Harold Macmillan have taken forward. It is a difficult challenge that will involve closing the productivity gaps and raising living standards sustainably across the country, with more transport investment, education and skills and full-fibre broadband. It will also mean ensuring that the benefits of Brexit are felt across the country, such as through new free ports—the proposal from my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich is duly noted—and the £3.6 billion towns fund, which is working in over 100 communities, including the constituency of the hon. Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn). As I said, it will not be easy, but levelling up all parts of the country and making sure that prosperity and opportunity are shared by everybody is one of the Government's central missions.

We will also publish a devolution White Paper showing how we can spread the devolution revolution we saw under the last Conservative Government across more parts of the country: more Mayors, more combined authorities and more opportunities for local authorities that wish to reform to do so—I note the proposal from my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson)—and by doing so to earn further autonomy and control over public funds. We know that Mayors can work. In that regard, we heard from the hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth). Incidentally, we are indeed taking forward the western powerhouse, only we call it the western gateway, as it will combine parts of Wales and the west country. It has now been launched and I hope she will get behind it. There will then be routes to devolution for great metropolitan areas and for non-metropolitan areas, and we will publish those proposals shortly.

As the shadow Secretary of State said, we must ensure that local government, which provides so many important services in all our lives, is properly resourced, and that is why we are bringing forward the best settlement for local government in a decade. This includes a 4.4% real-terms funding increase, a £1 billion grant for social care

and measures to place the sector on a sustainable financial footing ahead of the three-year settlement, which will come forward in the spending review and which I hope will answer some of the critical questions we have heard today, including on the future of social care. I take the shadow Secretary of State up on his offer to work on that on a cross-party basis.

In conclusion, one could not have listened to the fantastic maiden speeches today and failed to be optimistic about the future. The gridlock is broken and the country is no longer going round in circles. We have a functioning majority Government, Brexit is being delivered, and now the task for this Government is to repay the trust the public have placed in us and get on and deliver on the people's priorities. That is exactly what we will do and what is in the Queen's Speech. In education, in housing, in levelling up, in funding local government properly and in ensuring that public services are reformed and delivered, we will take forward the people's priorities and get on and deliver for the people of this country.

6.58 pm

Ordered, That the debate be now adjourned—(*Iain Stewart*).

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

PETITION

Traffic situation in Strathaven and safe walking routes to school

6.58 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I rise to present this petition.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow,

Declares that the dangerous traffic situation in Strathaven should be resolved; notes that this market town and conservation area with a very long and special history is being damaged due to the speed of traffic through this town; further that the heavy traffic exacerbates problems of pollution, noise and vibration damage; further that narrow pavements and a lack of dedicated parking at Western Overton Primary School increases the danger for pedestrians, especially school children; and further that residents have concerns about the mix of traffic which causes frustration and damage, especially where there are concerns about a possible safe walking route to schools in the Strathaven area.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to press upon the South Lanarkshire Council to reduce the speed of traffic through the market town, allow safe passage for school children and to resolve the parking issues at local schools in the area.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002548]

HMRC Tax Office: Cumbernauld

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Iain Stewart*.)

7 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I am very grateful for the opportunity once again to bring HMRC's disastrous proposals to close Cumbernauld tax office to the House's attention. Let me begin by paying tribute to its workforce for their dedicated service and thanking their representatives in the Public and Commercial Services Union, who have worked tirelessly on their behalf to make the case for keeping jobs in Cumbernauld.

If implemented, these proposals will be a huge blow to the workers at HMRC Cumbernauld, many of whom have given decades of service, and many of whom will not be able to transfer to the Glasgow office for a variety of reasons. If implemented, they will also be a disaster for the whole town and community of Cumbernauld. Finally, quite simply, they make no sense from the point of view of taxpayers generally. These are, of course, the workers who ensure the collection of the taxes that are needed to fund our vital public services. Disrupting them, putting some of them out of a job, reducing their capacity and moving them to more expensive inner-city accommodation seems to serve a dubious purpose, to put it mildly.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. A tax office in the centre of East Kilbride is also due to be closed, although it has been a pivotal place for tax collection in Scotland. This whole agenda goes against the Government's towns initiative. Moving jobs from towns to cities is counter productive, and counteracts what the Prime Minister set out in his agenda.

Stuart C. McDonald: My hon. Friend has made a powerful point, and I shall say more about it later in my speech. The experience so far of similar changes in other parts of the United Kingdom seems to be that it is harmful to the collection of taxes, rather than helpful to the work that HMRC employees are trying to do.

As some Members may know—my hon. Friend certainly does—the proposal to close the Cumbernauld tax office forms part of a massive programme of reform to the HMRC estate, which has been given the title “Building our future”. Members on both sides of the House—including, obviously, my hon. Friend—may have seen similar offices close in their own constituencies, or may be battling similar proposals.

The scale of the changes and cuts faced by HMRC has been extraordinary. When it was formed in 2005, HMRC had 96,000 full-time equivalent members of staff in 593 offices; less than a decade later, staff numbers had fallen to below 60,000 based in fewer than 190 offices. “Building our future” set out to close 137 of those remaining offices, and to centralise even fewer workers in just 13 large regional hubs with between 1,200 and 6,000 staff. It seems that HMRC will shed many thousand more jobs during this process, with tens of thousands having to move location.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): I commend my hon. Friend for the campaigning work that he is doing in his constituency. We often hear the Conservatives

[David Linden]

talk about going after benefit claimants. Is it not the case that in shedding these HMRC jobs, they are not going after people who should be paying their tax, but focusing on the more vulnerable in society who are just trying to get on with it?

Stuart C. McDonald: I agree with my hon. Friend. As I have said before and will say again, this is detrimental not only to the workforce and the town of Cumbernauld, but to the work that we require these people to do in collecting the tax that we need to fund our public services.

It is also fair to say that “Building our future” has been the subject of huge controversy since its launch. The National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee, among others, have made very critical comments. In Parliament, my party has devoted Opposition day time to opposing tax office closures. There have been Backbench Business debates, one of which I was able to secure and one that was secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens), who chairs the PCS parliamentary group. Numerous other Members on both sides of the House have tabled questions or secured Adjournment debates on specific site closures.

I make absolutely no apology for bringing this issue to the House once again, because the “Building our future” programme was flawed from the start. It remains flawed and, given the seismic changes that have happened between its initial design and now, there are strong reasons to pause, to look at what has happened so far and to consider whether it is really still worth pursuing these plans. Serious issues have been thrown up even where regional hubs have already opened. For example, in Norwich, despite emphasis being placed on proximity to universities for recruitment purposes, recruitment has apparently proved incredibly difficult. Not only are many existing staff choosing not to make the switch to the new hub, but the hoped-for recruitment of new graduates has not materialised, quite simply because they have better options in the private sector. For all these reasons, the Scottish National party manifesto again made the case for, and committed to, reconsidering these closure proposals.

My first call on the Government is simply for them to take responsibility for what is going on. That in itself is long overdue. In contrast to my colleagues, the Government have been rather less keen on bringing this issue to the House for scrutiny and debate. Even when the original list of sites to be closed was decided, no announcement was made to the House. That basically sums up how Ministers appear to see their role. Ministers hide behind HMRC’s status. Too often in these debates and question sessions, the issue is simply palmed off as one for HMRC to get on with. I recognise that Ministers cannot interfere in the day-to-day operation of tax collection, but that is not what this is about. These strategic decisions will have an impact for decades to come.

I recently joined Jamie Hepburn MSP, PCS union reps and the leader of North Lanarkshire Council, Councillor Jim Logue, in writing to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury and the chief executive of HMRC to make the case for retaining the site in Cumbernauld. We

ask them to come to Cumbernauld and to meet us and the staff. We got a typically bland response from HMRC, but at least it was a response, because all we got from the Treasury was nothing at all. That sums up the total lack of interest that the Treasury has taken in the whole issue of reform of HMRC’s estate and workforce.

Let us remember that these are not trifling changes. We are talking about turning 190 offices into 13. Along the way, thousands of jobs are being cut, and huge sums of money are being thrown at new buildings, refurbishments, relocation costs and all sorts of other expenses. Morale and job satisfaction among the HMRC workforce remains among the lowest in the civil service. Both the Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office have raised serious concerns with the programme, so it is no longer sufficient for Ministers to wash her hands of the issue and just leave HMRC to carry on regardless.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): My hon. Friend is setting out clearly the effect on his own constituency, and it is right and proper that he should. Does he agree that, at a time when the tax gap in the UK—the gap between the amount of tax that ought to be collected and the amount that is collected—is £35 billion, it would be appropriate for the Government to weigh up the cost of the savings to HMRC in axing these jobs with the amount of tax that is increasingly going to go uncollected?

Stuart C. McDonald: I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend. At the end of the day, this programme may well end up being absolutely self-defeating for HMRC, and it is the Government’s cost-cutting agenda that has been the driver behind it. They need to take ownership of what is going on.

First and foremost, the Government need to take ownership of the implications of these plans for the dedicated workforce who have built up considerable expertise over many years in Cumbernauld. The stark truth is that jobs will be lost. Written parliamentary answers confirm that the total capacity of the new Glasgow financial district site is considerably smaller than the number of staff at the sites that have been closed to make way for it. In fact, we are talking about a maximum capacity of 3,000 at the new site compared with a full-time equivalent workforce of 4,700 at the sites that are earmarked for closure.

It seems that HMRC is relying on the fact that many workers will be unable to make the transition because of personal circumstances. Remarkably, it has managed to pick a site in a part of Glasgow city centre that is unusually difficult for people in Cumbernauld to get to within HMRC’s one-hour reasonable daily travel limit if they are using public transport. Those workers who do make the move will be out of pocket. It is true that some reasonable daily travel costs will be met initially, but that will not last for ever. It also refers to the cheapest option, which I know from speaking to staff will be totally impossible for some of them. We have to remember that 57% of staff earn less than £20,000 a year. If, as has been estimated, staff will have to spend, on average, an additional £17 each week on travel to work, that will represent 5% of their take-home pay. It is a similar story with childcare costs, because 55% of staff have childcare or other caring responsibilities. Additional travel time

will see care costs rise by an average of £40 a week, which is 12% of an employee's take-home pay. After decades of service, those workers deserve better.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making an excellent case, but this is not just about the finances. At a time when we are so concerned about climate change and are looking to decarbonise where we can, the thought of additional travel to a place of work should be a worry to us all.

Stuart C. McDonald: I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend.

Secondly, the Government must take responsibility for the consequences of the proposed closure on the town of Cumbernauld. It is fair to say that HMRC and the Government have failed to show one iota of interest in the implications for the town and community. Earlier written answers sought to assure us that all the appropriate impact assessments would be carried out, but they proved to be hollow assurances as the economic impact assessment was never commissioned.

Thankfully, after a little encouragement, North Lanarkshire Council worked effectively with PCS to do what the Government should have done and looked at the economic consequences for Cumbernauld. The assessment confirmed what we all could guess: local shops and businesses benefit greatly from the footfall of tax office workers spending money in the town centre adjacent to the tax office building. A conservative estimate suggests an annual loss of almost £1 million at supermarkets, local cafés and food outlets alone. That significant loss of footfall will have a severe impact on the local economy.

However, absolutely none of that has played any role in HMRC's plans, and it has shown no interest in the impacts. If HMRC will not listen, the Government should. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) mentioned earlier, the Government's towns strategy, published last November, said that

“for too long, the benefits of this unprecedented growth in many of our world-renowned cities has not been felt as strongly by communities in our towns and rural areas... Successive Governments have often focused on cities as engines of economic growth.”

I largely agree with that, but a focus on rebalancing is exactly why the tax office ended up in Cumbernauld in the first place. During the 1960s and 1970s, there was cross-party consensus not only on dispersing existing civil service jobs from London to other parts of the UK, but on the creation of new positions. It was against that background that Cumbernauld was selected for a new accounts office in 1976, albeit that the opening was later postponed until 1978. The office was expected to have a hugely positive impact on employment in the town, with most of the jobs being new and recruited locally, and that is exactly what happened. Everyone in Cumbernauld knows somebody employed in the tax office. What a tragedy it is that, 40 years on, UK Ministers are standing idly by as HMRC runs roughshod over such policy goals.

In reality, the “Building our future” programme seems to be doing the opposite of the Government's stated aim of renewing our towns. New offices are being located in prime inner-city locations in places where I have absolutely no doubt that the offices would have

been filled by private sector tenants in any event. That is not the case in Cumbernauld where the site owner, Mapeley, is protecting its position in case HMRC fails to renew the lease, but it is not protecting the position by seeking new people for the lease and creating new jobs, but by knocking it down and seeking planning permission to build houses on the site. New housing is needed, but not at the expense of around 1,200 good-quality jobs.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): My hon. Friend is being generous with his time. I am incredibly disturbed by a lot of what he is saying, because I seem to remember in 2014 that the presence of all these civil service jobs at HMRC and, as we were discussing last night, at the Department for International Development site in East Kilbride was one of the strengths of the Union. All those jobs were going to be at risk if Scotland voted for independence. Has he noticed that all the warnings about the risks of voting for independence—losing civil service jobs and economic chaos—are starting to come true? Will he tell the House whether we voted for independence?

Stuart C. McDonald: My hon. Friend makes a good point. It would not take too long to google a nice picture of the Better Together campaign outside HMRC in Cumbernauld, where it was warned that all the jobs could be retained only if we remained part of the United Kingdom. If the Government's apparent new-found enthusiasm for protecting and nurturing towns is genuine, that is one strong reason why the Government should intervene and ensure that HMRC considers whether the closure is compatible with other Government objectives.

Of course, the other huge development since “Building our future” was first drafted is Brexit. The precise impact that Brexit will have on HMRC's work remains as clear as mud, but it clearly means more work. Trade with the EEA, and even trade between the UK and Northern Ireland, will now have greater implications for HMRC. It has been acknowledged that significant additional staffing will be required, and it should be recognised that that need will not be temporary. It will therefore be useful to know the Government's current estimate of the number of additional HMRC workers required as a result of Brexit. How many have been recruited and, indeed, how many have been recruited in Scotland. In short, it is clearly nonsense to think that we should simply ignore these realities and allow HMRC to press on as if nothing has happened. It is time to pause and think again.

It is frustrating that the Cumbernauld site was in the running for selection as one of the 13 hubs. To almost all intents and purposes, it meets the—albeit dubious—criteria used in the selection process. Cumbernauld is a large site, with good access by train and motorway to the cities of Edinburgh, Glasgow and Stirling, to the graduate populations located there and to the airports at Edinburgh and Glasgow. Of course, it has the added benefit of a pre-existing experienced and dedicated workforce. There is no sensible reason for not using the Cumbernauld site.

We know from written answers that HMRC has the option of extending the lease of the Cumbernauld premises. Surely it makes sense to do that now, even if at first it is for the short to medium term while we revisit the longer-term strategy of HMRC.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. An hon. Member cannot just walk in and intervene after the debate has started. I am very sympathetic to Mr Shannon, as he well knows, but we have to try to stick to the rules of the House.

Stuart C. McDonald: In a joint letter, PCS, Jamie Hepburn MSP, Councillor Logue and I invited the Financial Secretary and senior HMRC staff to meet us in Cumbernauld, and I repeat that invitation this evening. We are all desperate to work together to see HMRC retain its presence in Cumbernauld, benefiting the workforce, the whole town and taxpayers generally.

If the Financial Secretary does not visit for that purpose, he will soon receive a different letter, one asking him to come to discuss with us how the UK Government will help to pick up the pieces for Cumbernauld after the loss of its major employer and how he will properly support staff who are out of a job and out of pocket because of the closure. I would far rather not have to write that letter.

I hope the Financial Secretary will listen and consider for himself whether this seems like a reasonable way forward, or he can agree with our argument that HMRC in Cumbernauld has been working well and should remain open for the years ahead.

7.16 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jesse Norman): I thank the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) for calling this debate, following up on the Backbench Business debate he secured a couple of years ago.

Mr Speaker, I greatly appreciated the unusual range of guttural noises that you displayed a few seconds ago in relation to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). I think it is an attractive aspect of your speakership, if I may say so.

In November 2015, as hon. Members on both sides of the House will know, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs announced a location strategy to support its work to create what is understood to be a world-class tax authority. That, in turn, was part of the then Government's long-term economic plan for prosperity across this country.

Since 2010, successive Governments have made substantial investments to enable HMRC to do more to tackle evasion and avoidance, and to improve compliance, while also becoming more digital and more skilled in order to improve the services it offers to businesses and individuals.

Changes to HMRC and its office estate are an important part of that transformation. As the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East mentioned, before 2010 there was a wide sprawl of offices, varying in size and quality, across the UK. HMRC is seeking to bring the estate towards a more consistent and better integrated network of large, modern regional hubs, and to do so in the interests of its workforce who rightly deserve a modern workplace in which to work and thrive.

Stuart C. McDonald: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way so early. He might come on to this point, but Cumbernauld essentially met all the criteria that HMRC

was looking for in selecting its hubs. Why can we not persevere with Cumbernauld? What role do the economic implications for Cumbernauld have in the thinking of HMRC and the Government?

Jesse Norman: Of course, HMRC was focusing on the needs of its operational business and the wellbeing of its staff. It went through a procedure for the whole series of potential locations, and it concluded that, on a wide range of eight criteria designed to support that, the move was justifiable and, indeed, required. It is fair to say that HMRC looked at the wellbeing of its staff and at the future of its business, which is as it should be.

Stuart C. McDonald: The Public and Commercial Services Union and employees would be distraught if I did not simply point out that the staff themselves do not agree; the workers at HMRC Cumbernauld do not, for a minute, think that moving them to an inaccessible location in Glasgow city centre is remotely in their interests. I do not see how HMRC can possibly defend that position.

Jesse Norman: Of course, in any relocation there will be people who disagree with it, and that is to be anticipated. As the hon. Gentleman will know, HMRC has an elaborate and established process—I will come to it—of working with staff and seeking to support them in making the transition to a different working environment. The point I was making was that they can expect a significant improvement in the quality of the space that they are working and thriving in, and this should be beneficial for them and for the Revenue if they are allowed to do that. Of course HMRC will in turn benefit from bringing different skills and specialities together, and form a more connected and more technology-enabled environment.

Jim Shannon: Will the Minister give way?

Jesse Norman: No, I will not. The hon. Gentleman has absolutely no basis for coming in late to this debate in order to ask a question; I am a great fan of his and I have answered questions of his on many previous occasions, but I regard this as a discourtesy to the House. I am happy to take any further interventions that other Members may make.

Stuart C. McDonald: I sense that HMRC Cumbernauld workers will be watching this debate and screaming at their television sets. The Minister paints this rosy picture of this office in Glasgow where they will all be able to move around. First, as I said, 1,700 or so workers will not be able to make that transition at all. Secondly, they are all reasonably happy precisely where they are and they are not remotely impressed with what has been offered to them in Glasgow city centre. Why does he not speak directly with PCS and the representatives of the staff, whom he seems to be talking about?

Jesse Norman: I have no doubt that HMRC, which is operationally responsible for this change and for the management of its business, will have spoken very closely with the relevant unions on this issue, as it has been doing in other areas, too.

If I may, with your permission, Mr Speaker, I will continue to make some progress on my speech. In November 2015, HMRC announced that in the following

10 years it would seek to bring its employees together in 13 regional offices based in locations where it already had a significant presence, such as Glasgow, which is one of the two HMRC regional centres in Scotland. The co-locating of teams across HMRC is designed to lead to increased collaboration and flexibility, making it easier for skills across a lot of teams to be shared and for teams to switch between communications channels and subject areas in order to meet the evolving needs of taxpayers. HMRC recognises that the transition may not be easy and has put considerable support in place to help its workforce through these changes. The hon. Gentleman has mentioned that and I will address that support in due course.

In Glasgow, the regional centre will be situated in the heart of the city at 1 Atlantic Square and is currently in development. It will be home to some 2,600 HMRC staff, who will be moving from six offices around the region in order to fulfil a wide range of tax professional and operational roles, including in compliance and in large business relationships.

Dr Cameron: Does the Minister recognise, however, that HMRC's plans to move the hubs to city locations are counterproductive and undermine the Government's own agenda to try to support development in towns? The specialist expertise is already in the towns, so why are we moving the hubs to cities, against even the Prime Minister's aims of reinvigorating towns?

Jesse Norman: The hon. Lady is right to say that the Government take the needs of towns seriously. That is why we have a towns fund, which, in turn, works with a much wider spread of support that we are giving to cities. Of course towns have their uses and functions, and cities have theirs. HMRC is seeking to use the benefits of the city: the capacity to agglomerate services and bring people together, and give them proper communications and technology support. Those are things from which both HMRC and those staff will benefit.

I have taken a lot of interventions and I now have a limited amount of time, so I will make progress. HMRC has already opened three new regional centres in Croydon, Bristol and Belfast, with staff planned to move to the Edinburgh regional centre later this year. Construction is under way at all the remaining new locations, including Cardiff, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Nottingham, Birmingham and Stratford.

In addition to the 13 regional centres, HMRC will keep eight transitional sites open across the UK for several years to help retain key skills during the transition period, as well as five specialist sites for work that cannot be done elsewhere. For example, HMRC will retain Telford as a site for some of its specialist digital teams. Through this phased approach, HMRC will seek to minimise disruption to business operations.

The overall programme will deliver savings to the taxpayer of around £300 million up to 2025 and then rising cash savings, estimated to be more than £90 million by 2028. It also avoids additional costs of £75 million a year from 2021, when the current PFI contract with Mapeley, agreed by the last Labour Government, comes to an end.

Patricia Gibson: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way as I know he has points that he wants to go on to make. Can he explain to me, and to the House,

how the savings he has talked about and the reduction in staff can help mitigate and tackle the £35 billion tax gap that will inevitably grow with fewer staff?

Jesse Norman: The hon. Lady rightly raises the tax gap. When expressed as an absolute number, £35 billion is a large amount of money. Some £7 billion or £8 billion of that sum is caused by people not filling the forms out correctly, and there are many other components to it. As she will know, at 5.6% the tax gap is not only near to its historic low in this country but low against international comparators. It is key to see it as a percentage in the context of the overall amount of money the Revenue collects. HMRC remains an extremely efficient tax collection agency.

It is important to stress that the strategy that HMRC has adopted is not just about cost savings or bricks and mortar. The new office in Glasgow, as well as the other sites, will allow people to develop more fulfilling careers. There will be a wider variety of jobs and, therefore, of career paths to senior roles, as a wider range of work will be based in single sites. The judgment has been that the current office in Cumbernauld does not provide the kind of space that HMRC wants for its staff; nor does HMRC judge it to be fit, over time, for a tax authority operating in the digital age. Modern buildings such as the Glasgow regional centre will deliver a better working environment and experience for HMRC's workforce. Such buildings will increase HMRC's attractiveness as an employer, enabling it to recruit and retain the next generation of skilled professionals.

Stuart C. McDonald: Will the Minister give way?

Jesse Norman: I have very little time, and I want to talk about the support that HMRC is giving to staff. As I have said, HMRC will do all it can to retain the skills, knowledge and experience of the existing workforce and minimise any redundancies. The vast majority of existing employees are within reasonable daily travel of a regional centre, specialist site or transitional site, and that is part of the overall strategy. In 2015, HMRC estimated that 90% of its workforce would be able to move to one of the regional centres or complete their careers in their current offices. HMRC expects that the figure will be close to that once all moves to regional centres or other locations have been completed.

For those who are currently based in Cumbernauld, the travel time from Cumbernauld to Glasgow city centre is generally between 45 and 55 minutes by car, or 30 minutes by train to Queen Street station. In the locations that it is closing, HMRC has been proactive and has sought to provide a range of support for staff. In Cumbernauld, it has maintained continuous dialogue between staff and senior leaders. Local managers have received extra training to prepare and support them in that process. For some staff, HMRC is funding visits to the locations of new offices, so that they can experience the travel options that are available to them. As well as regular engagement through online forums and in person, HMRC has supported local trade unions to ensure that they can assist members and provide up-to-date information in order to retain people.

Of course, HMRC recognises that individual employees have distinct and different personal circumstances, so it has put in place structured support to help those who

[*Jesse Norman*]

can move, as well as those who cannot. One year ahead of any move, every staff member affected has the opportunity to discuss their personal circumstances with their manager, to talk through any particular needs that must be taken into account when making decisions and any help that individuals may need—for instance, help with additional travel costs for up to the first five years. I understand that that is a tried-and-tested

process, with tens of thousands of these conversations having been held in HMRC over the last two years. With that in mind, I hope Members agree that what we are proposing is a sane and sensible solution to the problem.

7.30 pm

House adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 9(7)).

Written Statements

Tuesday 14 January 2020

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

ENABLE Funding Scheme

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst): 'ENABLE Funding' is a scheme administered by the British Business Bank which provides senior funding (effectively at commercial terms) to delivery partners and is designed to increase funding diversification for leasing and asset finance providers and peer-to-peer lenders, with the overall purpose of increasing the supply of debt to underlying small and medium-sized enterprises.

Since the scheme began in 2014, senior secured funding has been provided to various delivery partners and their receivable portfolios have been 'warehoused' in a special purpose entity. The aggregate sum of certain receivable portfolios reached a desired critical mass whereby a capital markets refinancing (or securitisation) can proceed, repaying the funding. The transaction is expected to complete before the end of the financial year 2019-20.

As part of the transaction, a credit enhancement in the form of a capped second loss guarantee will be agreed. The guarantee issued by the Department is capped at up to £30 million and the 'second loss' element means that the participating delivery partners will fund and suffer an agreed amount up to the first loss threshold should defaults in the portfolio occur.

The guarantee is not expected to last for more than seven years and in practice will likely be much shorter. The beneficiary is the securitisation vehicle (a newly incorporated entity) which will purchase the facilities as part of the transaction. The Department will receive a commercial fee in return for the guarantee.

As a matter of record, I will be laying a Departmental Minute today explaining the procedure followed and containing a description of the liability undertaken.

[HCWS35]

TREASURY

Retail Prices Index: Consultation

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Sajid Javid): Yesterday, I wrote to the Chair of the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee to inform him that the joint consultation between the Government and UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) on a proposed change to address the shortcomings in the Retail Price Index (RPI) will now launch at Budget 2020. The consultation had been scheduled to launch this month. However, following the general election and my confirmation of the Budget date, I have agreed with UKSA that the consultation will now launch at Budget.

The consultation will launch at the Budget on 11 March. It will be open for responses for a period of six weeks, closing on 22 April. The Government and UKSA will respond to the consultation before the Parliamentary summer recess.

[HCWS33]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Gadaffi-sponsored Terrorism

The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa (Dr Andrew Murrison): The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 4 October formally commenced the appointment of Mr William Shawcross as his Special Representative on UK victims of Gadaffi-sponsored IRA terrorism. This appointment reflects HMG's strong commitment to support all UK victims of Libyan-sponsored IRA terrorism. The Special Representative has been asked to focus, in the first instance, on investigating the feasibility of calculating a precise number of people affected and the compensation due to them from the Libyan Government. This is an important preliminary step. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) believes that, provided the Special Representative acts honestly, reasonably, in good faith and without negligence in the performance of his obligations under the terms and conditions agreed with him, he should be indemnified against any liability arising from this role. The FCO notified Parliament of its intention to undertake this contingent liability on 15 October 2019. As Parliament dissolved before the 14 sitting days required for its consideration expired, the Departmental Minute is being re-laid today in the House of Commons. Further details are set out therein.

[HCWS32]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Ministerial Corrections

The Minister for Health (Edward Argar): I would like to inform the House that a written answer I gave on 8 October 2019, to the former hon. Member for Blackpool South contained an error and wish to correct the formal record.

In my reply, I was incorrectly advised and stated that 'The Chair at Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and the Chair at East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust sought the views of NHS England and NHS Improvement on the possibility of merging services and provision between the two trusts.'

The correct position is that the Chair at Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS FT did seek advice from NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSEI), as to whether they would support a proposal for a joint Chief Executive Officer, working across both organisations. These conversations did not involve discussion around merging services or provision.

Both trusts provided NHSEI with a number of assurances that having a joint Chief Executive working across two organisations would bring actual benefits and improve the care of patient populations in Blackpool and East Lancashire. NHSEI confirmed that they would be happy with those arrangements pending the appropriate approvals from within their own organisations. On 1 May Kevin McGee was appointed as interim Chief Executive of Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, while remaining as Chief Executive and Accountable Officer of East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust. On 4 October 2019 this joint appointment was made permanent.

Powers under Section 56A and 56AA of the NHS Act 2006 enables an NHS Foundation Trust (FT) to merge with another FT or NHS Trust. The trusts are required to make a joint application to NHS Improvement for any merger to go ahead. Where a merger involves an NHS Trust, this must also be supported by the Secretary of State. Any decisions by the two trusts need to reflect the views of local stakeholders, including local Members of Parliament.

[HCWS31]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Armed Policing Code of Practice

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): As Secretary of State for the Home Department, I have today given approval for the College of Policing to issue the code of practice for armed policing and police use of less lethal weapons.

The code of practice describes the roles and responsibilities of chief officers in relation to armed policing and less lethal weapons. It is relevant to all police officers in England and Wales involved in armed policing or the use of less lethal weapons setting out as it does the basic principles of the selection, evaluation, approval, authorisation, acquisition, training and deployment of these weapons by the police.

The code replaces the 2003 code of practice for the police use of firearms and less lethal weapons. The code has a statutory basis in law, meaning that all police

officers have a duty to have regard to it. The revised code of practice should be used in conjunction with the College of Policing authorised professional practice (APP) for armed policing. Alongside the APP the code of practice will help to ensure that the police force maintains the high standards for the police use of firearms, specialist munitions and less lethal weapons, for which the UK is renowned.

The new code also addresses the recommendation made to the Home Office by the Anthony Grainger public inquiry. The inquiry, which was established following the shooting of Anthony Grainger by the police in March 2012, concerns the authorisation of new weapon systems. It stated:

“The Secretary for State of the Home Department should ensure that the new code of practice on police use of firearms and less lethal weapons contains an express prohibition on the use of a new weapon system by the police service until the approval process set out in the code of practice has been completed and the new systems has been approved by the Secretary of State”.

The Government accept this recommendation. The revised code makes it clear that all new less lethal weapons and specialist munitions for use by police forces in England and Wales, and all significant changes to these weapons, must be approved by the Home Secretary.

In relation to the other recommendations, addressed to the police and others, it is the Government’s intention to provide a formal response in due course, once we have fully considered the report, and any recommendations therein. My officials have asked the National Police Chiefs’ Council and Greater Manchester police to set out how they will respond to the concerns raised by the inquiry and improve the safety of armed policing operations.

Finally, I would like to thank our police officers for the invaluable role they play in keeping the country safe, and the College of Policing for the work it has done on the code of practice. The code of practice has been laid before Parliament today and copies will be available from the Vote Office. It will also be available to view on the College of Policing website <https://www.college.police.uk/Pages/Home.aspx> and on gov.uk <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/armed-policing-and-police-use-of-less-lethal-weapons-code-of-practice>.

[HCWS34]

ORAL ANSWERS

Tuesday 14 January 2020

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
JUSTICE	865	JUSTICE—continued	
Constitution, Democracy and Rights		Perinatal Women: Custodial Settings	869
Commission	875	Rapes Reported to the Police: Number of	
Court Proceedings: Proportion Covered by		Suspects Charged	877
Court Reporters.....	878	Sentencing Policy for Prolific Offenders	871
Criminal Appeals: Victims of Crime	867	Staffing at Courts: Access to Justice.....	874
Human Rights Framework: Reform	879	Topical Questions	880
Legal Aid Access.....	865	Victims of Domestic Abuse.....	870

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Tuesday 14 January 2020

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL		HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	36WS
STRATEGY	35WS	Ministerial Corrections	36WS
ENABLE Funding Scheme.....	35WS	HOME DEPARTMENT	37WS
		Armed Policing Code of Practice	37WS
FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE	36WS	TREASURY	35WS
Gadaffi-sponsored Terrorism	36WS	Retail Prices Index: Consultation	35WS

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than
Tuesday 21 January 2020**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Tuesday 14 January 2020

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 865] [see index inside back page]
Secretary of State for Justice

Flybe [Col. 885]
Answer to urgent question—(Paul Maynard)

Joint Comprehensive Plan Of Action [Col. 896]
Statement—(Dominic Raab)

Debate on the Address (Third day) [Col. 907]
Debate adjourned

Petition [Col. 993]

HMRC Tax Office: Cumbernauld [Col. 994]
Debate on motion for Adjournment

Written Statements [Col. 35WS]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
