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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 29 January 2020

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr Speaker: I remind colleagues that the ballot for Select Committee Chair elections is taking place today until 4 pm in Committee Room 16.

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Plastic Use

1. **Edward Timpson** (Eddisbury) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to tackle plastic use in developing countries. [900462]

3. **Mark Jenkinson** (Workington) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to tackle plastic use in developing countries. [900464]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Alok Sharma): It is a delight to see the Conservative Benches so well attended for International Development Question Time.

My Department is providing expertise to help developing countries to reduce plastic usage and funding innovative pilot projects in, for example, Uganda and Ghana to improve recycling rates and waste collection.

Edward Timpson: Given that 2020 is set to become the first year in which the pieces of plastic in our seas outnumber fish, will the Secretary of State update the House on the Government's plans for the UK to play its part in tackling that shocking statistic by means of, for instance, their new Blue Planet fund?

Alok Sharma: Let me first welcome my hon. Friend back to the House: we are all delighted that he is back with us. As he knows, the Government have committed £500 million to the Blue Planet Fund to help developing countries to manage the marine environment. The fund, which is in the process of being designed, will run for five years from April next year, and will focus on four priority areas in marine management: fisheries, pollution—including plastic pollution—climate change and marine protected areas.

Mark Jenkinson: I welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment to tackling plastic use. In my constituency, Workington, people care about the future of our seas

and oceans. Young students at Ashfield Infant and Nursery School, Holme St Cuthbert School and St Michael's Nursery and Infant School have written a book about Driggsby, the young fin whale who sadly died on a Cumbrian beach, a victim of plastic poisoning. What is the Department doing to rid the world's oceans of plastic waste?

Alok Sharma: About 70% of the litter in the ocean is plastic, and I therefore commend the work of my hon. Friend and his young constituents in highlighting the clear and present danger of plastic pollution to life in our oceans. The Government recognise the need for action through our joint leadership, with Vanuatu, of the Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance, and we are supporting technical assistance for countries that are committed to taking practical steps to tackle marine pollution.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): In the poorest countries, 93% of waste is burnt or discarded on roads or open land or in waterways. Will the Secretary of State expand on his answer to the first question, and tell us what he is doing to develop a system of improved waste collection while also encouraging recycling in many of those countries?

Alok Sharma: The hon. Gentleman has raised an important point. Let me give him a couple of examples. In Uganda and Ghana, my Department is providing support for pilot projects. We are working with businesses to improve waste management and increase recycling. In Uganda, for example, we are working with the Kampala plastics recycling partnership.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The Dutch non-governmental organisation The Ocean Cleanup has discovered that most plastics in the seas come from abandoned fishing gear and nets. Does the Secretary of State agree that assisting fishermen in developing countries is one way to eliminate that waste?

Alok Sharma: The hon. Gentleman is right. I have talked about the Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance, but he will also know that at the 2019 United Nations General Assembly the Prime Minister announced the global ocean alliance of countries which aims to protect at least 30% of the global ocean within marine protected areas by 2030.

Forestry/Biodiversity

2. **Robbie Moore** (Keighley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to protect (a) forestry and (b) biodiversity in developing countries. [900463]

4. **James Wild** (North West Norfolk) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to protect (a) forestry and (b) biodiversity in developing countries. [900466]

5. **Fay Jones** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to protect (a) forestry and (b) biodiversity in developing countries. [900467]

8. **Craig Whittaker** (Calder Valley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to protect (a) forestry and (b) biodiversity in developing countries. [900470]

The Minister for Africa (Andrew Stephenson): DFID is at the forefront of global efforts to tackle illegal logging, promote sustainable trade in timber, and eliminate deforestation from supply chains. Those programmes, and other assistance from the UK, are helping to preserve the world's most valuable habitats and address biodiversity loss.

Robbie Moore: It was great to see many families—particularly children—from Addingham, in my constituency, plant more than 600 trees last weekend, thus setting an example to us all. How do the Government plan to inspire the next generation of leaders, such as the children from my constituency, to ensure that we can continue to use our influence on the global platform to help reduce carbon emissions, improve biodiversity, and plant more trees?

Andrew Stephenson: I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to his constituents from Addingham, and pay tribute to him for representing them in the House so well. The Government will ensure that young people have a strong voice at COP26 in November, so that their views on the climate and nature are heard on the global stage. DFID is committed to involving young people in our work, promoting active and engaged citizenship through our policy and programmes.

James Wild: The people in North West Norfolk supported our manifesto commitments to tackle climate change and help countries receiving development aid to become more self-sufficient. What steps is my hon. Friend taking to ensure that the aid budget, through CDC, is invested in forestry projects in Africa and elsewhere, both to protect the environment and to help reduce poverty?

Andrew Stephenson: I am delighted to tell my hon. Friend that the Secretary of State and I visited CDC on Monday. CDC has a number of investments in sustainable forestry across Africa and is actively exploring opportunities to do more. For example, it is supporting Miro Forestry, a sustainable timber business operating in Sierra Leone and Ghana. CDC's investment is helping Miro to support the natural environment by replanting severely degraded land, thereby protecting the indigenous forest. To date, the investment has supported the planting of roughly 5.4 million trees.

Fay Jones: It is shameful that the Amazon rainforest is being destroyed to provide pasture for cattle grazing. This is devastating for that important global natural resource, and it is also undercutting British beef production. Does the Minister agree that efforts to prevent deforestation are essential for global biodiversity as well as for supporting British beef farmers such as those in my constituency?

Andrew Stephenson: The Department for International Development is supporting programmes on reforestation and promoting sustainable beef production. The UK's Partnerships for Forests programme works in South America to support sustainable businesses that grow crops and rear cattle without causing deforestation. This includes support for a responsible beef partnership, which works to eliminate purchases of beef from producers engaged in illegal deforestation.

Craig Whittaker: As a dual national, I accept that Australia is not a developing country, but the ongoing bush fires have seen forestry and bushland destroyed to the tune of almost 25 million acres, an area almost five times the size of Wales. We have also seen the destruction of more than 1 billion animals. What support has been offered to Australia to help to rebuild not only the bushland and forests but the biodiversity that has been destroyed?

Andrew Stephenson: Our hearts go out to everyone in Australia who has been affected by these devastating fires. The fires are a tragedy that remind us all of the catastrophe that climate change is inflicting on forests and biodiversity. The UK stands ready to provide our Australian friends with the support they need, including our full range of humanitarian capabilities if required.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): Just over a week ago, the Prime Minister made a showpiece promise to end all UK aid spending on coal. That is all well and good, but there has not been any such spending since 2012. This is more evidence that the Government are more interested in talking big on climate change globally than in taking action. It is time for the Government to get serious. Will the Minister commit today to stopping spending taxpayers' money on gas, oil and fracking, which are helping to destroy our planet and biodiversity, and instead commit to using aid to tackle the vast amounts of poverty and inequality across the globe?

Andrew Stephenson: I would encourage the hon. Gentleman to read the announcement in the Prime Minister's speech more carefully. The announcement includes not only our bilateral aid assistance but investment, export credit and trade promotion support. The Government have shown significant leadership in tackling climate change, not least through our announcement to double our international climate finance commitment to developing countries, and we will host COP26 later this year.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Minister aware that an all-party group has invited leaders of the indigenous communities of the Amazon to visit the House of Commons on 5 February? I invite all Members to meet those people and listen to their concerns about the deforestation of the Amazon.

Andrew Stephenson: The hon. Gentleman is right to suggest that we need to work with indigenous communities around the world. Many people in the developing world owe their livelihoods and incomes to local forests, and we therefore need to work with the communities in everything we do.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): Developing countries around the world are facing a loss of trees and animals at a catastrophic rate as the climate emergency worsens. When will the Secretary of State follow the bold leadership of the Scottish Government and the recommendations of the International Development Committee and explicitly adopt the concept of climate justice, in order to help climate spending and ensure that the most vulnerable receive the help that they need to protect their biodiversity?

Andrew Stephenson: The UK is a global leader. Not only are we the fastest remover of our own carbon emissions in the G7; we are also making ground-breaking commitments such as the Prime Minister's commitment at the UN General Assembly to double our international climate finance spending. I think that we have a proud record to tell, but we are going to work even harder to ensure that COP26 in Glasgow in November is a huge success.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): International agribusiness in Colombia regularly steals land from campesino and indigenous peoples to cut down trees and plant acre after acre of palm oil crops, which is unsustainable for the future and bad for the environment. What are the Government saying to the Colombian Government to bring the peace process back on track so that indigenous people can have their land back?

Andrew Stephenson: DFID supports the Tropical Forest Alliance 2020, a public-private initiative with 90 member organisations that is focused on realising private sector commitments to eliminate deforestation in the supply chains for palm oil, beef, soya and paper. This is one of our many initiatives to address the consequences of palm oil production.

Bilateral Trade: Developing Countries

6. **Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con):** What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for International Trade on increasing bilateral trade with developing countries. [900468]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Alok Sharma): Our Departments work together to ensure that development is at the heart of UK trade policy. This includes delivering the successful UK-Africa investment summit, where we announced the trade connect service. The service will help developing countries to make the most of preferential access to UK markets and support UK firms to strengthen their supply chains in developing countries.

Daniel Kawczynski: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. Increasing the number of women in the workforce is key to economic growth. What support is DFID giving to women entrepreneurs?

Alok Sharma: I commend my hon. Friend's support for entrepreneurship in his constituency and more widely. The UK is absolutely committed to increasing women's role in trade, recognising the importance of trade as a lever for equality. That is why we recently announced an extension to the Commonwealth SheTrades programme, which provides training and mentoring to female entrepreneurs and connects them to international markets and investment opportunities.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): In 2013, Australia merged its aid and trade departments, resulting in worse-performing aid programmes and a mass exodus of development experts and even leading to DFID downgrading the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to third-tier status for staff exchanges. Is that the future that the Secretary of State wants for

his own Department, or does he agree that a standalone Department remains the best way for the UK to deliver world-leading international development projects?

Alok Sharma: Machinery of government changes are a matter for the Prime Minister, but the UK is and will continue to be a superpower when it comes to international development. He will have seen in our manifesto the commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI.

Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the success of the UK-Africa investment Summit. What further steps are the Government taking to support British businesses, such as JCB in my constituency, to export more and generate local jobs?

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend did an enormous amount in her previous career to ensure more bilateral trade and investment. The summit was indeed a success, building partnerships with Governments and companies for the future, and that will lead to more trade and jobs in both regions.

Female Genital Mutilation

7. **Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op):** Whether his Department plans to allocate long-term funding to end female genital mutilation. [900469]

The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa (Dr Andrew Murrison): The hon. Lady is right to raise this matter. I am pleased to say that the UK leads the world in our support to the Africa-led movement to end FGM. In 2018, we announced a further £50 million in UK aid to tackle FGM over the next five years, including £15 million for our programme in Sudan, which is now in its second phase.

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to the Minister for that answer. He will of course be aware that the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation is next week. In that context, and given some of the discussions around the potential reorganisation of DFID, he will understand why some in the sector are worried about whether funding will be retained up to 2025. The relationships underpinning those programmes take time to embed, so will he please give us that guarantee?

Dr Murrison: Notwithstanding what may happen with the machinery of government, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State just said, I remind the hon. Lady that we are committed—indeed, we are legally obliged—to spend 0.7% of GNI. That is a firm commitment, and she should be in no doubt about it.

We, like her, look forward to the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation on 6 February. We wish it well and entirely agree with its theme of “unleashing youth power”. Following DFID's success in helping to achieve legal change in partner countries, we look forward to making another further important announcement about how we will work with international partners to strengthen laws, policies and systems to respond to FGM.

Palestine: UK Aid

9. **Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure that UK aid to the Palestinians facilitates peace-building with Israel. [900471]

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Dr Andrew Murrison): As my right hon. Friend knows, the UK is committed to making progress towards a negotiated two-state solution. Meanwhile, UK aid to Palestinians helps to meet immediate needs, deliver key services and promote economic development. It supports stability in the development of a capable and accountable Palestinian Authority who can act as an effective partner for peace with Israel.

Robert Halfon: UK taxpayers' aid pays the salaries of teachers in Palestinian Authority schools, yet at least 31 official PA schools are named after terrorists who killed innocent citizens. Does the Secretary of State share my concern that the children studying in those schools are being taught that it is honourable to commit violent acts against Israelis? Does he agree that, instead of prolonging the conflict by supporting such rhetoric, we must do more to press the Palestinians to stop glorifying terrorists and to use our aid as it is meant to be used?

Dr Murrison: My right hon. Friend is right to raise this matter. We are clear with the Palestinian Authority on how we expect UK aid to be spent. Last week, I had a further meeting with the Palestinian Authority Education Minister, Professor Awartani, following our meeting in Ramallah last year. He expressed his commitment to the EU's review of teaching materials, as well as to the PA's own review, which will be available before the start of the academic year.

Education means hope, and we need to be careful about removing hope from the OPTs, because hope is what is preventing people from falling into the arms of those with mischievous intent for the future of that part of the world.

Preventable Child Deaths

10. **Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): What steps his Department is taking to implement the findings of the UNICEF UK report on ending preventable child deaths. [900472]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Alok Sharma): I welcome the report and its recognition that my Department is a force for good that saves children's lives and makes a real difference. The report is in line with the Government's ambition to end preventable maternal, new-born and child deaths by 2030.

Wera Hobhouse: Without global leadership, we will not meet sustainable development target 3.2 and end preventable child deaths by 2030. Does the Secretary of State agree that we should place child health on a level footing with the Government's commitment to girls' education?

Alok Sharma: The hon. Lady cares deeply about this issue, which I completely understand. We made a manifesto commitment to tackle preventable deaths by 2030. I hope in the coming weeks to set out a detailed strategy on how we will do that.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): The UK Government have an outstanding record on contributing to the 50% fall in the number of children in developing countries who die before their fifth birthday but, even with that progress, UNICEF calculates that 52 million children will still die before the age of five by 2030. What more can we do to provide additional leadership to make sure we get rid of diseases like pneumonia, as well as the lack of access to basic vaccines, which will help to end this blight?

Alok Sharma: We support organisations such as the Global Fund and, as my hon. Friend knows, the UK will host the replenishment of GAVI later this year. He is right to highlight this important issue.

Hunger

11. **Mr Virendra Sharma** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): What progress his Department has made on achieving sustainable development goal 2 on tackling hunger. [900474]

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Dr Andrew Murrison): The UK is at the forefront of the fight against hunger, giving £461 million to humanitarian food assistance in 2018 through the World Food Programme. We will take a leadership position as a global influencer and convener, alongside Germany, at the SDG2 summit in Berlin in June and at other events leading up to the New York food systems summit and Japan's nutrition for growth summit.

Mr Sharma: Malnutrition is the No. 1 risk factor for TB, the world's deadliest infectious disease. A quarter of the 10 million new cases last year were caused by undernutrition, and treatment is less effective for those who are unable to access a good diet. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that fewer people fall ill with TB and to improve access to nutritional support for those who do fall ill?

Dr Murrison: The hon. Gentleman is right to link TB and malnutrition, and I hope he approves of the UK's contribution to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria last year. That was a huge effort on behalf of this country. I think he will also approve of the GAVI replenishment, which this country will be hosting in London in June.

Topical Questions

T1. [900477] **Andrew Jones** (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for International Development (Alok Sharma): In August, I announced an International Development Infrastructure Commission to advise me on mobilising additional private sector funds alongside public money to deliver on the sustainable development goals. The United Nations estimates that an additional \$2.5 trillion is required annually to meet those goals, and the commission has now made recommendations on how to turbocharge infrastructure investment in developing countries. At the recent UK-Africa investment

summit, I announced that the UK will work together with the Governments of Uganda, Egypt, Kenya, Ethiopia and Ghana—initially—to do just that.

Andrew Jones: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. I was pleased to see that COP26 will be held in Glasgow. Will he update the House on preparations for that conference?

Alok Sharma: A successful delivery of COP26 in November is a key priority for the Government, and cross-departmental work is being co-ordinated through the Cabinet Office. It is vital for current and future generations that all of us around the world step up to the challenge.

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State clarify what his Department's policy is on spending UK aid money on expanding fossil fuels overseas?

Alok Sharma: I think the answer was given earlier by the Minister of State, Department for International Development, my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson), in respect of the statement the Prime Minister made at the Africa investment summit.

Dan Carden: I am afraid that that is just not good enough. Last week's UK-Africa investment summit cost the Department more than £15 million of aid money, on a one-day event. I wonder whether the Secretary of State can say now whether any of that money was spent on business-class flights or five-star hotels, because the Department will not disclose the figures until autumn 2021. At the summit, almost £2 billion-worth of new energy deals were struck for fossil fuels. How on earth can he justify using taxpayers' funds to help fossil fuel companies when we are in the midst of a climate catastrophe?

Alok Sharma: If the hon. Gentleman had read the communiqué that came out of the summit, he would have seen not only the billions of pounds of investment, but the UK support going to developing countries. He always castigates private investment, but perhaps he ought to read what the UN Secretary-General wrote in November in the *Financial Times*, where he pointed out that the private sector is vital to advance development goals. Sometimes the hon. Gentleman needs to read and listen to the experts, rather than to people on his own Benches.

T2. [900479] **Cherilyn Mackrory** (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): . Will my right hon. Friend reassure companies in my constituency that specialise in renewables, such as Kensa Heat Pumps, how the African summit held last week will boost African countries' efforts to adopt cleaner forms of fuel?

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend raises a good question. The summit highlighted the UK's distinct offer to support clean growth, and our expertise in low-carbon sectors and green finance. For example, along with the President of Kenya, I attended the London stock exchange for the launch of the first green Simba bond, which the UK Government helped to develop.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): Will the Minister confirm that educating and employing women and girls will remain a key strategy for his Department?

Alok Sharma: Absolutely it will.

T3. [900480] **Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Will the Secretary of State update the House on what measures he is taking to empower the women's economy in many developing countries?

Alok Sharma: Women and girls are very much at the heart of our approach to economic development, and I am sure that all colleagues would agree that no society can truly flourish if half the population is held back. At the UK-Africa investment summit, I announced further support for our work and opportunities for women programme, which will help at least 100,000 additional women to achieve better paid and more secure work.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): The UK has a major responsibility for the plastic pollution we see, particularly in developing countries, so what work are the UK Government doing to stop the trade in and export of plastic pollution from the UK?

Alok Sharma: I set out earlier what we are doing in this particular area. There is a legitimate export market for plastic waste and secondary raw material, but we take firm action against those engaged in the illegal export of contaminated, low-quality and unrecyclable plastic waste.

T4. [900481] **Jack Lopresti** (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): I understand that, given the recent significant influx of Syrian refugees into the Kurdistan region of Iraq, there are issues with the allocation of British funding to the Kurdistan region. So will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to the region, which has accommodated more than 1 million refugees and displaced people since 2014, and will he sort out the funding?

The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa (Dr Andrew Murrison): I most certainly do join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the Kurdistan Regional Government and other Governments in the area, including those of Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, who are helping. I am not aware of any delays to the allocation to which my hon. Friend refers, but I am happy to look into the matter.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—
Engagements

Q1. [900485] **Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 29 January.

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Carol Monaghan: Monday was Holocaust Memorial Day, when we remember those who suffered under Nazi persecution. During that dark time, Britain stood out as a beacon of hope, and 10,000 Jewish children came here with the Kindertransport. When the Prime Minister's Government rejected Lord Dubs' amendment on unaccompanied child refugees, Britain's beacon dimmed. Will the Prime Minister now devolve powers over immigration to Holyrood, to allow Scotland to be that beacon of hope?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady does a disservice to this country's reputation and record, because not only have we taken 41,000 unaccompanied children since 2010, but the whole country can be very proud of everything that we continue to do to commemorate the holocaust and what took place then.

Q3. [900487] **Bill Wiggin** (North Herefordshire) (Con): I know that my right hon. Friend would never put our country at risk, and I also know that he was born in America, so what plans does he have to convince the US Secretary of State that the Huawei deal is safe not only for our constituents but for our allies?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises a most important point that I know is of great concern to Members from all parties. I assure the House and, indeed, the country that it is absolutely vital that people in this country have access to the best technology available, but that we also do absolutely nothing to imperil our relationship with the United States, do anything to compromise our critical national security infrastructure, or do anything to imperil our extremely valuable co-operation with Five Eyes security partners.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I am sure that the whole House will want to send our thoughts to the family and friends of the Royal Marines soldier who sadly died in a training incident earlier this week.

If you will forgive me, Mr Speaker, may we take just a minute to pay tribute to Nicholas Parsons, who passed away this week? We thank him for his work in broadcasting.

This Friday, the UK will be leaving the European Union. The actions that we take over the months and years ahead will shape our future role in the international community for generations to come. Britain's role in the world will face one of its most important tests later this year when COP26 meets in Glasgow to discuss the need for drastic action to tackle the climate emergency. Given the scale of the crisis, does the Prime Minister think that we as a country should be financing billions of pounds-worth of oil and gas projects all around the world?

The Prime Minister: Let me first say, in memory of Nicholas Parsons, that we should all avoid hesitation, deviation or repetition in this House.

I do think it important that the UK continues to campaign against hydrocarbon emissions of all kinds, as we do. The right hon. Gentleman will have noticed that we have just decided to ban support for all extraction of coal around the world. That is a massive step forward by this country.

Jeremy Corbyn: The report from the BBC and Unerthed investigation has revealed that a Government agency has helped to finance oil and gas projects that will emit 69 million tonnes of carbon a year—nearly a sixth of the total emissions from this country alone. The effects of climate change have been felt in this country, with flooding in Yorkshire and the midlands, and of course we have seen the wildfires in Australia. Despite pledging to reach net zero emissions by 2050, the Government are currently on track to meet that target only by 2099. Can we afford to wait another 79 years before we reach net zero in this country?

The Prime Minister: This Government have doubled spending on tackling climate change internationally to £11.6 billion. I am not surprised by what the right hon. Gentleman has said because he is so pessimistic. We should not forget that this country has reduced CO₂ emissions already by 42% on 1990 levels, while the economy, under this Conservative Government, has grown by 73%. That is our record; we can do both.

Jeremy Corbyn: The right hon. Gentleman voted against every proposal to take action on climate change until he became Prime Minister. I hope, for the sake of our future, that he changes his mind before COP26 meets in Glasgow.

Speaking of failing to take a global lead on climate change, the US Secretary of State is visiting later today. President Trump's latest middle east peace plan is not a peace plan. It will annexe Palestinian territory, lock in illegal Israeli colonisation, transfer Palestinian citizens of Israel, and deny Palestinian people their fundamental rights. When the Government meet the US Secretary of State later today, will they make it clear that they will stand for a genuine, internationally backed peace plan rather than this stuff proposed by Trump yesterday?

The Prime Minister: Let us be clear that this is a problem that has bedevilled the world, and the middle east in particular, for decades. No peace plan is perfect, but this has the merit of a two-state solution—it is a two-state solution. It would ensure that Jerusalem is both the capital of Israel and of the Palestinian people. Rather than being so characteristically negative, I urge the right hon. Gentleman to reach out to his friends and my friends—our friends—in the Palestinian Authority, and to Mahmoud Abbas, for whom I have the highest respect, and, for once, to engage with this initiative and to get talking rather than to leave a political vacuum.

Jeremy Corbyn: I have the greatest respect for President Abbas and those in the Palestinian Authority; I have met them many times—[*Interruption.*] This is actually a very serious issue. The Prime Minister should acknowledge that President Trump's plan will not bring any move towards peace and that it has no support from any Palestinian anywhere in the world. Perhaps this would be a good opportunity for the British Government to say frankly and candidly to the US that, on this, it is wrong. There needs to be a two-state solution with international support.

The kind of test for this country for the future has to be how we work to end conflict abroad. The Saudi Arabian-led intervention in Yemen has led to the needless deaths of innocent men, women and children, yet this

Government have broken the ban on Saudi arms sales three times, while Donald Trump has vetoed a ban on arms exports three times. Will the Prime Minister confirm that he will respect his own ban and will he, when he meets the US later today, ask it to stop selling arms to Saudi Arabia while it continues the bombardment of the people of Yemen?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the Saudi-led operation in Yemen is supported by the UN—a UN mandate to restore the Government of Yemen—and that is absolutely vital. He is completely correct that the crisis in Yemen continues, and that it is a tragedy for the people of Yemen, but what he should be doing is supporting the activity of the British UN negotiator, Martin Griffiths, who is doing a fantastic job in trying to bring the sides together and to get a peaceful solution led by Yemenis.

Jeremy Corbyn: Of course, attempts are being made to bring about a peace process, but it is not helped when one country supplies arms to Saudi Arabia, which has led to the deaths of 100,000 people in Yemen last year alone. According to Human Rights Watch, Saudi authorities have stepped up their arbitrary arrests, trials and convictions and the killing of peaceful dissidents and activists, including a large-scale crackdown on the women's rights movement. When the Prime Minister heads to Riyadh later this year for the G20, will he make it clear that any future trade arrangement with Saudi Arabia will be dependent on an improvement of its human rights laws and its human rights record, particularly in respect of women in that country?

The Prime Minister: It will not have escaped the House's attention that the right hon. Gentleman is a supporter and defender of the Iranian regime in Tehran, which has grossly exacerbated the tensions in Yemen by sending missiles to attack the civilian population of Saudi Arabia. Of course we raise the matter of human rights in Saudi Arabia. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised the rights of women in Saudi Arabia only the other day. We will continue to do that, and we will do that ever more vigorously and ever more energetically as we pursue our policy of a global Britain doing free trade deals around the world, which will give us the leverage to make exactly these points.

Jeremy Corbyn: I condemn human rights abuses in every country in the world, including Iran, Russia and anywhere else where such abuses are committed. My question was: what is being done to ensure that our future trade deals are dependent on good human rights in the countries that we deal with? Nine women are in Saudi prisons at the present time, merely for standing up for equal rights for women. Four of them have received electric shock treatment during interrogation. Is that the kind of human rights we tolerate? I sincerely hope not.

Britain is at a crossroads. We are leaving the EU, and our place in the world is going to change. The question is what direction it will take. The signs are that this Government are prepared to sacrifice our country's interests and values for short-term political advantage and a sell-out trade deal with Donald Trump. As Foreign Secretary the Prime Minister embarrassed this country, and as Prime Minister he shows every sign of being

prepared sell it off. When will he accept that the only chance of a truly internationalist Britain is to work with our global partners to tackle the climate catastrophe, expand trade, fight human rights abuses and promote peace?

The Prime Minister: The difference between this Government and the way we treat international affairs, and the Labour party under its present leadership, can be summarised as follows: the right hon. Gentleman, as leader of the Labour party, has consistently stood up not just for Tehran, but for Vladimir Putin when he poisoned innocent people on the streets of this country; he has said that he would scrap the armed services of the United Kingdom, end our nuclear deterrent and abolish NATO, which has been the bulwark of our security for the past 70 years. This Government are leading the world in tackling abuses, sticking up for human rights, championing the struggle against climate change, and leading the fight for every single girl in the world to have access to 12 years of quality education. That is what global Britain is delivering under this Government. The right hon. Gentleman would isolate this country and deprive us of our most crucial allies. We are going to take this country forward and outward into the world, and—in case I forgot to mention it before—we are going to deliver on our promises and take us out of the European Union this Friday, despite everything that he and all the Opposition parties tried to do.

Q7. [900491] Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con): With our Prime Minister's vision, this Conservative Government have an incredible opportunity to deliver change by driving forward the levelling up of parts of the country that have lagged behind London. Will the Prime Minister confirm that beautiful Hastings and Rye will not be overlooked in the process of levelling up, and that the necessary investment will be made in our transport infrastructure, education and health to unleash our bags of talent and potential?

The Prime Minister: I can confirm that the infrastructure revolution will penetrate all the way to Hastings and Rye, and across the whole country. There will be an additional £100 million for the redevelopment of the Conquest Hospital and Eastbourne District General Hospital, which I know will be of benefit to my hon. Friend's constituents.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Scotland is being dragged out of the European Union against our will. We hope that our European friends will leave a light on for Scotland.

During the EU referendum, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said that when it came to immigration, it would be for the people of Scotland to decide. On Monday, the Scottish Government published their plans for a Scottish visa, doing just what the right hon. Member promised Scotland should be able to do. Before the ink was even dry, those proposals were rejected without consideration. Given that the Prime Minister would never reject a proposal before reading it, can he tell the House on what points he disagrees with model 3? If it helps the Prime Minister, that model was outlined on page 20 of the proposal.

The Prime Minister: I have every sympathy with the industries and businesses of Scotland that need to allow workers to come freely for the seasonal agricultural workers scheme; we have doubled that number, and that is very important. I thank the lobbying representations that I have received from Conservative colleagues in Scotland on that point. But the idea of having a Scottish-only visa, with a border at Berwick, a wall and inspection posts is absolutely fanciful and deranged. Whatever may be on page 20 of the right hon. Member's document, I doubt that he explains who would pay for it.

Ian Blackford: Nobody is suggesting such a thing, and that confirms that the Prime Minister does not have a clue.

Unlike the Prime Minister, experts have backed the Scottish Government's proposals. The Scottish Trades Union Congress supports them. The Federation of Small Businesses supports them. The Scottish Council for Development and Industry supports them. Even the Migration Advisory Committee report commissioned by his Government has highlighted additional migration routes as a means of increasing population growth. The Scottish Government's proposals will boost Scotland's population, grow our economy, and protect public services. The UK Government's policies threaten to plunge our working-age population into decline. We were told we would have the most powerful devolved Parliament in the world. We were told we would be an equal partner in the family of nations. Will the Prime Minister now read the Scottish Government's proposal, listen to the evidence, and deliver a tailored migration policy for Scotland?

The Prime Minister: We will have exactly such a thing. We will have a points-based system that will deliver the immigration that this whole country needs. The way to boost the population of Scotland is not to have a Scottish Government who tax the population to oblivion and who fail to deliver results in their schools. It may interest you to know, Mr Speaker, that the SNP has not had a debate in its Parliament on education for two years—and what is it debating today? Whether or not to fly the EU flag. It should get on with the day job.

Q13. [900497] **Mrs Andrea Jenkyns** (Morley and Outwood) (Con): Prime Minister, up in Yorkshire, in your Conservative Brexit heartlands, we are celebrating our leaving the EU on Friday with a big Brexit bash. I wish to congratulate the Prime Minister on achieving our leaving the EU when so many deemed it impossible. Does he agree that this is an opportunity for a new chapter in our great country when we will finally control our laws, our borders and our money, and become a truly global trading nation?

The Prime Minister: I do join my hon. Friend in her celebrations. I am sorry I cannot be there personally but I wish everybody in Morley and Outwood a very enjoyable big Brexit bash.

Q2. [900486] **Sarah Champion** (Rotherham) (Lab): Sexual exploitation does not end when you turn 18. Indeed, it is the main driver of modern slavery and trafficking of women in this country. So will the Prime Minister join other countries around the world by bringing in legislation to end demand, making it illegal to buy sexual consent?

The Prime Minister: I am certainly happy to look at the proposals if the hon. Lady wishes to bring them forward to the House.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Does the Prime Minister agree that we need to increase capacity on our railways in and between the north, the midlands, the south and Scotland, and that unless we want decades of disruption, the only way to do this is through Midlands Engine Rail, Northern Powerhouse Rail, and HS2?

The Prime Minister: I can tell my hon. Friend that we are not only building Northern Powerhouse Rail and investing in the midlands rail hub but, as he knows, we are looking into whether and how to proceed with HS2, and the House can expect an announcement very shortly.

Q4. [900488] **Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): This Prime Minister has shown no respect for Scotland. Will he listen to the Scottish food and drink sector, which currently employs 40,000 EU nationals? We have 46,000 roles needing to be filled by 2030. The figures are clear: immigration is an urgent priority for Scotland. So when will this Prime Minister accept that Scotland must have the power to tailor its own immigration policy and ensure that we have the powers to do so?

The Prime Minister: I have the utmost respect for the people of Scotland. I have less respect for the SNP Government of Scotland, who are currently, because of their failures, producing less growth than any other part of the UK.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con): May I start by congratulating the Prime Minister on ensuring that this is the final Prime Minister's questions of our time as a member of the European Union? I know that he shares my concern about the loss of biodiversity around the world. I have seen at first hand how it is possible to turn a palm oil plantation back into a fast-recovering rainforest full of wildlife. While we are already doing good work on restoring environment around the world, will he ensure that we step up our work through the Department for International Development to restore biodiversity, and in doing so, help to tackle climate change?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend raises an exceptionally important point. That is why it is vital that we have a direct link between the Chinese COP summit on biodiversity and our COP26 summit on climate change.

Q5. [900489] **Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The Prime Minister talks of avoiding hesitation, repetition and deviation, but does he agree that we should also avoid hypocrisy? We will not be taken seriously on climate leadership as long as we are ploughing taxpayers' money into projects overseas that are emitting huge amounts of carbon. It is not just the export finance. It is also the fact that at the UK-Africa investment summit last week, it was announced that £2 billion will be ploughed into more oil and gas. Will he join me and the Environmental Audit Committee in agreeing that, from the end of 2021, there should be no UK money going into fossil fuels overseas—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: What I can tell the hon. Lady is that we have doubled spending on tackling climate change, to £11.6 billion. Not another penny will be going into digging out coal, and we will do everything we can to help the rest of the world achieve the incredible record of the UK Government in reducing CO₂ emissions. That is our ambition.

Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con): This Sunday is World Wetlands Day, and I have the superb WWT Slimbridge headquarters in my constituency. Will the Prime Minister tell us what the environment Bill will do for wetlands and wildlife, and will he visit our famous flamboyance of flamingos?

The Prime Minister: I look forward to seeing my hon. Friend's famous flamboyant flamingos at the earliest opportunity. I can tell her that our environment plan places biodiversity frameworks on a statutory footing—whether or not that includes flamingos, I do not know.

Q6. [900490] **Karl Turner** (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): P&O Ferries in Hull are finding Filipino seafarers to work for far below the national minimum wage. They are expected to work 12-hour shifts seven days a week for six months at a time. The Prime Minister will remember that the Herald of Free Enterprise disaster, which claimed the lives of 193 passengers and crew, was caused by seafarer fatigue. Will he agree to meet a cross-party group of MPs to discuss that issue, to try to put it to bed once and for all and to protect British seafarer jobs?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise that serious issue. I have been told that the replacement crew's working pattern meets the requirements of international maritime conventions, but plainly there are concerns for all the reasons that he mentions. The shortest answer I can give him is that I know my right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary will be only too happy to meet him and others who are concerned.

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): This week, the much anticipated Chapelford Medical Centre opened in my constituency, improving GP access for residents. Will the Prime Minister confirm that this Government's intention is to recruit, train and deploy more doctors, so that we can increase the number of appointments for people in Warrington and across the UK?

The Prime Minister: Yes; I can confirm that we will not only deliver 6,000 more GPs but, as my hon. Friend may recall, we have also pledged to deliver 40 new hospitals and 50,000 more nurses. This is the party of delivery, decision and democracy, and we get on with the job.

Q8. [900492] **Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): The Prime Minister will be aware that we have been pressing for some time for a pension for innocent victims of violence in Northern Ireland. Can he update the House on the progress made thus far and give an absolute assurance that those in receipt of such a pension are innocent victims and will not include perpetrators who were injured by their own actions?

The Prime Minister: We obviously have every sympathy for innocent victims of violence in Northern Ireland. We have been consistently clear about the principle that

people must have sustained injuries through no fault of their own, and that principle will be sustained throughout the negotiation.

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): The Prime Minister will know that the Future Fit programme is a £312 million investment in upgrading and modernising hospital services in Shropshire. Telford Council, a medically illiterate organisation, has managed to prevent these changes over the last six years, undermining the 300 local doctors and surgeons who believe it is essential for patient safety. Will the Prime Minister intervene to use his good offices to help us break this deadlock, otherwise patient safety will be put at risk at the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that issue, and I can tell him that we are indeed getting on with that job. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health says that he will personally intervene to ensure that that is done.

Q9. [900493] **Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): While the MAC report proposes a reduction in salary thresholds from £30,000 to £25,600, it does not go far enough, given that around half of Scottish employees earn less than the proposed threshold, and that rises to almost 90% in the vital care sector. Does the Prime Minister agree that protecting Scotland's care sector with a tailored migration system is more important than his ideological obsession of cutting immigration?

The Prime Minister: I think the House should be clear that we do not wish in any way to deprive any part of the UK of the labour that it needs, and we have special provisions to ensure that Scotland is properly catered for. As I say, we have doubled the seasonal agricultural workers scheme. But we will respond in due course to the stipulations of the Migration Advisory Committee.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): I know my right hon. Friend is very fond of the north-east of Scotland, having visited twice in the last year, so will he commit here today to delivering the long-awaited oil and gas sector deal so that we can work with that industry as it transitions to net zero and make Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire not just the oil and gas capital of Europe, but the energy capital of the world?

The Prime Minister: Yes. Not only that, but we can do it in such a way as to continue this country's reduction in hydrocarbon emissions.

Q10. [900494] **Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): The shortage of GPs has reached crisis point. In his answer to the hon. Member for Warrington South (Andy Carter), the Prime Minister did nothing to allay the fears and concerns of patients who are waiting weeks to see a GP now. People in training is all very well, but what is he going to do now to make sure patients can access GPs?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member is right to raise the point, but the number of GPs is already going up, and as I have just told the House, we are recruiting 6,000 more.

Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con): Yesterday's announcement of the Nexus contract being placed with the Swiss company Stadler instead of with Hitachi Rail, which is based in my Sedgefield constituency, is in my opinion inappropriate and it takes no account of the socioeconomic benefit to us of UK-based business. I hope to see a positive decision on HS2 with its potential to reconnect the north with London, and would ask the Prime Minister to ensure that UK-based businesses such as Hitachi see their investment in the UK properly recognised in the procurement process.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has personally raised the issue with me before, and I am sure that his constituents will congratulate him on sticking up for their interests in the way that he does. I can tell him that there will be a decision on HS2 very shortly, if he can just contain his impatience a little bit longer.

11. [900495] **Owen Thompson** (Midlothian) (SNP): Yesterday, the EU published the Erasmus+ programme annual report. It showed that Edinburgh University is the top UK institution for sending students on the scheme. The number of incoming higher education EU staff stood at 4,970 across the UK. The educational benefits are clearly endless. Will the Prime Minister now prioritise talks on the UK's continued participation, so we do not face any delay in joining the next cycle from 2021?

The Prime Minister: Nothing in withdrawal from the EU stops UK students being able to pursue their hopes, their dreams around the whole of the European Union, and we will ensure that that is the case.

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): This week sees the start of the second phase of the Grenfell inquiry. Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that our thoughts are with those affected, and that what we seek from the inquiry is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth as to what happened?

The Prime Minister: Yes. I think most people would agree that Sir Martin Moore-Bick was pretty unflinching in the first section of his report, and I have no doubt that he will be equally unsparing in the next.

Q12. [900496] **Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Prime Minister, is the BBC a mortal enemy of the Conservative party, or a cherished British institution that will be funded by the licence fee?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly say that it is a cherished British institution, and not a mortal enemy of the Conservative party.

Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con): Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust is receiving £500 million thanks to this Conservative Government. Does the Prime Minister agree that that is excellent news for Carshalton and Wallington patients, and will he encourage my constituents to get involved with the consultation on where the new hospital should go?

The Prime Minister: I congratulate my hon. Friend on speaking up for Carshalton and Wallington, and on drawing attention to investment in the NHS. That investment is increasing under this Government, and we have now legislated for it, not just for this year, not just for next year, but for every year of this Parliament.

Q14. [900498] **Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): Last week I visited Grange Academy, a special school in Kempston. Its recent bid to the condition improvement fund, in order to make desperately needed school improvements, was turned down by the Government. Will the Prime Minister urgently review the funding formula for capital and revenue, so that schools for children with special educational needs and disability are not disadvantaged simply because they have fewer pupils?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We are increasing funding for SEND schools by £780 million and ensuring that there are more of them, but I would be happy to look at the particular case he raises.

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): Half of the adult population in Cornwall, and 40% of children, have not seen an NHS dentist in the past year. Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who is a friend of Penzance and Cornwall, meet me to see how we can resolve that inequality?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to meet my hon. Friend any time.

Q15. [900499] **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Is the Prime Minister aware that the international strand of Glasgow's fantastic Celtic Connections festival has been scaled back by almost 20% this year, because of what the director, Donald Shaw, described as the "hassle and stress" of sourcing visas for overseas artists? What is the Prime Minister's message to artists who want to come here and share their talents, but who are put off by an over-complicated and extortionate application process that signals they are not welcome?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, this Government have already instituted new measures to ensure that people of talent, and who can contribute to this economy, can come without let or hindrance. I am surprised that the director of the festival he refers to is encountering any difficulties, but if he really has a problem, may I direct him to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary?

Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): Given the Prime Minister's proven track record in overcoming prevarication, procrastination, dither and delay, will he repeat that success, do as other hon. Friends have asked, and get High Speed 2 done, in order to secure jobs across the country, including in Crewe and Nantwich?

The Prime Minister: I reassure hon. Friends and Members across the Chamber, of whatever persuasion they may be regarding HS2, that there will be an announcement and decision very shortly.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I hope the Prime Minister has the humility to recognise that not everybody will be celebrating on Friday night.

We have been promised that leaving the EU will bring power closer to the people and give us a greater say in our communities, but instead many people feel that they have so far been ignored and disempowered. Will he demonstrate his willingness to listen to all voices by meeting Plaid Cymru leader, Adam Price, and me, to discuss how Wales will win the tools to forge a better future?

The Prime Minister: I certainly share the right hon. Lady's general sentiment that it is time for the whole country to come together. I think from memory that Wales voted to leave the EU, and it is time that we regarded this as a beginning. This is curtain-up on a fantastic future for our country, and I respectfully suggest to the right hon. Lady, and others, that that is the frame of mind in which they should approach it.

Speaker's Statement

12.33 pm

Mr Speaker: As Speaker of the House I am committed to transparency, but I am mindful that frank advice must be protected confidentially. To balance those principles, I have written to the Clerk of the House to establish a new procedure, modelled on the power of accounting officers to seek ministerial direction. The procedure will apply if I take a decision as Speaker that the Clerk of the House considers to comprise a substantial breach of the Standing Orders, or a departure from long-established conventions, without appropriate authorisation by the House itself. In such a case, the Clerk of the House will be empowered to place a statement of his views in the Library, and I will always make the House aware that that has been done. I am placing a copy of my letter to the Clerk of the House in the Library.

Points of Order

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This week we mark Holocaust Memorial Day, a powerful reminder of where hatred and division can lead, but despite all the warnings, antisemitism is on the rise. As co-chairs of the all-party group against antisemitism, we have worked hard to ensure that all MPs sign up to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism, and 640 Members have done so. Mr Speaker, is there any way to convey the message that this sends a vital signal that this House will take antisemitism seriously; and that we congratulate the Antisemitism Policy Trust on this initiative, encourage all MPs who have not done so to sign, and reaffirm that each solemn pledge must now convert those words into real action and change?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Lady has carried out her desire. The message has certainly gone out. She realises that that is not a point of order, but I am so pleased it has, quite rightly, been raised.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am sure all Members of this House will share my sorrow in noting the recent death of Lord MacLennan of Rogart—or Bob, as all of us who knew him called him. In due course, I am sure others will refer to his career and to his role in forming the Social Democratic party and my own party. However, as I represent his constituency today, I want to put on record his fantastic 35 years of service to his constituents, regardless of their politics or their rank. For that reason, he was very, very dearly loved the length and breadth of his vast constituency. I am sure all Members will join me in sending our condolences to his widow Helen and his family. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”]

Mr Speaker: Absolutely. Quite rightly, the hon. Gentleman raises a very important matter: the death of a former Member who had the great confidence of all sides of the House.

Opposition Day

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

Policing and Crime

Mr Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

12.37 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes that since 2010 police officer numbers have been reduced by almost 21,000; further notes that some violent crime, including knife crime, has risen to record levels; notes that youth services, including early intervention, have been decimated by a decade of austerity; notes that prosecution rates have fallen sharply; notes that on current plans many police forces will still be left with fewer officers than in 2010; and therefore calls on the Government to recruit 2,000 more frontline police officers than they plan and re-establish neighbourhood policing.

There is no more emotive issue than crime and punishment. We have asked for this debate today because these issues matter so much to all our constituents, and because the first duty of every Government is to defend the safety and security of their citizens. Of course, that does not mean there will be no crime. What it means is that every Government should use their best endeavours to ensure that safety and security. That does not mean dog-whistle rhetoric on law and order; it means genuinely making people safer. Ministers like to trumpet their enthusiasm for stop-and-search. Labour supports evidence-based stop-and-search, but random stop-and-search can poison police-community relations, rather than necessarily making anybody safer.

Instead of fulfilling their duty, the Government have tried to ensure safety and security on the cheap. Labour Members have repeatedly warned that cuts have consequences.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): On that point, does my right hon. Friend agree that the public value safer neighbourhood policing above almost everything else? They like to see the police out and about, building good community relations. Does she share my regret that a five-ward cluster in my constituency, which had 30 police on duty a few years back, recently had as few as seven? No wonder the public no longer feel that the police are present on our streets.

Ms Abbott: I am familiar with my hon. Friend's part of London and I share her regret that the amount of visible policing on the ground has lessened because of Government cuts.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that violent crime, particularly knife crime, is now at a record high—in my constituency we have recently had two fatalities—and that this is a direct result of the huge cuts, including more than £1 billion to our youth centres and more than £1 billion to our police force? It is about time that the Government stop their austerity, which is decimating our communities.

Ms Abbott: I agree with my hon. Friend. The figures for so many categories of crime, including knife crime, show how right we were to warn of the consequences of austerity in relation to law and order and policing.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Abbott: I have to make some progress.

The Government decided in the last election that their policing pledge was crucial. Their manifesto uses the word “police” a couple of dozen times—not as many times as “Brexit”, but enough to suggest that this was a major plank of their platform. We will see whether they can actually get Brexit done before the end of the year, but there must be doubt about whether they will be able to get the central pledge to recruit 20,000 extra police done, given the poor start on police funding. In the light of their overall policies, I am even less convinced that we will see a fall in serious violent crime.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Ben Bradley: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Abbott: I have to make some progress.

During the debate, we will undoubtedly hear Government Members boast about how many police officers they are going to recruit. In their recent announcement about police funding, Home Office Ministers claimed that this is the biggest funding settlement for a decade. They would know, because they have been cutting police funding for a decade—the Conservatives have been responsible for funding over the past decade. The truth is that the Tory party and Tory Ministers damaged our police when they took an axe to the numbers. It is widely known that they cut more than 20,000 police officers, so to boast that they are putting the numbers up now when they cut them in the first place will not sit well with our constituents.

Along with the cuts to police numbers—this is important, so I ask the House to listen—the Government also cut thousands of police community support officers and police civilian support staff, and the effect was devastating. Having fewer PCSOs is a terrible thing because communities rely on them to maintain community links and help with low-level policing.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a stark contrast with the policy of the Welsh Labour Government in the Senedd, who have kept and funded PCSOs in Wales? That has made a huge difference in my community, despite the cuts we have seen. Our Welsh Labour police commissioners in Gwent and South Wales have made such a difference with an evidence-based policing policy.

Ms Abbott: I thank my hon. Friend for reminding me of the progress that the Labour Government in Wales has made on this issue.

Fewer support staff means that police are doing more of their clerical and admin work. That is not pen pushing, but vital work—for example, preparing a case for court. I am not aware of any plans by this Government to restore the numbers of either PCSOs or admin staff, but I am very happy to give way to the Minister if he

[Ms Abbott]

wishes to tell me about that. Police officers will still be burdened with non-police and non-crime-fighting work. This Government have also created a huge shortfall in funding for the police pension fund. The police deserve decent pensions—as do all public sector workers, who have seen their pensions frozen under this Government.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way on that point?

Ms Abbott: I have to make some progress. The Government need to provide funding for police recruitment and police pensions; otherwise, the funds for one will come out of the other.

I remind Government Members that what they actually inherited in 2010 was police officer strength at a record high and a long-term downward trend in total crime, which began in the early 1990s and continued through Labour's years in office. Labour in office was tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime, but this Government squandered that legacy. In its most recent publication on crime, the Office for National Statistics states:

“Following a long-term reduction, levels of crime have remained broadly stable in recent years”.

Under the Tories, the downward trend in crime halted and total crime has stopped falling. In the past 12 months, well over 10 million crimes were committed. There was a 7% rise in offences involving knives—all of us in this House know the fear and concern in our communities about knife crime. That level of knife crime is 46% higher than when comparable recording began. This Government have presided over the highest level of knife crime on record. Of course, all of that increase occurred under Tory or Tory-led Governments. [Interruption.] As for Mayors, their resources come from Government.

The crime survey of England and Wales states:

“Over the past five years there has been a rise in the prevalence of sexual assault...with the latest estimate returning to levels similar to those over a decade ago.”

I hope the Minister takes that point seriously. Sexual assault is a concern for all people and all communities. Ministers should be ashamed that sexual assault is returning to levels seen over a decade ago. Each of those stats, whether for knife crime, violent crime or sexual assault, is terrible, and the House should pause and think of the individual victims behind those statistics.

Taken together, those stats are a damning indictment of this Government's failures, but their record is even worse when it comes to actually apprehending criminals. Of course, how could it be otherwise when they have decimated the police and trashed the funding of our criminal justice system? The Home Office's own data shows that just one in 14—I repeat: one in 14—crimes leads to charge or summons. While crime has risen, the charge rate for crime has fallen. The charge rate for rape is just 1.4%. I invite all Members to stop and think how appalling that statistic is. It is shameful. Government Members may claim that some of this is because police are recording crime better. It is true that recording is improving, but the police are not just there to record and report crime; they are there to prevent it, detect it and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Ms Abbott: I have to make progress.

The response of the Government, which no doubt we shall hear from Ministers today, is to talk tough on crime—to talk about draconian measures—and to criminalise law-abiding citizens who are upholding their rights. This Government threaten to criminalise trade unionists who are engaged in legitimate strike action, and they have been forced to admit an “error” in listing campaign organisations such as CND and Greenpeace as extremist. Their discredited Prevent programme has been politicised because this Government and these Ministers confuse extremism and disagreement with them.

Research funded by the Home Office says that the Home Secretary's approach to young people in danger of radicalisation is “madness”—the opposite of what is required to prevent radicalisation. I have to tell Government Members that they will not tackle crime by criminalising lawful activity by campaigners such as CND, they will not tackle crime by imposing ever longer sentences whereby inexperienced, first-time offenders become hard cases or drug addicts in prison, and they will not tackle crime by cutting the police so much that they cannot catch the criminals in the first place.

As everyone knows—[Interruption.] The behaviour of Government Members suggests a contempt for the issues I am talking about, whether violent crime or rape. Labour's promise in the 2017 election and its pledge to increase policing after years of Government cuts resonated with the public. I take the current Government's pledge as something of a tribute to our work and the Leader of the Opposition's leadership of the Labour party. We always understood, however, that increased policing would not be enough. As many senior police officers have told me, we cannot arrest our way out of a crime problem. We have to take an integrated approach—more and better policing, treating crime as a public health issue, drawing in all the public services and funding them properly. The Government have paid lip service to the idea of a public health approach, but many of the services that have to come together to make that work—schools, youth services, housing—are funded by local authorities, and the Government have no intention of funding those properly.

Emma Hardy: I am really pleased that my right hon. Friend is drawing attention to the role that local government can play. I hope she will join me in recognising the work that Labour police and crime commissioner Keith Hunter and Hull City Council are doing to tackle the problems of city centre crime by creating a crime hub and working with city centre businesses. This is due to the huge increase in crime we have seen at the same time as police officer numbers have been cut.

Ms Abbott: I thank my hon. Friend for that important intervention.

The Government have said they will establish violence reduction units, which is another Labour policy, but in their repeated announcements of the same money they have demonstrated that they are not committed to

long-term funding for these units. We will hold them to account on this and on all their pledges—to recruit 20,000 additional police officers, to tackle violent crime, to make our streets safer.

Gary Sambrook (Birmingham, Northfield) (Con): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Abbott: I am coming to a close.

Crime, particularly violent crime, is a tragedy for the victims of crime but it is also traumatic for the mothers and families of the perpetrators of crime. *[Interruption.]* If Government Members, like me, had had to visit the families of young people who have been the victims of crime, they would not be making a joke of this. The Opposition, knowing how seriously our constituents take this issue, are pledged to hold the Government to account on all their pledges. They must live up to what they have promised. The public deserve no less.

12.53 pm

The Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service (Kit Malthouse): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from “House” to the end of the Question and add:

“welcomes the Government’s commitment to the people’s priorities to drive down crime in all its forms including serious and violent crime; further welcomes the Government’s commitment to recruit 20,000 additional police officers and increase police funding to its highest level in over a decade, including over £100m to tackle serious violence; and welcomes the Government’s intention to bring forward the necessary legislation which will provide police officers with the powers and tools they need to bring criminals to justice and give victims a greater voice.”

For me, fighting crime has never been a theoretical or statistical issue, as it is for many. Happily, the Office for National Statistics tells us that the likelihood of becoming a victim of crime has fallen significantly in the long term. In 1995, around four in 10 adults were estimated to have been a victim of crime, not including fraud or computer misuse. Last year, the comparable figure was just two in 10.

As you may recall, Mr Speaker, I was Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime in London between 2008 and 2012, at a time when we were wrestling with a terrible rise in serious violence across the capital. I can still remember the devastation on the face of the father of Amro Elbadawi, the 14-year-old who was stabbed to death in Queen’s Park in March 2008. I was campaigning for a London Assembly seat at the time, and when I met them Amro’s family brought home the devastation, destruction and terror that knife crime had brought to London. The then Mayor, now the Prime Minister, and I made it a personal mission to turn that awful tide. In our first year, 29 young people were killed. By the time I left policing, it had fallen to eight—eight too many, but on the previous trend it could easily have been 50.

It is worth remembering that all those terrible events took place when police officer numbers were at a high and the then Labour Government were spending borrowed money like water. I learned then what every sensible person knows: quantity is no substitute for quality in crime fighting. Successful crime fighting requires a sustained and committed focus by highly motivated leaders in policing and politics. That is what a Conservative Mayor brought to City Hall and what this new Conservative Government will redouble and bring to the United Kingdom.

Matt Western: I thank the Minister for giving way; he is being very generous. On the point about knife crime—and, related to that, drugs—he and the Mayor may have been successful in London, but the problem has now been exported to the towns around our cities through county drug lines. We are seeing that in towns such as Warwick and Leamington, where there was a death just two weeks ago in a multiple stabbing. Does he agree that we will tackle this only through intelligence on the street, including from police community support officers and community workers?

Kit Malthouse: The hon. Member is quite right to raise county lines as an issue, and I will say more about that later in my speech. I, too, suffer from the county lines phenomenon in my constituency, but there is no silver bullet to this problem. It requires a 360-degree assault upon these gangs, but I will say more about that in a moment.

Stephen Doughty: The Minister talks about a 360-degree approach. Does he therefore share my deep concern that when I discovered, along with BBC Wales, videos glamorising knife violence involving convicted criminals operating in my own constituency, YouTube refused to take them down, calling it legitimate artistic expression? These videos glamorised the carrying of knives and the disposal of evidence. Does he agree that YouTube should take such videos down?

Kit Malthouse: At a time when we all owe a duty to our young people to stand shoulder to shoulder in the fight against the violence that disproportionately affects them, I find it hard to imagine being a director of such a company sitting in a room and declining to remove such material from their product. I hope that over time they will reflect on their duty not just to their shareholders but to wider society.

After a decade of sustained and significant falls in crime, we cannot hide from the fact that the landscape is changing and some of the most troubling and violent crimes, including knife offences, are on the rise once again. They are also, as we have just referred to, more visible than ever before. Given my personal commitment to this issue, I would like to thank Her Majesty’s loyal Opposition for tabling this important debate and giving us the opportunity to outline some of the urgent actions we are taking to prevent, detect and fight crime in all its forms. First, there is commitment from the top. Members will be aware that the Prime Minister will personally chair a new Cabinet Committee on criminal justice, leading a drive to bring all Departments of State to bear in the struggle against criminality.

Secondly, we know there must be focused and sustained action on the ground. Attention has rightly been drawn to the need to ensure that our police are well funded and that there are more officers on our streets to keep the public safe. On this point at least we are in total agreement, but police funding is about more than just material resources; it is about sending a clear message to our police forces that the Government support them in their difficult task, that we know their capabilities and understand the risks they take, and that they can rely on us. That said, merely putting more officers on the street will not in itself reduce crime. Rather, tackling crime requires a

[Kit Malthouse]

judicious combination of focused interventions, such as our serious violence fund legislation and preventive measures, alongside that all-important motivated leadership.

Last year, Parliament approved a funding settlement that gave police and crime commissioners the opportunity to increase additional public investment in policing by up to £970 million. That included an increase to government grant funding of £161 million, £59 million for counter-terrorism policing, more than £150 million to cover additional pension costs, and £500 million for more local forces from the local council tax precept. That was already the largest yearly increase in police funding for more than five years, even before the provision of an additional £100 million to tackle serious violence was announced in the spring statement.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Does the Minister share my concern about the fact that while the capital cities of Northern Ireland, Scotland and England receive extra funding because they are capital cities, Cardiff, the capital city of Wales, does not receive any extra funding for this very purpose?

Kit Malthouse: I am always happy to speak to police forces about their requirements. As the hon. Lady will know, we have a special fund that can help financially when one-off events occur in cities such as Cardiff, but I should be more than happy to meet her to discuss that. I am aware that Cardiff does shoulder some of the burdens of a capital city, so let us see what we can talk about. There is, however, a wider objective. Beyond the general discussion about funding and process, we must concentrate on fighting crime, and while resources do matter in that regard, it is also important that we focus on product.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I welcome the debate, because the Home Affairs Committee did a great deal of work on these issues in the last Parliament. I am sorry not to be able to speak in it, but it is my daughter's parents evening later. I know that Front Benchers on both sides will understand.

I want to ask the Minister about the drop in the number and proportion of cases that are reaching charge and summons. Is he as concerned as I am about the drop in justice, and the drop in the number of crimes being solved?

Kit Malthouse: Yes. I think we should all be concerned about that statistic. As the right hon. Lady will know, the Prime Minister has ordered a royal commission to review the criminal justice system, and the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), will lead a review of rape to see what more we can do to improve criminal justice. We must bear in mind, however, that the best sort of victim is someone who is not a victim at all, and I want to concentrate our efforts on the prevention of crime alongside its prosecution.

I have mentioned the increase in police funding. Last week, I announced that we would go even further. In 2020-21 we are giving forces £700 million for the recruitment of the first 6,000 of the 20,000 additional police officers promised in our manifesto, which represents an increase of nearly 10% of the core grant funding provided

last year. Those first 6,000 officers will be shared among the 43 territorial forces in England and Wales, and will be dedicated to territorial functions.

The scale of this recruitment campaign is unprecedented: no previous Government have ever attempted such an ambitious police recruitment drive. The new officers will be a visible and reassuring presence on our streets and in our communities. If we assume full take-up of precept flexibility, total police funding will increase by £1.1 billion next year. That—as we heard from the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott)—is the largest increase in funding for the police system for more than a decade, and it means that every single force in England and Wales will see a substantial increase in its funding.

Neil Coyle: Since 2010, Southwark has lost more than 400 police officers and police and community support officers. When will the Minister give them back to us?

Kit Malthouse: Well, Mr Deputy Speaker—sorry, Mr Speaker! Forgive me. It was a slip of the tongue, and a memory, happily, of old times.

We will recruit 20,000 police officers over the next three years, and Southwark—or, rather, the Met—will receive its share of those officers, alongside whatever the Mayor of London chooses to do in augmenting the Met's finances. We would be very pleased if the Mayor, whoever that may be after May, stepped in to shoulder much more of the responsibility for fighting crime in the capital in a way that, to be honest, we have not seen in the last few years.

I am not saying this just because it is time. Two years ago almost to the day, I wrote an article in the *Evening Standard*—an op-ed from the Back Benches—saying exactly the same: that it was about time City Hall stepped forward and fulfilled its responsibilities for fighting crime.

Gary Sambrook: I am sorry to make what seems to be an obvious point, but does my hon. Friend not think that it is the job of police and crime commissioners to focus on police and crime? Unfortunately, our police and crime commissioner in the west midlands has spent most of the year so far talking about train delays. His time could be much better spent in talking about and advertising police recruitment in the region, which will benefit from an extra 366 police officers this year.

Kit Malthouse: As would be expected, I completely agree with my hon. Friend. He has identified a trend that I have detected, which is returning to policing after an absence of some six years. The policing family in its widest sense has drifted towards an obsession with process rather than product. For example, in the six months for which I have been the policing Minister I have been invited to conferences on computers and human resources, but I have yet to be invited to a conference on crime and how we fight it. We will therefore be holding such a conference in March. We will invite police and crime commissioners to come and talk about crime-fighting policy, and I hope that many of the best of them will do so.

Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): Does the Minister agree that it is important for the Mayor of London in particular to trust local authorities to be able to fight crime and the causes of crime in their

own areas? What concerns me is that the money that comes from violence reduction units comes with too many conditions. Local authorities such as mine, Westminster City Council, know their young people. They know their estates and their streets. I urge the Minister to ensure that the Mayor of London, and police and crime commissioners, trust their local authorities an awful lot more with their funding.

Kit Malthouse: There speaks the voice of experience. It is great to see a former leader of Westminster City Council, and a successor in my council ward, in this place. She is quite right: that was something that we recognised, certainly when I was at City Hall, in our joint engagement meetings, when we put every single local authority in London alongside every single borough commander and anyone else in the borough who wanted to fight crime, and talked about our common problems and our shared solutions, bearing in mind that no one organisation or geography has a monopoly on wisdom and that very often local authorities are closer to the problem than the police can be.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Kit Malthouse: I must make some progress.

The police uplift is, of course, an important part of our strategy to tackle crime, but it is not our only measure. Those extra officers will be immediately supported by a raft of new schemes and legislation designed to make their job easier and safer. The police protection and powers Bill will enshrine in law a new police covenant recognising the extraordinary challenges that our police face and pledging to recognise the bravery, commitment and sacrifices of serving and former officers. We also plan to consult on doubling the sentence for assaults on police officers and other emergency service workers to ensure that the punishment fits the crime.

The Opposition have rightly drawn attention to the rise in knife crime. In our manifesto, we set out ideas for a new court order that will give the police new stop-and-search powers in respect of anyone serving all or part of their sentence for a knife possession offence in the community. That will increase the likelihood of such offenders being stopped, and will send the strong message that if they persist in carrying a knife they will be punished and will face a custodial sentence. The police will also be empowered by a new court order to target known knife carriers, which will make it easier for officers to stop and search.

In October, we announced the beginning of a strategy to confront county lines drugs gangs. The package of measures is already having a significant impact, which is why we have now committed an additional £5 million, on top of the £20 million that was announced in October. That means that we will be investing £25 million in the next year to further increase activity against these ruthless gangs, who target and exploit so many children and vulnerable people.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): Since 2010, youth offender services and teams in local authorities have experienced year-on-year cuts. That affects the work that can be done to prevent young people from reoffending, because social workers and other ongoing resources are vital to it. Does the Minister agree that the cuts should be reversed so that that preventive work can actually take place?

Kit Malthouse: I definitely agree that, broadly, three ingredients will be required. First, we need significant and assertive enforcement; secondly, we need to intervene with young people as early as we possibly can; and, thirdly, we need to focus on offender management. We are having conversations across Government about what more we can do to improve it, particularly at the younger end of the cohort.

Ben Bradley: We have heard a lot about police cuts from the Opposition over the last half hour or so. I wonder whether my hon. Friend can help me to fathom what they are saying. If I remember rightly, just a few years ago the predecessor of the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) was sitting on the Opposition Front Bench talking about his plans to cut our police funding by 10%. The right hon. Lady said in her speech that she had always appreciated the need for funding and recruitment. I wonder what my hon. Friend makes of that, and what he thinks the Labour party was planning to cut.

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend is quite right. I well remember the former Member for Leigh, who is now the Mayor of Manchester, proudly boasting of the further cuts he would make to the police service over and above those that were being made.

As I said earlier, we have to recognise that there is no direct link between the level of crime and the number of police officers. It can help, and it is necessary, but it is not sufficient. Motivation, leadership, targeting and focus—all these things matter. Throughout our history, we have seen police numbers at a lower level and crime higher, and police numbers at a higher level and crime also high. There is no direct correlation. The years between 2008 and 2012 were a particularly difficult time, yet police officer numbers were extremely high.

Gareth Thomas: The Minister will know that one particular area of crime that is on the rise is crime against retail workers. They face increasing threats of violence, many involving a knife and many, sadly, involving guns, particularly where age-restricted products are involved. Is he yet convinced of the need, as we are on the Opposition Benches, for specific offences to make it easier to take action against those offenders?

Kit Malthouse: On the very last day of the last Parliament there was a Westminster Hall debate on precisely this subject. As I explained in that debate, we hope shortly to publish the results of the call for evidence that we put out early last year on this particular crime type. I am aware that shop workers and others who are in the frontline at the shop counter see a significant amount of crime, not least against them physically, and once we have digested the results of that call for evidence I am hopeful that we will be able to work with the industry to bring solutions to comfort those who put up with that crime.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. He is being exceedingly generous in promoting a debate, in stark contrast to what we heard from the Opposition Benches. He is right to say that police numbers are welcome but not the be all and end all. It is appropriate that the

[Tim Loughton]

police have the right kit and the right powers to pursue criminals. Does he agree that one of the most worrying things has been the huge increase in fraud crimes, which account for about half of all crimes, but for which traditional policing is completely inappropriate? What more can we do to ensure that the Action Fraud record of fewer than 1.5% of reported frauds resulting in a prosecution can be improved? That would get all the crime figures down.

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend is quite right to say that the rise in fraud over the past few years has been significant, and the Minister for Security, my right hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Brandon Lewis), and I are not necessarily convinced that we are in the best shape organisationally to deal with it. A review has recently been done by Sir Craig Mackey of the way we address fraud, and I know that my right hon. Friend, whose part of the business this is, will be digesting that report and coming forward with proposals. My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) may remember, however, that in the manifesto on which he and I both stood there was a pledge to create a cyber force. Given that we are seeing an exponential growth in the amount of online fraud, it strikes me that there is some strength in that proposal, and we will be bringing something forward in the near future.

It is sometimes easy to lose sight of the fact that the surest way to tackle crime is to prevent it from happening in the first place. We have announced an extensive series of preventive measures to remove opportunities for crime and to tackle its root causes. I recently announced the launch of a £25 million safer streets fund to support areas that are disproportionately affected by acquisitive crime and to invest in well-evidenced preventive interventions such as home security and street lighting. We are investing millions in early intervention through the £22 million early intervention youth fund and the long-term £200 million youth endowment fund to ensure that those most at risk are given the opportunity to turn away from violence and lead positive lives. The Serious Violence Bill will introduce a legal duty for schools, police, councils and health authorities to work together to prevent serious violence, along the lines that my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Nickie Aiken) suggested. They will be required to collaborate on an effective local response and to safeguard those most at risk, thereby protecting young people, their families and communities.

I cannot agree with the Opposition's diagnosis of why certain types of crime are on the rise. I believe that colleagues on both sides of the House can see just how seriously the Government take the protection of our citizens. Our measures are extensive, well funded and based on firm evidence, and as long as crime continues to blight the lives of the most vulnerable, its eradication remains one of the people's priorities and therefore our priority. Nothing can atone for the damage that crime inflicts on our communities each and every day, but we hope that in the years to come, fewer families will have to suffer the trauma of victimhood or the pain of bereavement that I saw on the face of Amro Elbadawi's father.

1.15 pm

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I should like to start by congratulating Her Majesty's Opposition on securing this Opposition day debate on such an important topic. I am particularly pleased about it, as it gives me an opportunity to talk about the good news story for policing and tackling crime in Scotland. We often hear the allegation from the Government Benches that there are major problems with domestic policy in Scotland, but when we examine the evidence, we see that that is not the case. I am happy to say that, on policing and fighting violent crime, Scotland under a Scottish National party Government has a good news story to tell. The glib and misleading comments that we hear from the new Prime Minister about failures in domestic policy cannot be brought home in relation to issues of policing and violent crime. I am particularly pleased to have this opportunity to talk about how we have increased police numbers in Scotland under an SNP Government and successfully tackled the terrible scourge of knife crime, which I know from my previous role as a prosecutor in Scotland's highest courts was a terrible scourge in Scottish society. While it has not by any means gone from the streets of Glasgow and the rest of Scotland, knife crime is being successfully tackled there in a way that could never previously have been imagined.

Liz Saville Roberts: I hope that my hon. and learned Friend will join me in welcoming the report of the Commission on Justice in Wales, which was commissioned by the Welsh Labour Government. It draws attention to the fact that there is a jagged edge in relation to devolution in Wales, where criminal justice is reserved despite the fact that many of the services that underpin it are devolved. We do not get policing funded per head of population as we would under the Barnett formula. I tried to intervene on the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) earlier, because I was sure that she would agree with the Welsh Labour Government on this. Does my hon. and learned Friend believe that criminal justice and policing per se need to be devolved to Wales as a matter of urgency, just as they have been so effectively in Scotland?

Joanna Cherry: I wholly agree with that. Matters such as criminal justice, policing and tackling violent crime are best fought as close to home as possible by people who understand the communities in which these issues occur. As I have said, Scotland has a good news story to tell about fighting violent crime and about policing numbers, and I am sure that if the wishes of Plaid Cymru and the Labour party, who I believe considerably outnumber Conservative MPs in Wales, were listened to, Wales could benefit in a similar way.

I stress that there is no room for complacency in Scotland, and my colleagues at Holyrood continually strive to improve matters, but I think that Scotland's successes are something from which the UK Government could learn. I therefore hope that Ministers will listen to this carefully, because what I am going to say is based on evidence, rather than flung-about allegations about policy failures. In Scotland, crime is down to historically low levels. Recorded crime has fallen by 41% since 2006-07 and non-sexual violent crime is down by 43% since 2006-07. Cases of homicide have fallen by 25% in the

past 10 years, and the Scottish crime and justice survey shows a 46% fall between 2008-09 and 2017-18 in violent incidents experienced by adults in Scotland.

It is well known that Scotland moved in recent years from having eight regional police forces to a single police force, and it is worth bearing in mind that that was a bit of a no-brainer. Scotland's population is only 5.5 million, which seems a sensible number to be policed by one force. In the days when I was prosecuting, having multiple different practices across the regions of Scotland caused problems. The benefit of a unified police force in Scotland is that we have been able to improve best practice across the force, but do not just take my word for that. Let us hear what Rape Crisis Scotland has to say about the single police force in Scotland:

"The move to a single police force has transformed the way rape and other sexual crimes are investigated in Scotland. It has allowed far greater consistency of approach, including to the training of police officers and to the use of specialist officers."

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): I acknowledge what the hon. and learned Member says in relation to Rape Crisis and serious crime and in relation to Police Scotland, but does she acknowledge that moving to a single police force in Scotland has taken away the third leg of the stool in terms of local accountability, meaning that the police force is now a much more politicised institution than it was prior to unification?

Joanna Cherry: With all due respect to the hon. Lady, whom I congratulate on her recent election victory, I cannot agree with that. It is a political point that the Liberal Democrats repeatedly try to make in the Scottish Parliament, but it is not borne out by experience.

Police officer numbers are up by 1,000 in Scotland despite significant cuts to Scotland's budget from Westminster. As of 30 September 2019, total police officer numbers were up 1,022 on 2007. Scotland has more officers per head of population than England and Wales. The ratio in Scotland is 32 officers per 10,000 members of the population versus 21 officers per 10,000 members of the population in England and Wales. I suggest that the sort of ratio we have in Scotland is something that England and Wales should be aiming for. The present Government's proposal to increase police numbers simply reverses a position that they enforced at an earlier stage, so it is a bit rich for them to expect to be congratulated on reversing their own policy failures.

Kit Malthouse: The hon. and learned Lady would not want to mislead the House—I will not put it as strongly as that—but while she refers to the 2007 figures, the numbers that I have suggest that the number at quarter 4 in 2019 was actually below that in 2009, so she is neatly avoiding the high point in her maths, illustrating the fact that police officer numbers in Scotland have been broadly flat for a decade.

Joanna Cherry: I do not accept that, and I return to the statistic I quoted: police officer numbers stood at 17,256 in Scotland at 30 September 2019, which is up by 1,022 on the total inherited by the SNP Government when Alex Salmond first brought the SNP to power in Scotland in 2007. That is a fact. Of course, there have been fluctuations in the meantime, but there is a significant—[HON. MEMBERS: "Aha!"] No, that is a fact.

If the Minister thinks that I am misleading the House on the stats, I challenge him to make a point of order and to bring stats that contradict mine. I can tell the Minister that this is not just about the Scottish National party, because people across Scotland working in the health service, the police and in other areas of Scottish public services are sick to death of glib comments from this misinformed Conservative Government—misinformed by the six Tory MPs that they are left with in Scotland.

Kit Malthouse *rose*—

Joanna Cherry: I will not give way. The Minister has had time, and I saw Mr Speaker urging him to bring his speech to a close, so I will use my time to look at the facts. As we say in Scotland, facts are chieftains that winna ding which, translated into English, basically means that evidence-based policy making is best.

Despite successive Tory Governments reducing the Scottish Government's resource budget by £1.5 billion—5% in real terms—since 2010, police budgets in Scotland are protected, and police officers in Scotland are getting the biggest pay rise in the United Kingdom. The police budget in Scotland is up by more than £80 million since 2016-17, and that includes a £42.3 million increase in funding for this year alone. Police officers in Scotland are receiving a pay rise of 6.5% over 31 months, compared with just 2% for 2018-19 for officers in England and Wales. As a result—[*Interruption.*] I am going to continue my speech despite the heckling from those on the Government Front Bench. I know it is deeply uncomfortable for the Tories to hear the facts as opposed to—[*Interruption.*] These are the facts.

One of the main issues facing Scotland was that, unlike other police forces in the United Kingdom, Police Scotland was being charged VAT. As a result of increased pressure from me and my learned friends, we won back VAT worth around £25 million a year. However, the United Kingdom has yet to refund the £125 million of VAT paid by Police Scotland between 2013 and 2018. I hope that the Government will look at that carefully—[*Interruption.*] If I may make some progress over the heckling, I point out—[*Interruption.*] Well, I realise that it is deeply uncomfortable to hear the facts as opposed to the misinformation that this Government like to put forth.

The Prime Minister was asked a series of questions at PMQs about the reality on the ground in Scotland as a result of the impending withdrawal of freedom of movement, but it was interesting that he was unable to deal with them in any meaningful way because he is not across the detail. I assure the Government that I and my colleagues up the road in Edinburgh are across the detail, and they do not have to take just my word for it.

As I said earlier, Scotland had a woeful problem with knife crime. To our shame, Glasgow was for a while the murder capital of the world, but that is no longer the case. We introduced a public health approach to tackling knife crime—an approach advocated by the World Health Organisation—and it has worked well in Scotland to reduce the incidence of knife crime. I am absolutely delighted that so many representatives from this great city of London—the Metropolitan Police, the Mayor and, indeed, members of the Government—have visited Scotland to look at the public health approach to tackling violence. It really has brought amazing results in Scotland, and it is clearly effective when we see that

[Joanna Cherry]

violent crime in Scotland has decreased by 49% over the past decade, and that crimes of handling an offensive weapon have decreased by 64% over the past 10 years.

There is still a long way to go in fighting violent crime in Scotland, but the importance of the public health approach has been that it has recognised that the issue is complex. Were there to be any doubt about Scotland's success in fighting crime, let me quote what the Conservative and Unionist party's crime spokesperson said in Holyrood recently:

"It is important to acknowledge that Scotland has turned its record on violence around."—[*Scottish Parliament Official Report*, 20 September 2018; c. 61.]

That turning around of Scotland's record on violence has happened under the much-maligned SNP Government, who have a great success story to tell in this area.

Let us have credit where credit is due—not for the sake of it, but because facts matter. In the area of policing and knife crime, we must take an evidence-based approach. The success of the Scottish National party's Government offers lessons from which this Government could learn, and that could benefit the people of England and Wales if the Government were big enough to acknowledge Scotland's success story and follow our example.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: We will have a seven-minute limit from now on, starting with a maiden speech, with no interruptions, from Danny Kruger.

1.28 pm

Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con): I rise for the first time in this place as the hon. Member for Devizes and as the successor to my friend the great Claire Perry O'Neill. Claire was a brilliant Minister in several Departments, and she brought huge zest and zeal to her work in government. Most of all, however, she was a great campaigner for our constituency. We owe her for the faster, better trains through Pewsey and Bedwyn and for the superfast broadband that is now enjoyed by some of our smallest communities. Thanks to her, we have the promise of a new health centre in Devizes, which is badly needed and, I am afraid to say, quite long overdue. I have inherited from Claire the tradition of posing with the Health Secretary in an empty field outside Devizes, pointing to the spot where the health centre will appear at any moment. I pledge to Claire that I will see the project through as soon as possible.

Claire is now focusing on the presidency of COP26, the UN climate conference that the UK is hosting in Glasgow in November. This vital role is crucial for the future of our country and the world. I wish her all the very best in this, and I thank her for her work locally and for her friendship to me.

I represent a corner of the country that is not only the most beautiful in the land but, in a sense, the oldest. It is the ancient heart of England. My constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen), can boast all he likes about Stonehenge, but we have Silbury Hill, the largest prehistoric structure in Europe—a great mound of earth the size of a small Egyptian pyramid built, for reasons we will never know, on a bend of the A4 just outside Marlborough.

We have Avebury, the largest stone circle in the world. It is not only much bigger but much older than Stonehenge, which is a vulgar upstart by comparison. We have the ancient burial grounds of our forgotten forebears in tombs and barrows 4,000 years old. We have white horses on the chalk hillsides.

We have big skies and tough people, and we have the British Army. A quarter of our Army is based in Wiltshire, including the regiments recently returned from Germany and now stationed in Tidworth, Larkhill, Bulford and villages round about. I am deeply honoured to represent our soldiers, and I pledge to serve them and their families as faithfully as they have served us.

My constituency is in a beautiful part of the country, but we face deep social challenges and many of the problems that are familiar to rural communities everywhere. We need better funding for our health service, for education, for police and for rural transport, and we need a new deal for our farmers. In the brave new world we are entering, in which rural businesses will face global competition and new environmental responsibilities, we need to remember our own responsibilities to the stewards of our countryside. I will be their champion.

I voted leave in 2016, and I am glad that we are leaving the EU on Friday. The 21st century will reward countries that are nimble, agile and free, but Brexit is about more than global Britain; it is a response to the call of home. It reflects people's attachment to the places that are theirs. Patriotism is rooted in places. Our love of our country begins with love of our neighbourhoods. Our first loyalties are to the people we live among, and we have a preference to be governed by people we know. That impulse is not wrong; it is right.

As we finally get Brexit done this week, it is right that we are considering how to strengthen local places, especially places far from London. I wholeheartedly support the plans to invest in infrastructure to connect our cities and towns—the broadband and the transport links that will drive economic growth in all parts of the UK.

Just as important as economic infrastructure is what we might call social infrastructure: the institutions of all kinds where people gather to work together, to play together and to help each other. I make my maiden speech in this debate because I spent 10 years as the chief executive of a project I founded with my wife Emma that works in prisons and with young people at risk. It was the hardest job I have ever done, and I worked in some very tough places. We often failed, but we were always close to the people we tried to help. Never bureaucratic, and never treating people as statistics or—a phrase I do not like—service users, we saw them as people whose lives had gone wrong and whose lives, but for the grace of God, could have been ours.

We are now trustees of that charity. If I might make a plea to Ministers, it is for them to recognise the role of independent civil society organisations—charities and social enterprises—in the fight against crime and, indeed, against all the social evils we debate in this place.

Social problems demand social solutions, not just a state response. Of course we need the police, the prison system and the probation service—we need them very badly, and we need them to be better—but, just as important, we need the social infrastructure that prevents crime, supports victims and rehabilitates criminals.

The Government have a great mission as we leave the EU and try to fashion a UK that is fit for the future. This mission represents a challenge to some of the traditional views of both left and right. The main actor in our story is not the solitary individual seeking to maximise personal advantage, nor is it the central state enforcing uniformity from a Department in Whitehall; the main actor in our story is the local community.

We need reform of the public sector to create services that are genuinely owned and cared for by local people. We need reform of business so that directors are incentivised to think of people and the planet, as well as their quarterly profits. And we need reform of politics itself to give power back to the people and to make communities responsible for the decisions that affect them.

I finish on a more abstract issue, but it is one that we will find ourselves debating in many different forms in this Parliament. It is the issue of identity, of who we are both as individuals and in relation to each other. We traditionally had a sense of this: we are children of God, fallen but redeemed, capable of great wrong but capable of great virtue. Even for those who did not believe in God, there was a sense that our country is rooted in Christianity and that our liberties derive from the Christian idea of absolute human dignity.

Today those ideas are losing their purchase, so we are trying to find a new set of values to guide us, a new language of rights and wrongs, and a new idea of identity based not on our universal inner value or on our membership of a common culture but on our particular differences.

I state this as neutrally as I can, because I know that good people are trying hard to make a better world and that Christianity and the western past are badly stained by violence and injustice, but I am not sure that we should so casually throw away the inheritance of our culture. There is so much to be positive about. I share the Prime Minister's exuberant optimism about the future, but we need a set of values and beliefs to guide us.

As we advance at speed into a bewildering world in which we are forced to ask the most profound questions about the limits of autonomy and what it means to be human, we may have reason to look about for the old ways and to seek wisdom in the old ideas that are, in my view, entirely timeless.

1.36 pm

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger), and I welcome him to the House. It was an articulate and beautiful speech, and I am sure he will be a very good advocate for his constituents. Many of us in this House support prisoner rehabilitation and the ability of most offenders to turn their lives around, so it is good to have another person join us in that cause.

This is a timely debate, because yesterday evening I and other Members representing constituencies across south Wales met the chief constable of South Wales police. I pay tribute to South Wales police, who epitomise the best of public service. Since being elected in 2015, I have learned a lot about the nature of the challenges South Wales police face every day in Cardiff Central and across our city. I have had the privilege of spending time with officers and control staff at their headquarters in Bridgend and with officers who patrol Cardiff city centre, seeing and hearing all about policing.

Schemes such as "Give a Day to Policing" are excellent, and the continuing dialogue and co-operation of police in Cardiff Central helps me and my constituents a great deal. I thank the police community support officers in my neighbourhood policing team who have provided a lot of support to me and my staff in difficult circumstances, particularly over the past couple of years, to ensure our safety. I really appreciate it.

All of this has broadened my knowledge and understanding of policing, which had previously centred on trying to get my clients out of police custody as quickly as possible when I was a practising criminal defence solicitor. I now know so much more about what it is like on the other side.

South Wales police are underfunded, under-resourced and overwhelmed with work. Conservative Members will point to the recently announced money to recruit officers—136 of them for the whole of south Wales—but there is no escaping the fact that this does not get near matching the officer numbers we had in 2010 before the decade of austerity and cuts.

Of course I welcome the money for recruitment this year but, in the context of Cardiff growing faster than any other major UK city outside London, it is not enough. It is not enough for the whole of south Wales, and it is certainly not enough for Cardiff.

As one of our four UK capital cities, Cardiff hosts more than 400 major civic, political and royal events every year and, on top of a decade of police funding cuts, my constituents are having to find money to contribute to the extra £4 million for the annual cost of policing these events—that is the equivalent of more than 60 police officers. I have repeatedly raised the anomaly of capital city funding with successive Home Office Ministers, Policing Ministers and Wales Office Ministers over the past few years. There is no valid explanation of why Cardiff is discriminated against in this way when it comes to capital city funding, so will the Minister please confirm that he will meet me and my Cardiff constituency neighbours to discuss how this unfair and unequitable situation can be resolved? During each of those 400 events, police officers have to be drawn from around the South Wales area into Cardiff and the city centre, which has a knock-on effect on the ability of the police to do their jobs, and protect people and property across the whole of South Wales.

That pressure comes on top of the daily pressure of rising crime, particularly violent crime, drug offences and domestic abuse. South Wales police have 30,000 reports of domestic abuse a year, never mind the reports of all the other crimes. In July last year, they had their highest total number of calls in a month in their history. As the chief constable was telling us yesterday, in the past year the force has seen an increase of 140% in reports of sexual violence; drug offences, both dealing and possession, have rocketed; and serious violence and knife crime has doubled. Drugs are at the heart of much of the crime in my constituency, as they are across the country.

The police cannot possibly deal with this challenge without much greater funding, and I now believe, having taken time to come to a firm view on this, that we need to look much more urgently at the issue of the drugs epidemic and at how it is driving the rise in crime. We need to think about options and solutions that have previously been unthinkable. This is a major public health

[Jo Stevens]

issue, a major policing issue and a major criminal justice issue, but none of those policy areas can tackle this alone. I worry that even in combination they cannot tackle the crisis that we face, and the decade of cuts is making that crisis worse. We now need to look at safe drug consumption rooms.

My constituents are deeply concerned about rising crime and decreasing community safety, and many of them gave me their views in a survey I ran just before the general election last year. Overall, there were three broad themes to what they were concerned about: violent crime and knife crime; drugs, both dealing and their use in front of people, including children, and the associated antisocial behaviour; and theft and burglaries. Many constituents made it clear to me that the Government's cuts to police funding and to our Welsh Government's budget were having an impact on local services, and that that in itself was playing a major part in all these crimes and the increasing number of them. My constituents overwhelmingly want to see more police on our streets. Neighbourhood policing is vital to them, as I know it is to many Members from across the country. My constituents want more funding for Wales, to provide services and resources to help people who are homeless or who have a drug addiction—or face both those problems. They want to see the police in their neighbourhoods and their communities, both to prevent crime and to protect citizens and property. So my message to the Government is: 136 new officers across South Wales is not enough—we really need many more.

1.42 pm

Suella Braverman (Fareham) (Con): I want to be the first Conservative Member to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger) on a superlative speech, made in the best traditions of this House. I am so delighted to see a friend take his seat in this Chamber, and express such values and a worldview with which I so wholeheartedly agree. I wish him all the best in his time and service here in this House.

We have spent many months talking about policing, crime and security since the general election, and having more police in Fareham is definitely a priority for my constituents. It is almost as though the Prime Minister parachuted himself into one of the many watering holes and pubs in Fareham, sat down with a group of decent, fair-minded constituents and asked them, "What is the most important thing you want to see here in Fareham?" Had he done that, he would have been met with the response, "More police on our streets." I congratulate Ministers and the Prime Minister on making more policing a central pledge to the British people during the general election.

I want to set out a few of the local issues relating to crime and policing that have been in my postbag in the past few months. These issues worry some of my local residents in Fareham, on the south coast. We have seen a spate of burglaries in the Locks Heath and Fareham area, and local people have been worried about the sometimes slow response from the Fareham police team. In Titchfield village, a beautiful and historic part of my constituency, where many elderly people live by themselves, there have been several incidents where properties have been vandalised late in the evening by antisocial youths. St Peter's church had flags and flowerpots stolen by

vandals a few months ago, which is a sad and depressing state of affairs in such a beautiful part of the constituency, where there is such strong community pride and commitment to our local area. In my surgery last week, I met a family who have been the victims of burglary. Their house was ransacked when they went to the cinema one evening, and thousands of pounds-worth of jewellery was stolen. They felt that their home had been demolished when they returned; they found this a traumatising and violating experience.

Those incidents have to be set against the big picture and the context, which is that, thankfully, the overall crime rate in Fareham and throughout the country fell last year, compared with the year before, thanks to the diligence and vigilance of our police. There have been other success stories locally. For example, 150 police officers were involved in five dawn raids in Fareham, Portsmouth and Southampton following a spate of ATM "explosions"—this is where an explosive gas is used to break into an ATM—with incidents having happened in Park Gate and the wider Hampshire and Surrey area. Several individuals were arrested. Fareham police are also stepping up their patrols after the increasing number of antisocial behaviour incidents, such as vandalism and use of drugs in the Fareham and Locks Heath shopping centre area, particularly in the summer months. I am pleased to hear that they are responding appropriately.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I am interested in what the hon. Member is saying about the rise in crime. We have seen a rise in crime, particularly in knife crime, across specific parts of the country. Does she accept that the proposals put forward by the Government would still leave police forces short of where they were in 2010, that more officers are needed and that what is needed to deal with knife crime, in particular, is a more holistic approach? This is about health, education and investment, to prevent people from getting involved in and turning to crime.

Suella Braverman: I disagree with the hon. Lady's premise that there has been a rise. In Fareham, overall and taking a long view, we are definitely seeing a fall in the number of incidents and the level of violent crime. We see that a huge investment from the Government is going to help to reassure local people, with visible policing and many more resources. I am going to deal with the particular effect of the police funding settlement on Hampshire in a moment.

Another success story from Fareham is that the local police have succeeded in arresting thieves who had been involved in several car thefts and break-ins in the Highlands Road area. There has also been a successful drugs bust in the high street, where large quantities of class A and class B drugs were seized, with a man and woman arrested on suspicion of intent to supply. I want to take this opportunity to thank and applaud the efforts of Hampshire police and the Fareham policing team.

I must also mention a game changer for policing in our local area. I had the pleasure of visiting the new eastern police investigation centre last year in Portsmouth, which represents a step change in local policing. At a cost of £31 million, a huge investment from national Government, there will be 430 officers, investigators and staff on site, with 36 custody cells. This centre will bring the constabulary forces together to enable a more efficient delivery of police services locally. It will serve

Fareham, Gosport, Havant and parts of east Hampshire, providing a modern and fit-for-purpose facility. I applaud all the efforts that went into making that possible.

Finally, I cannot stand up and speak without mentioning the historic police funding settlement for Hampshire for 2020-21, under which Hampshire will receive a monumental cash injection of £366.5 million, which represents a colossal increase of 26% in cash terms on the previous year. In the first round of police recruitment, Hampshire will see 156 primed and ready police officers, and I know from speaking to many local people that they are excited and enthusiastic about the arrival of those police officers. It will be my task to make sure that a good portion of them serve Fareham. Such investment is unprecedented for Fareham and for Hampshire. The new injection of capital will undoubtedly contribute to the continuation of an overall reduction in crime.

Not only are the Government serious about maintaining security and stability, as any good Government should be, but they have outdone expectations and surpassed requirements by making this country a more protected, peaceful and prosperous place, through their huge commitment to policing.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): It is a pleasure to call Allan Dorans to make his maiden speech.

1.51 pm

Allan Dorans (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to make my maiden speech. I am honoured and privileged to have been elected to represent the constituents of Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock on the west coast of Scotland. However, I would not be here were it not for the commitment of my campaign team, who worked tirelessly to get me elected, and the people who voted for me—the 20,272 people who put their trust in me to act with honesty and integrity as their representative.

I am proud and pleased that my son Peter is in the Gallery. Peter is a civil servant; he has asked me—perhaps understandably—to campaign to increase civil service pay, which for many in the civil service has been reduced in real terms since the Tories came to power in 2010. This is something that I am sure will be supported by many of his colleagues and many of our hard-working civil servants across the country, including those who support the police.

Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock is a constituency of rural and coastal communities, with rich farmland, thriving food and drink industries, a manufacturing base and, of course, outstanding tourist and leisure facilities, including some exceptional golf courses. It is a relatively large constituency, being about 50 miles from north to south and 22 miles from east to west. The largest town, Ayr, was established by a royal charter granted in 1205 by William the Lion. It was described accurately by our bard, Rabbie Burns, as:

“Auld Ayr, wham ne’er a town surpasses, For honest men and bonnie lasses”.

Who am I to argue with the Bard?

To the south of the constituency is Maybole—the ancient capital of Carrick—and the picturesque seaside town of Girvan. To the east of the constituency are the

proud former mining towns and villages of Cumnock, New Cumnock, Dalmellington, Patna and my home village of Dailly, among others.

Famous people associated with the constituency include King Robert the Bruce, who was born in Turnberry castle and went on to lead the fight for Scottish independence, winning the battle of Bannockburn in 1314; Keir Hardie, one of the founders of and the first leader of the Labour party, who made his home in Cumnock—a beautiful commemorative bust of him stands proudly outside Cumnock town hall; and Rabbie Burns, our national bard, whose birthday is celebrated this week. It is not by accident that I mention those three very famous individuals, as they all shared my passion for freedom and self-determination for Scotland.

By tradition, I pay tribute to my predecessor Bill Grant. I do so without difficulty as Bill and I were councillors together. We agreed at the beginning of the council that we would work together collaboratively for the benefit of our constituents and not along political lines—perhaps a model that could be followed by others. In addition to Bill’s contribution to Parliament, I can also say that he worked with integrity and did what he felt was best for the community.

In a former career, I was a police officer: I served here in London with the Metropolitan police, both as a uniformed response officer and as a detective, achieving the rank of detective inspector. With the help of the Commons Library, I have been able to establish that I am probably only the fourth person ever to have served in both the Metropolitan police and the Commons since 1829.

I could regale the Chamber with hours of stories of frontline policing, but I will not. I will, though, mention one particular incident in which I had a Stanley knife held to my throat by a seriously mentally ill man. I mention this not to make me look brave, or even lucky to still be alive, but to highlight the importance of investment in effective mental health services to support the work of the police. There is a growing realisation that for many years mental health has been seriously underfunded, and I wish to see that changed.

I want to turn briefly to the Prime Minister’s promise to increase police numbers by 20,000 in the next three years. Some 26,000 police officers are going to retire in the next three years so, realistically, he will have to recruit 46,000 police officers. I look forward to seeing how that progresses.

Let me turn briefly to something that is not covered by criminal law in this country but that will undoubtedly go down as one of the greatest crimes of this century: I refer to the grand theft of the pensions of the WASPI women. There are 3.8 million women in this country, including 6,800 in my own constituency, who have had their pension stolen. They have been denied the chance to retire when they expected to. They have been robbed of the opportunity to spend time with their families, especially their grandchildren. They are suffering financial difficulties and mental health issues caused by the loss of that pension, and tragically some have died before reaching their enforced delayed retirement age. I therefore urge the Government to look again with the greatest urgency at the plight of the WASPI women and to right this cruel injustice once and for all.

[Allan Dorans]

In conclusion, during my acceptance speech on election night I said that I sincerely hoped that it was the last time that the people of Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock needed to send an elected representative to Parliament in Westminster. I look forward with confidence to the time, in the not-too-distant future, when Scotland will be an independent country, able to choose its own future—a time when the decision as to whether Scotland should be a member of the European Union, and all other matters affecting Scotland, will be decided by the people of Scotland.

1.57 pm

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): I pay tribute to the hon. Members whose great maiden speeches we have heard in the House today. I have to admit that the election of the hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Allan Dorans) was one of the great sadnesses of my election night, because his predecessor was a very good man and a good friend of mine. I trust that the hon. Gentleman will continue to work in the same vein. If he does, I know that, although I am sure we will disagree on much, we will be able to work together well. My hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger) gave a passionate speech in which he showed his vision for his constituency and for the country, which I welcome. He will be a great asset to the House.

I welcome many things that the Government are doing on policing and crime, not least the new recruitment drive and the police covenant, on which I and a great number of colleagues have been campaigning for a year or more, not least as part of the Blue Collar Conservative campaign and agenda that has driven so much in respect of policing as a key priority. I welcome the £15.2 billion funding package, which is up by £1.1 billion on last year.

I thank the Minister for meeting Nottinghamshire colleagues last week. Nottinghamshire has its own gripes about police funding and everything else, but I thank him for that meeting and trust that he will take those things forward. The announcement of additional funding was incredibly welcome in the wake of that meeting, and I know that those resources will go a long way towards supporting our local police to deliver what residents want and need. Throughout the election campaign, it was incredibly clear that policing and crime was a key priority for them. In particular, they felt as though their community policing had disappeared. We are going to get 107 additional officers in the first of three rounds, and that is very welcome. I will fight locally to make sure that the right proportion comes to us in Mansfield. I pressed the Minister in that meeting, and I do it again now publicly, to ensure that as many of the additional 20,000 officers as possible are visible in frontline roles, working with our communities. So much of the intelligence that enables us to deal with the rest of the crime on our streets and in our country comes from conversations on the frontlines between neighbourhood officers and the communities they get to know.

I am not entirely convinced about the graduate requirement for police recruitment. I hope that we will open up the recruitment process beyond graduates to all the different avenues available, including degree apprenticeships and everything else that has come forward through the system.

I also welcome the crackdown on serious violence, including proper sentencing, which we talked about in the House yesterday. In recent months, we have heard complaints from local people who see reports in the media about how those involved in drug rings, paedophiles and rapists are being given early release. That seems to be more and more prevalent, but whether that is actually the case or just a media perception, it is a growing concern among my constituents. I trust that we will be able to combat this effectively by ensuring that sentencing is clear and that we are open and honest with the public about what it means to receive these sentences.

Drugs drive so much of our crime. I know that the Minister has spoken previously about the drugs that have made such a huge difference in our communities. I know that so much of that crime has been led by drugs. I spoke to the previous policing Minister about Mamba and Spice in particular, which is a blight on our community and which in summer 2018 turned my town centre in Mansfield into a scene from a zombie video game. I pressed at the time for a review of the classification of Mamba and Spice, and 18 months on, that review is still ongoing. I ask the Minister to speak, if possible, to the Advisory Council for the Misuse of Drugs to drive that forward and make sure that we get proper change and decisions made, because the review has been dragging on for a long time with no outcome.

I welcome the police covenant, the police protection Bill and the support behind the scenes for police officers, including for their mental and physical health, and so many other things that they need and deserve. Almost every member of my extended family is or has been a police officer, so I hear about those requirements from all angles. One that I have raised with the Minister previously came up when we met police representatives at party conference. It was about internal investigations in the police and how some of them seemed to drag on for an awfully long time, leaving often innocent officers at home on full pay and not able to take part in the work that they are qualified to do and that they want to do. I ask that we make sure—perhaps within the covenant—that those investigations are dealt with swiftly, because both victims and perpetrators need justice. Police must be held to account and to the law like everybody else, but we need to make sure that we are not leaving people at home being paid to do nothing when they want to be out and working on the frontlines.

The investment in Tasers is a positive thing. Quizzing my constituents about it—we have done some local polling—showed they were incredibly positive. I recognise that there are different community sensitivities and that their use will not be right everywhere, but certainly locally it has been incredibly popular. I personally think that every police officer who wants a Taser should be able to have one. We see the risks that our officers face on an increasingly regular basis, so it is only right that they are protected and able to protect our communities as well.

The Conservative party is, and should always be, the party of law and order, and if we are not delivering on that, we are not really doing our jobs very well. I have found myself concerned about this matter over the past few years. I think that we have got a job to do.

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con): Retford in my constituency of Bassetlaw is currently mourning the tragic death of a gentleman following a violent crime.

With regard to protecting the public, it would help the police greatly if, once we lock people up, they stay locked up. Will my hon. Friend join me in urging the Opposition to support the Government's plans to end automatic early release of violent offenders halfway through their sentence?

Ben Bradley: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. It is vital that the public can trust our sentencing and know that the punishment will fit the crime. That applies to all levels of crime. There is no benefit to people going into prison for two weeks and not getting any help or support while they are in there, then coming back out, having lost their housing or whatever it may be, and starting on the spiral of criminality again. In many cases, a longer sentence with more inbuilt support to help them to rehabilitate would be better. We need a proper review, and I hope that the Opposition will give that fair consideration when the Government try to deliver it.

As I said, we have a job to do to rebuild trust with the police and with the public, who are rightly at the top of the agenda. To feel safe in their community is the No. 1 thing that the public wants and needs, and we should be delivering that, so I am pleased that it is absolutely at the top of this Government's agenda. It was at the forefront of our election campaign. A lot of promises were made, and no doubt we will all hold the Government to account for delivery.

We need to ensure that residents get proper responses and proper communication, so they know what response they should be getting—that has also been raised with me regularly. We must ensure that we have a proper, fair and open sentencing system, particularly for serious offenders, and that we keep our communities safe. I know from conversation with the Minister in recent weeks that he is absolutely committed to delivering on that. He is on the right track, and I hope that legislation to deliver will be introduced as soon as possible. I absolutely welcome the Government's commitment to policing and crime, and particularly to supporting those officers who do so much to keep us all safe.

2.5 pm

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): It is an opportune moment to be having this debate. I am particularly proud to take part following two exceptional maiden speeches this afternoon.

I welcome a number of the decisions this Government have taken recently. They have listened to communities and to chief officers and delivered a significant uplift in spending on policing. However, it is not unrealistic to say that this demonstrates nothing short of a complete U-turn in their approach to policing, given the Government's conduct between 2010 and 2019. We have lost 21,000 police officers and 600 police stations have closed across England and Wales. One of those stations is in my constituency: Sowerby Bridge police station, where "Happy Valley" was filmed. The building was sold off at a time when the West Yorkshire police force was doing all it could to generate the cash needed to keep funding boots on the ground. That station simply is not coming back.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making an important point about the closure of police stations, which we have also seen in

Hounslow. Such closures contribute to the feeling of greater distance between the police and our communities. Does she agree that that is part of the reason why there has been a reduction in people's confidence in the police, both in terms of dealing with crimes and achieving the detection rates that we need?

Holly Lynch: I thank my hon. Friend for making that very important point. She is quite right that, as those 600 police stations have closed in our communities and the number of officers has declined, people are feeling that access to justice is further away from them than ever before, and that is contributing to that lack of confidence in the ability of our police officers to secure the results that we so desperately need in our communities.

In addition to reductions in officers and police stations, there have been changes to officer recruitment and training. I do not necessarily disagree with those changes, but they do mean that the new officers promised by the Prime Minister will not be operational until 2023. We have a long way to go before we start to feel the change in approach from this Conservative Government towards policing on our streets and in our communities.

I look forward to the police powers and protections Bill which, as I understand it, will legislate for the creation of a police covenant; like the hon. Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley), I am very much in favour of that. It will also allow special constables to join the Police Federation and allow another look at the legality of emergency driving, to ensure that all police officers know where they stand when tasked with driving in an emergency situations. I know that all such measures will be welcomed by both the public and the officers themselves.

I am currently taking part in the police service parliamentary scheme, which I recommend to all colleagues, particularly our new colleagues. It offers a truly insightful frontline experience of what is going on right across policing. Having had to call 999 from a police car for urgent back-up for a single-crewed officer whom I was shadowing on the front line, I decided to start the Protect the Protectors campaign, which finally resulted in law changes introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) in 2018.

The Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018 created a new offence of "assault against an emergency worker" with the maximum penalty increased from six months to 12 months. The Act also created a statutory aggravating factor within a raft of other offences including sexual assault, actual bodily harm, grievous bodily harm and manslaughter, which means that the judge must consider the fact that the offence was committed against an emergency worker as an aggravating factor, meriting an increase in the sentence. I was reassured but somewhat taken aback to hear the Minister in his opening remarks talk about the Government's plan to double sentences for those who assault police officers. Although the 2018 Act was very much a step in the right direction, I cannot stress enough how hard we had to fight Ministers to secure the increase from six months to 12 months; they rejected our initial proposals for 24 months. We very much welcome that step to double sentences, but it is hard to describe how hard we had to fight for it. We had our proposals rejected by the then Government just 18 months ago.

While we make the laws in here, we ask the police to uphold and enforce them out there, and we certainly agree that to assault an emergency service worker is to

[Holly Lynch]

show complete disregard for law and order. It is a breakdown in our shared values and in democracy itself, and that must be reflected in sentencing, particularly for repeat offenders. It saddens me to say that the changes in the law are having a minimal impact. There were over 30,000 assaults on police officers in England and Wales in 2018-19, as well as a 13% increase in attacks classified as assault without injury on a constable, and a 27% increase in assault with injury on a constable, compared with the previous year. There were 1,897 recorded assaults last year in West Yorkshire alone—the highest figure in England and Wales outside the Met area. Will the Minister reopen this issue as part of the police powers and protections Bill, and look at minimum sentencing, enhanced penalties for repeat offenders and the abolition of suspended sentences for such crimes?

The other element of the “Protect the Protectors” Bill that we were not able to nail down in statute related to spitting. I have shared horror stories on several occasions in this Chamber about emergency service workers having been spat at, and the anxiety of having to wait up to six months for test results to determine whether they have contracted a potentially life-changing communicable disease, having to take antiviral treatments as a precaution, and on occasion having to adhere to restrictions about interacting with close family and friends, based on advice given by medical professionals. We initially wanted to introduce a new law to require someone who spits at a police officer or any other emergency service worker to provide a blood sample in order to determine whether they have a communicable disease. Such a measure would give the victim some clarity about whether antiviral treatments would be required. The new law would have made it a crime for the perpetrator to refuse to provide a sample.

Advice provided by the NHS at the time argued that the chances of contracting such diseases were so low that any such testing was not necessary, as contracting the disease from being spat at or bitten was almost impossible. The problem is that even today the advice given to frontline officers presenting at A&E having been spat at is a course of antiviral treatment and six months of testing as a precaution. Will the Minister agree to have another look at this issue with colleagues in the Department of Health, to ensure that we are removing as much stress and anxiety from the situation as possible for dedicated police officers and their colleagues across the emergency services who have been subjected to such vile behaviour in the line of duty?

I want to take this opportunity to highlight the issues of recruitment and retention in police leadership. Last summer I invited doctors from Calderdale to meet the then Health Minister to discuss how the annual lifetime allowances on their pensions were affecting them. Although the Government have found a temporary sticking plaster for this issue for clinicians, the same problem persists right across the public sector—not least in policing. In a letter to the chair of the Police Pension Scheme Advisory Board sent just this week, the Policing Minister argued that although he is open to the reform of police pensions, the case

“does not demonstrate evidence of recruitment and retention problems and a resulting impact on operational service delivery”. Having recently taken part in the police service parliamentary scheme, I can tell the Minister that, anecdotally, this is

certainly discouraging officers from seeking promotion to the higher ranks, and senior officers openly tell me that this is the case.

Research undertaken by the National Police Chiefs’ Council shows that the number of applicants for chief officer jobs is declining, as is the length of tenure in those roles. My own force, West Yorkshire police, had just one applicant on the previous two occasions it needed to fill the post of chief constable, and Northumbria police force recently had to open recruitment for a chief constable three times. Will the Minister have another look at the issue, given that, perversely, senior officers are receiving bizarre yearly tax bills that are greater than their annual salary?

I very much welcome some of the decisions taken, but there is certainly a long way to go for the Government to win back trust from communities and from within policing.

2.13 pm

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): The Government know that their first priority is to protect the public, and having a well-funded and properly resourced police department is vital in delivering that duty. I warmly welcome the recruitment of 20,000 new police officers to help in that mission, and the additional £13.5 million in funding for Derbyshire police announced last week. But the fight against crime is about more than figures and pounds. It is about our culture, as the Minister set out earlier, and our approach to crime, criminals, victims, rehabilitation and sentencing, and how tolerant we are of those who choose to play by their own rules. I know that our Prime Minister gets that point; he said in his very first speech outside Downing Street that making our streets safe is a key priority. I know that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary gets it—that we are on the side of honest, decent, law-abiding individuals. But having listened to some of the remarks in the opening speeches of Opposition Front Benchers, I am not sure that they get that point.

Crime is a scourge on working-class communities up and down the country. For some, it is antisocial behaviour and the feeling of impotence people get when they live on a street with one troublesome neighbour who blights the lives of all around. This is a daily occurrence for too many people, and it must not be allowed. When the Home Secretary visited Clowne during the election, she heard from some of the residents about how they have suffered as a result of antisocial behaviour. As she said then, we cannot and should not stand by while these residents suffer in silence, and they must know that this Government are on their side.

For others, as my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Suella Braverman) set out earlier, it is crimes such as burglaries. A number of people in Bolsover town and elsewhere have written to me recently to say that there has been a spate of burglaries across the constituency. I have written to the chief constable and received helpful responses, but it is so important that these crimes are investigated and perpetrators brought to justice. Victims must know that we are on their side, and those who think they can get away with such offences must know that they will be targeted with the full force of the law. There should be no doubt that these crimes—too often overlooked by those on social media who think that

every word spoken by a Conservative politician is some sort of crime—blight the lives of too many working-class people in this country.

We are incredibly fortunate to have so many dedicated police officers up and down the country who work incredibly hard to protect our communities. I thank them for their service. I am sure that they will welcome the news that they will have 6,000 additional colleagues by March 2021, as well as the forthcoming police protections Bill. Our police officers must know that they have our full support in this House, and we will ensure that they have the resources they need.

I welcome the forthcoming royal commission on the criminal justice system. I hope that its terms of reference will allow it to be as holistic as possible. It is incredibly important that we understand the public's understanding of, involvement in and support for the system as it stands, and I hope that that will form part of the review. I have three suggestions or comments that I hope can be fed into that process.

First, a number of forces have streamlined their physical presence across the areas they serve, operating from fewer stations and reducing building costs to reinvest in frontline policing. In Bolsover town itself, it is regularly mentioned that the station is no longer there. That leads to three questions. Has the closure of these stations—or, in some cases, front desks—had any effect on the support for police in these communities? Has it affected their community relationships and intelligence gathering? And has the closure of these desks been compensated for by more visible policing on the streets in the surrounding areas?

Secondly, although police and crime commissioners are a welcome addition to our policing landscape, there is scope to give them greater powers. In particular, we should look at giving them some control over sentencing rules in their respective patches. For example, if there is a particular issue with a crime in a certain area, we should allow PCCs to set tougher sentencing in that area so that we can respond to local needs.

Thirdly, there should be greater involvement from councillors and parish councillors, particularly on matters such as antisocial behaviour. Usually when an individual causes problems, they are well known by their neighbours, but there is often a sense that nothing can be done. I strongly believe that if a parish council or a councillor were given greater powers in identifying these individuals, we could get rid of them more quickly. That is what residents deserve.

This Government are committed to a properly funded police force with the physical and legislative powers they need. We are on the side of honest, hard-working people, and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is determined to do all she can to help the police to protect the residents of Bolsover and elsewhere.

2.19 pm

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Let me start by saying how disappointing it is that the “Victoria Derbyshire” show is going to be taken off-air. I have been on the show several times to talk about the impact of youth violence and finding solutions to prevent it. It has engaged in looking at the root causes of and how we tackle knife crime and engage with young people, including former young mayors of Lewisham, with genuine sensitivity. I hope this decision is revisited.

Seema Malhotra: I add my voice to that, particularly in the light of the work that the show has done around Feltham young offenders and some of the very complex issues that have arisen in relation to youth crime.

Vicky Foxcroft: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention.

Youth violence has devastating consequences for individuals, families, communities and society as a whole, yet under the current Government knife crime is at its highest-ever levels and shows no sign of decreasing. Ten years of Tory austerity and cuts to policing have had a hugely damaging impact. In September 2019, the Prime Minister announced a target to recruit 20,000 new police officers over the next three years. This is welcome, but it is still down on the 2010-11 figures when Labour was last in power. What worries me is whether these will be frontline community police officers. Nothing shown to me suggests that they will be. We need that community policing to ensure that people feel safe in their communities, that there are these strong relationships, and that trust between the public and the police is restored. We need to see them on the frontline of community policing, building relationships with young people, schools and youth services.

But increases in police funding are only the tip of the iceberg. If we are to stand any chance of providing long-term solutions to knife crime, it is absolutely vital that we tackle the root causes of youth violence rather than simply addressing the symptoms. Those root causes are complex and deeply ingrained. I set up the Youth Violence Commission in 2016 after seeing several young people in my constituency lose their lives to youth violence in my first few months as an MP. Over the past three and a half years, our commissioners and core team have gathered evidence from a wide range of academics, practitioners and other experts in the field—including, most crucially, young people themselves. We published an interim report on our findings in May 2018, and our full report, to be launched in March this year, proposes how we should move forward.

First and foremost, the commission believes that we must develop a consistent, long-term public health approach to tackling youth violence. I was really sad not to hear the Minister talk about that during his opening remarks. As referenced by the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), Scotland's Violence Reduction Unit is widely recognised as the UK's most successful example of this. We welcome the fact that similar violence reduction units are being set up in other parts of the country, including London. However, it is becoming more and more apparent that the term “public health model” is being used without a proper understanding of what is required to effect lasting change. As we have learned from Scotland's success, a public health approach requires whole-system cultural and organisational change, supported by sustained political backing. Anything short of this will fail. Under the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), the last Conservative Government professed to have adopted this approach, but in practice we saw little evidence of it. We now have a new Prime Minister and even less of an idea of whether this approach will be taken seriously. It has to be taken seriously.

Our findings also stress the importance of early intervention. The emotional and economic cost of failing sufficiently to address early trauma is huge. This includes

[Vicky Foxcroft]

costs incurred through funding statutory services such as those for children in care, meeting the most immediate impacts of educational failure, and income support for young people who are not in employment, education or training, as well as the more obvious frontline pressures such as youth crime and criminal justice.

Moving forward, our goal must be to ensure that the public health approach stays at the top of the political agenda. I hope that the Minister, in her closing remarks, is able to say that this will be the case. We must also push for long-term, sustainable funding that will not be at the mercy of every change in government. As chair of the Youth Violence Commission, I will continue to push for this in Parliament, alongside my colleagues in the all-party parliamentary group on knife crime and the many individual MPs who have brought their own experiences, and those of their constituencies, here to the Commons.

Time and again I hear from constituents who are scared for young people in their families, for their friends, and, sadly, for themselves. Since 2015, I have seen far too many young lives cut short by knife crime. These are preventable deaths, and we are seriously failing our young people if we do not succeed in finding sustainable, properly funded long-term solutions.

2.25 pm

Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft). I found myself agreeing with a great deal of the sentiment of what she said, not least around knife crime. I look forward to joining her in the all-party parliamentary group on knife crime. This is a challenging subject.

It is also a pleasure to follow two wonderful maiden speeches, first, from the hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Allan Dorans), who did incredibly well. He managed to get Burns and Bannockburn into his speech. Although I am not a veteran in this House, I think that is probably something of a staple of SNP Members. However, he added a bit of spice by mentioning both Keir Hardie and Richard the Lionheart, which probably makes it a unique speech in this place. I am sure he will be a welcome addition to this House. Certainly, his experience in the police will put him in good stead for his time here.

My hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger) gave a thoughtful, challenging and optimistic maiden speech. He is clearly going to be an excellent champion for his constituency, for rural communities and for the Army—which he mentioned specifically—but also, judging by the thought-provoking content of his speech, for our values: the values of this House and the values of this country.

There have been four murders in 10 weeks in Milton Keynes, all of them involving knives. This is an incredibly touching and emotional subject. Four murders in 10 weeks is not normal. It should never be normal. We should not let it be normal. We should deal with this. Last week, I was fortunate enough to be briefed by the local police area commander for Milton Keynes. It was very reassuring to talk to him about what the police are doing proactively to break up some of the local gangs that operate in Milton Keynes, and about the intelligence-led approach that the local police are taking, but also about

how some of the additional money—the £800,000 granted in last year's budgets by the Conservative police and crime commissioner—is being spent on diversionary activities for young people at risk of being led astray by gangs or by other means.

We need to show our communities a lot more love, but we do need to get tough on crime. When the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) opened the debate, she noted that Conservatives like to talk tough on crime, and indeed she is right. I am proud to talk tough on crime because we should be tough on crime—and frankly, getting tough on crime works. Stop-and-search works.

Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP): Many young people would never think of carrying a firearm, yet they are tooled up with a weapon that is equally dangerous and lethal. There is not the same penalty for carrying a knife as there is for carrying an illegal firearm, and that needs to be dealt with. In Northern Ireland, firearms have been a problem. Nobody will go out carrying a firearm unless they are legally entitled to do so. The same should apply for anyone who wants to go out carrying a knife.

Ben Everitt: That is a thoughtful and helpful intervention, and I thank the hon. Gentleman for it.

Stop-and-search works in three particular ways. First and most obviously, it allows the police to not only get knives off the streets but to get those who carry them in their rightful place—behind bars. Secondly, it acts as a deterrent, to discourage people from carrying those weapons. Thirdly, and importantly, it acts as a reassurance to the wider law-abiding public. I know that personally, because after the first of these terrible murders happened in Milton Keynes, I spoke to some parents of teenagers and younger children. They all, without fail, were really pleased that section 60 powers were in place and that people were being stopped and searched. It makes communities feel safer, despite their obvious worry following such incidents. This is the nub of getting tough on crime—not only do we catch more criminals, but the public feel safer, which is really important.

It is not just about getting tough; we have to act tough as well. Of the 20,000 extra police officers, 183 will be in my local force, and 36 will be available in Milton Keynes. That will make a real difference, and it is on top of the 69 extra officers thanks to the Conservative police and crime commissioner's additional policing precept last year.

I have mentioned previously in this place that my constituency has three parts. We have inner-city Milton Keynes, which is the area that I referred to earlier. We also have the new bit of Milton Keynes—so new that they are still building it—where the police acted quickly to address an issue of burglary in November and December last year. In the words of the Policing Minister when I raised this personally with him, “The cops are good at catching these guys.” It is an intelligence-led approach, and perhaps we need to get a bit better at informing the public about the work the police do, because they are doing good work.

The third part of my constituency is rural. Rural crime and the fear of it, which my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mark Fletcher) referred to, is a unique phenomenon. Word gets round in rural communities. Last week, the village of Lathbury suffered

some car and van break-ins, some shed break-ins and a perceptible rise in hare coursing. Communities need to feel safe and feel that their responses are being taken seriously. I can reassure the people of Lathbury, because I know that Thames Valley police does take those issues very seriously, but quite often classically rural crimes such as hare coursing can hide a darker side to crime. Too often, criminal gangs take advantage of the peace and tranquillity of our beautiful countryside to perpetrate horrible crimes such as human trafficking and the industrial-scale production and distribution of narcotics. That is why the intelligence-led approach that we are taking is necessary.

I am pleased to say that there are 140 additional back-office staff available to Thames Valley police this year. They are not bureaucrats or pen pushers; they are intelligence analysts who will be tasking the police, pointing them in the right direction and ensuring that these horrible crimes are dealt with proactively. I welcome these extra resources. We are on the right track. We are the party of law and order. We are the party that is tough on crime.

2.34 pm

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): Despite what the Minister said in his opening remarks, the Government's announcement on police funding provides only limited clarity for forces for the next financial year and leaves serious questions to answer about the long-term strategy for funding our forces. We need a long-term strategy for funding our forces, after years of hard cuts and the impact that they have had on our communities—communities that need to see more police on the beat, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) said so eloquently. I pay tribute to her not only for her speech but for the work that she does as chair of the excellent Youth Violence Commission.

While any new police officers are welcome—I say that having attended a number of passing out parades, often with my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones), to welcome new recruits in the last year to Gwent police—the Government's Operation Uplift programme does not make amends for the 21,000 officers cut under Tory austerity since 2010. In Gwent, which saw its budget slashed by an eye-watering 40% in real terms over the last decade, the new recruitment programme will only take officer levels back to where they were in 2010, if that. That is not to mention the loss of civilian staff, whose work is often unseen.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) said, it was the Welsh Government who stepped in to fund 500 police community support officers in Wales when police numbers were cut. We need some answers from the Government about what funding will be made available to recruit, train, equip and locate these additional officers. As well as the loss of officers over the past decade, most forces have had to reduce their support departments, facilities and other functions that are vital to the successful training and deployment of police officers.

Seema Malhotra: In Hounslow, around 10% of our officers have been cut. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is extremely important to locate the new officers not only on the streets but in institutions such as schools, given the threats that young people face, including grooming at school gates, which we have seen in my area?

Jessica Morden: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, and I agree; it is key that we see officers in those places, and I will go on to say a bit more about that.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): My hon. Friend mentioned back-room staff, who provide vital support to the frontline. Does she agree that, when those back-room staff were lost, frontline staff had to go back and do some of those jobs?

Jessica Morden: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. There are many examples of that in Gwent, and it puts an additional strain on existing officers, which is obviously a bad thing.

We still have no clarity on how these officers will be paid for after the initial three years of Government funding comes to an end. Is that because police forces will have to meet these costs from their own budgets and raise more money from local council tax payers, who have already been turned to frequently over recent years to plug the gap left by the central grant? It is time the Government addressed the issue of long-term funding. The question of pension costs is also outstanding and needs to be answered by the Government.

The Government announced funding to increase the uptake of Tasers, but the latest funding announcement only covers Taser equipment. Funding for training and other associated costs will need to be met from police forces' own budgets. For forces such as Gwent, which has been forced to make £50 million of savings since 2008, that represents another significant financial commitment.

Welsh police forces are still being left in the dark over the apprenticeship levy. Gwent police and the other Welsh police forces have paid in excess of £2 million towards the apprenticeship levy each year since it was introduced in 2017. After pressure from our local police and crime commissioner, Jeff Cuthbert, and his counterparts, the Home Secretary advised that it would provide Welsh forces directly with their share of the levy from 2019. However, Welsh forces have yet to see any of that money. Can Ministers look into that and tell us what is going on?

I would like to pay huge tribute to Gwent police officers and staff, including Chief Constable Pam Kelly, for all they do, and to our police and crime commissioner, Jeff Cuthbert, who is very active and responsive in our community. I am very aware of the impact that the Government's cut of over 20,000 police officers has had on the wellbeing, stress levels and workload of all existing police staff—that should not be underestimated—and on our communities.

Despite that, Gwent police deserves huge credit for its ongoing work in tackling serious violence and organised crime. This includes projects funded by the office of the police and crime commissioner and the Home Office that have delivered training to more than 400 partner organisations on county lines, gangs and violence, and delivered sessions to 5,500 pupils across Newport schools. Thanks also to organisations such as Positive Futures, Barnardo's and the St Giles Trust for what they are doing in partnership to offer diversionary activities to young people. I have seen that work for myself in my constituency, and it is hugely valuable. We could do with some of the work by the violence prevention unit in south Wales going Wales-wide to help with young people in Newport.

[Jessica Morden]

We want greater investment in all areas—from educational and diversionary activities to prevent people from committing crimes in the first place to investment in police control rooms and custody suites, the Crown Prosecution Service, the courts and victims' services. To give a local example, Gwent police's early action together team has transformed the way the force responds to children and vulnerable people. It has trained over 1,000 officers to deal with complex vulnerability issues and offers families help and support at the very earliest opportunity, yet the police transformation fund, which has paid for this work, is to be cut.

Our PCC has shown the benefit of this work in supporting vulnerable people away from potentially turning to a life of crime and antisocial behaviour. Our PCC has agreed to fund this work, but again, the police are in effect picking up the tab for locally based diversionary activities to keep young people out of the criminal justice system. I completely agree with Gwent police that this focused early intervention should be funded at a national level and form part of the Government's long-term spending plan.

Finally, 2020 marks two years since the passage of the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018. I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Halifax (Holly Lynch) and for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) for their determined efforts to push through this much-needed legislation on to the statute book. However, I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax that we need the Government to be serious in enforcing the protecting the protectors law, as the number of assaults on officers is still far too high. Attacks on those who protect and care for us—that includes prison officers, NHS staff and firefighters—remain completely unacceptable and abhorrent, and we need to ensure that the legislation we have in place acts as the most effective deterrent possible.

2.42 pm

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): Protecting our communities is absolutely vital, and I for one welcome the £14.1 million announced last week for Leicestershire police, as well as the 89 police officers that are planned to come to our force. This will benefit and support our communities.

I also welcome the raft of measures that have been brought in since 2010 to support victims of crime. Having worked in the victims team at the Ministry of Justice, I understand how important these changes have been. Having met victims of trafficking, those whose loved ones are being held by terrorists in Iraq and Syria, and victims of the Oxford grooming case, I know that these measures have made a real difference, giving victims the confidence to go forward, be heard, get the justice they deserve and see justice done.

Isolation in Rutland and Melton is a real concern—as it is for rural communities across this country—and it is made worse by rural crime. My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Ben Everitt) spoke passionately and from the heart about this, so I can only try to do justice to his words. The fact is that rural crime hits communities hard, and I have over 150 villages in my constituency. It is made worse by slower emergency response times due to the vast distances that responders have to travel, and it is also made worse by the enormous

economic impact of these crimes. Too often for farmers, the workplace that has been struck by criminals is their home. This is a double betrayal—a double attack—that makes them feel vulnerable both at work and at home.

I stood on a commitment to tackle rural crime. When I was out knocking on doors in Great Dalby on Saturday morning, farmers came to find me on the streets to talk to me about rural crime. Over Christmas, we saw an increase in the theft of tractors, 4x4s and all sorts of equipment that matters. Some of this equipment is worth multiple hundreds of thousands of pounds, and replacing it just is not easy. Many farmers have to rely on buying second-hand kit, because first-hand kit is so expensive, so it is very difficult for them to do.

One thing I want us to do is to work on tracking and identifying the organised crime networks responsible for these thefts. It is not isolated individuals who are taking these opportunities; it is organised crime networks, and we need to crack down on them. I also want us to do more on tougher sentencing for fly-tipping, because it is the absolute abdication of personal responsibility. The fact that it is left to farmers to deal with this horrendous crime is unacceptable. I know the police are working very hard, but I want to see more commitment across Leicestershire from the Leicestershire police and crime commissioner to see rural communities benefiting from the police.

Organised crime, which I touched on, is a scourge, and I welcome the significant effort being put into dealing with it. Funding to tackle county lines is helping to protect market towns like mine that do not want to become victims of what is happening elsewhere. That also applies to investment in relation to trafficking and extremist groups, which operate like organised criminal groups.

Last week, we announced enormous investment in counter-terrorism and extremism measures, and those are enormously important. For me particularly, having worked in counter-terrorism, the minimum of 14 years for the most serious terrorist offences is important, but I want us to go beyond that. When someone commits the most serious terrorist offence, they are declaring war on every single citizen of this country. They are committing atrocities against civilians, and saying, "I reject everything that this country has given me." Fourteen years is not sufficient for those who are traitors; and that is when that word should be deployed.

For many years, I have argued for an end to the early release of terrorists, and I am ecstatic to see that brought in because it is so important. I am also very pleased to see the investment in ongoing management of former terrorists and those who have been responsible for extremism. However, there is a question about when radicalisation ends, as it does not end the moment someone exits through a prison door. My concern is that those who have been radicalised and have radicalised others remain vulnerable for the entirety of their lives, because the things that have made them vulnerable remain in place. We must ensure that the risks continue to be managed for the lifetime of the individual.

I would like to praise the Prevent programme, which Opposition Front Benchers have been very keen to throw away. The Prevent programme does an enormous amount of work to tackle everything from the far right through to the takfiri Salafist extremism that we have seen. I would particularly like to praise the work of Will Baldet and Sean Arbuthnot, who are doing incredible work on the frontline of this in Leicestershire.

I would also like to raise forgotten crimes and the forgotten victims—prison officers. Too often crimes take place in our prisons that nobody hears about and nobody knows about, and the victims are prison officers. In HMP Stocken in my constituency, a prison officer was attacked just last week. The guidelines say that when a prisoner attacks a prison officer, the sentence should not be concurrent with the existing sentence for the crime for which they are imprisoned, but unfortunately the guidelines are not always being followed. Given the incredible work we are doing to support emergency workers and those on the frontline, we must ensure that we support prison officers. They deserve that from us because they do so much that is hidden behind those walls.

I am sure Ministers will welcome the fact that at door after door during the election, voters told me that only the Conservatives can be trusted on crime and on law and order. Across the whole of Europe, knife crime is up, so I will not accept arguments that Britain is in some way failing its people. It is an issue across the whole of Europe, and we should be looking to learn from across western Europe about how we tackle it and make the situation better.

My key message to Ministers is, please, let us not forget rural communities and the staggering impact of crime on farmers and remote communities. We have to tackle the scourge of violent extremism throughout the lifetime of individuals who have been responsible for some of the most appalling acts. Throughout my career, I have been devastated to see the impact of their actions. We must continue to invest in counter-terrorism, and we cannot forget our prison officers. I thank Ministers for the investment they have made, and I know that the police officers of Leicestershire are grateful for the investment that has been made in the services they provide.

2.48 pm

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): I rise today not so much to deliver a speech, but to ask the Minister for help because I do not know what else I can do as an MP to get justice, to get prosecutions and to get accountability when it comes specifically to grooming gangs exploiting children.

I am incredibly grateful for the hard work of South Yorkshire police. The frontline officers have been exemplary in both listening to and supporting victims, survivors, parents and the broader community. However, we must also accept that there is reputational damage to South Yorkshire police from past failings. They have yet to be recognised in full, and they have yet to be resolved. I want a line drawn under this so that our police force can have both the respect and the trust that it needs, and I need the Government's help to be able to do that.

Five years ago, almost to the day, on 4 February 2015, I had a meeting with the then Prime Minister, David Cameron. I presented him with a five-point plan for tackling this scourge, and I will read my introduction to that:

"From my experience in Rotherham I am convinced that we need a national strategy to tackle organised child abuse. Criminals do not observe local authority or police force boundaries. Locally, there are neither the resources, or expertise, to tackle organised child abuse, by which I mean gang-related child sexual exploitation, institutional abuse, paedophile rings and prolific abusers."

Sadly, I could be reading that today—indeed, I am—because the situation has changed very little. I am incredibly glad and grateful that the Government have introduced relationship education—one of the things I am proudest to have campaigned on.

Seema Malhotra: My hon. Friend is making an incredibly powerful speech. I pay tribute to her work in her constituency on these difficult, complex and devastating issues, and in seeking justice for those who have been groomed. Paedophile rings behave in ways that we cannot imagine, and people continue to pursue those who are victims in their rings, even once they have gone to jail. Resources must be made available to deal with that issue far more comprehensively than is currently the case.

Sarah Champion: My hon. Friend is right, but the difference between paedophile rings and grooming gangs is that for the former, the police have the research and understanding to know what the motivators are. A police force can look at patterns of behaviour or get ahead of the abuse because they see those patterns, and then they can disrupt it. Sadly, for all the promises that the Government made, we still do not have that research about grooming gangs. That is something I asked for, and something I would like the Minister to reassure me about.

I sent a letter to the then Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid)—I have been working on this for a while—and on 6 December I received a reply:

"Thank you for your letter of 3 September to the Home Secretary seeking an update on Home Office activity to understand the characteristics of group-based child sexual exploitation...In your letter you emphasise the need for research and the importance of sharing relevant findings with agencies tasked with protecting vulnerable children and young people and disrupting offenders...I recognise that the Home Office is uniquely placed to provide some of this insight, protecting operationally sensitive information where it is appropriate and necessary. Officials will consider the most appropriate approach in sharing this work and will advise Ministers, including the Home Secretary, in due course."

I hope that officials have now advised the Home Secretary about a matter that is pressing, up and down our country.

The Government have committed to publishing a national child sexual abuse strategy that will look at all forms of abuse, but I am talking specifically about research that is used to disrupt grooming gangs, which should be published imminently. Will the Government make a commitment on timing, and say how that information will be shared nationally? How will police forces, local authorities and the voluntary sector be resourced so that they can use that data to disrupt such behaviour?

I turn now to the historical failings of our police forces. Two weeks ago, the Mayor of Greater Manchester published a report on Operation Augusta, which was about trying to disrupt a grooming gang and seek justice. The headlines from that report are shocking. It found that police and social services failed the girls, and that police resources were insufficient to deal with the issue. The girls were seen as prostitutes and as somehow complicit in their own abuse. Greater Manchester police dropped an operation that identified up to 97 potential suspects, and at least 57 potential victims. Eight of those men went on to rape girls. As recently as 2018, the chief constable refused to reopen the dropped operation.

[Sarah Champion]

The following week, the Independent Office for Police Conduct released a report on one strand of its investigation into the handling of past child abuse cases by South Yorkshire police. I wrote to our chief constable, and stated:

“The report’s conclusions make profoundly disturbing reading. South Yorkshire police failed the child multiple times, and by doing so, led her to be exposed to long-term horrific abuse. It is particularly concerning that the report upholds a complaint against a senior officer and that it has not been possible for this officer to be identified.

As I am sure you would agree, I do not believe it is possible for Rotherham to have confidence in its police force whilst officers found to have failed so badly, and with such catastrophic consequences, are not held to account for their actions. I would therefore welcome your assurances that every effort will be made to identify officers involved, and that any possible misconduct will be both investigated and action taken, including where appropriate, disciplinary action.”

I have still not received a satisfactory response to that, although I hope I will receive one. This is not a witch hunt; this is about restoring confidence in our local police force. This is about victims and survivors feeling that they have had closure, and that what they went through will never happen to anybody else. I ask the Minister: please, let us look at transparency and accountability in our police forces.

I ask all hon. Members present, including the Minister, to ask their police forces for information about the caseloads of officers who are dealing with child sexual exploitation, compared with those dealing with other crimes. How many dedicated child sexual exploitation officers are qualified in the professionalising investigation programme—PIP2—and what is the ratio of uniformed police officers to detectives assigned to CSE investigations? What is the retention rate of investigating officers on CSE cases, and what is the average level of experience among officers assigned to CSE investigations? I say to all of you: if you think you do not have child exploitation on your patch, you have. Ask those questions and make sure that your force is properly resourced to protect everyone in your constituency.

2.56 pm

Gary Sambrook (Birmingham, Northfield) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger) and the hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Allan Dorans) on their maiden speeches. It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), whose campaigning on child sexual exploitation I respect and admire.

There is a common misconception that the election we just had was only about getting Brexit done. That is simply not the case. The message was that we must get Brexit done in order to focus on our NHS, on education, and on crime. Those are the people’s priorities and that is exactly what the Government are doing, so it is perplexing that the Opposition have chosen to debate policing and crime today.

This Government are providing £1.1 billion extra for policing. Last week, I was pleased to see in the funding settlement that the west midlands will receive an extra £49 million. That 8% increase means that up to £620 million will be made available to West Midlands police, including for 366 new police officers in the force. Last summer,

before I came to this place, I was pleased that the Prime Minister and Home Secretary came to Birmingham to kick-start the recruitment of 20,000 new police officers at the Tally Ho conference and banqueting centre. That facility is an institution in Birmingham and all Brummies should be proud that we have it.

I am pleased that recruitment is taking place in a sensible and realistic way, as a staged process. Some £700 million has been made available to recruit 6,000 new police officers in the first year, 366 of whom will go to the west midlands. In addition, there is £150 million for fighting organised crime, £190 million for fighting serious crime, and £20 million to combat county lines—an issue that affects Birmingham more than most places, so I am interested to learn more about what I can do as a Birmingham MP to help tackle that problem. The extra £90 million for counter-terrorism will take the counter-terrorism budget to just shy of £1 billion at £906 million, including £24 million for the firearms that officers need. We must ensure that we use the money invested in our police forces to provide the police with the resources they need to tackle crime.

Knife crime is an issue that unfortunately affects Birmingham and the west midlands more than most areas. I am pleased that we are putting an additional £35 million into the areas that need it most to reduce knife crime, and the £100 million to tackle violent crime.

Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con): In Derby North, we are deeply troubled by knife crime. Does my hon. Friend agree that we must do all we can to tackle knife crime, especially when it involves young people? Does he welcome the youth investment fund—about £500 million, I think—which will be used for work on this issue and help young people?

Gary Sambrook: I thank my hon. Friend and dancing partner for her intervention. That investment is really important. The £500 million will provide 60 new youth centres, 100 mobile facilities and 360 refurbishments of youth centres across the country.

We need to send out two messages. First, if you carry a knife you will be arrested; within 24 hours you will be cautioned or charged, and within a week you will be in a courtroom. Secondly, we are looking at the reasons why young people feel it necessary to carry a knife, because it does not have to be that way. That is why the youth investment fund is really important to local communities across the country.

I am pleased that we are focusing on this issue. Today, I read in the regional news that the Conservative candidate to be police and crime commissioner for the west midlands, Jay Singh-Sohal, has set out his plan to tackle knife crime. I will be pleased to join him on the campaign trail to make sure we get a police and crime commissioner in the west midlands who really knows what is going on and really understands the problems we face as a region.

Unfortunately, I do not have any police stations left in my constituency, because the Labour police and crime commissioner for the west midlands decided to spend most of his resources propping up the city centre station, spending £30 million on refurbishment rather than using the network of local police stations across the region, such as in Longbridge and King’s Norton in my constituency. Those resources and the estates could

have been used far better, rather than concentrating all our resources into the city centre. Two weeks ago, I was pleased to meet some members of my local neighbourhood team, who are doing so much good work across the patch to ensure that police are seen out on the street and are getting involved in community issues. They do difficult work, sometimes in a difficult environment. I take my hat off to them, because I really respect the work they do.

We have heard much today about police forces not having the resources they need, but last year in the west midlands there was a proposal to merge the role of the police and crime commissioner with that of the Mayor for the west midlands. It provided the perfect opportunity to save money and was a sensible proposal, and we should have just got on with it. Unfortunately, despite the fact that 58% of people in the west midlands agreed with the proposals, the Labour leaders of local authorities in the west midlands decided to play silly political games with the consultation and the process, so the two roles are to be kept separate. That is regrettable. I hope that in future we can look again at a merger.

Labour set out its stall in the election—an alternative thankfully rejected by the people of Birmingham Northfield and the rest of the country. It was mostly empty words. Labour voted against last year's settlement and had uncoded plans for recruitment. It tried to say that it would recruit an additional 2,000 officers, but forgot to put the £105 million costing in its manifesto. How can people take such figures seriously when it forgets to put them in its own manifesto? Labour is against the strengthening of police powers and would allow dangerous criminals out early.

It is the Conservatives and this Government who are delivering on the people's priorities, which are that, after Friday, when Brexit is done, we focus all our attention on the NHS, on crime and on schools. That is exactly what this party and the Government are going to do.

3.4 pm

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I pay tribute to the Members who have made their maiden speeches today. I value the experience of Members from different parties and their knowledge of their local constituencies.

Like many Members here today, my own constituency has seen a rise in knife crime and in young people becoming caught up in crime. As others have said, people are experiencing more robberies at knifepoint and more stabbings. There has been an increase in knife injuries coming into West Middlesex University Hospital's A&E department, and last March we had the tragic death at knife point of a young man in Isleworth.

Over the past year, I have engaged in a range of work listening to people and their experiences. I conducted a survey of residents. I discuss knife crime whenever I go to schools, talking to students as well as headteachers and other adults in those schools. I brought together local people at two public events to discuss the problem and to see whether we can find solutions. On knife crime, over the past year I have heard from young people themselves and their parents, and from youth workers, social workers, headteachers, teachers, police officers, councillors, specialist staff who work with young people, and, as I said, the A&E staff at West Middlesex hospital.

What people tell me is that, first of all, they are seeing fewer police on the streets. The cuts to London's policing resulting from the £700 million cut to the London Mayor's police budget has meant that, in effect, our neighbourhood teams are half the size they were eight years ago. Reported crime is too often dropped, and crimes are taking longer and longer to come to a resolution. Young people themselves are scared of being victims; sadly, they are so frightened they end up carrying knives. Young people and parents tell me that drug gangs, using sophisticated mind games based on befriending and misplaced loyalty, are too easily drawing young people into dealing or carrying drugs. Young people and their parents have told me how young people are unwillingly drawn in by the offer of food to somebody who is hungry, by the offer of a place to hang out for somebody who is living in an overcrowded flat, or by the offer of cash to somebody who wants to help their mum out with the weekly shopping. These young people do not wake up one day and decide to be criminals. Those most at risk are those with the least money, the least space and the least capacity—young people with special educational needs or family issues—and they are the most likely to be caught.

The experience of recent years is that in addition to the halving of the visible police presence, we have lost a range of other public services, including the welfare and pastoral support in schools that young people, particularly those experiencing difficulties, need. Local authority funding has been cut, meaning that youth services have had to be cut. Hounslow Council has had to cut almost all mainstream youth services in our borough. Youth workers are often at the frontline, so they know who is hanging out with who, where young people are at risk, which young people are at risk, and where the drug gangs and the serious criminals are drawing them in. They are best placed to provide diversionary activities and positive support to those young people. One headteacher told me this morning about a young person she is worried about. She has tried to report the situation to both social workers and the police, but they are overstretched. They want to help, but they do not have the capacity. These are all examples of the cuts in the public services that we all depend on and need if we are to be free of crime and knife crime.

We have had some good news locally. We have some great police community support officers who really know their communities and their young people. We have had violence prevention work from the London Mayor, which is starting to make a difference. We have had Home Office funding for a peace project with the youth offending team, which is working with schools, and that is positive. As a result of my meetings, parents who are worried about their young people getting caught up in crime are starting to meet together as a support group. However, these little drips are not enough.

I pay tribute to the work of the police officers in our area. They are skilled, dedicated and committed, but they are struggling with the lack of resources and lack of support. They are only an emergency service, and too often a reactive service, and they can tackle crime and its causes only if they have the support of other agencies.

Young people tell me that they do not mind stop-and-search if it is done properly and respectfully, with the policies being carried out properly and the body-worn cameras switched on. The Government, however, must

[*Ruth Cadbury*]

take responsibility for this crime wave after 10 years of austerity in public funding, cutting away all the services that I have outlined and which we need to support young people. We need to take account of the public health experiences in Scotland and other places and have a wraparound public health approach to knife crime, because it works. However, that needs to be adequately supported by a group of services, so that a range of qualified, experienced staff in all services are addressing the problem. Will the Government and the Minister please stop chasing headlines, focus on what works and listen to those involved? We can get tough on crime only if we get tough on the causes of crime, and then we need to invest, invest and invest in the solutions that work.

3.11 pm

Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con): I praise the hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Allan Dorans) for his maiden speech, which gave a positive and full description of his constituency. As a committed Unionist, I look forward to some very lively debate on that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger) gave an incredibly thoughtful and powerful speech, which spoke to the heart. He made a point about a sense of place and identity, which we can all relate to in our constituencies and our lives, and he will be a very valued addition to the Government Benches.

This debate is about policing and crime. Our police are heroes. I have already spoken in this place of the incredible support that my family received from Karen Cocker of South Yorkshire police. I also pay tribute to Angus Hopper and Jamie Riley of Durham constabulary for their personal support over the past few months.

Across my constituency, whether it is in Bishop Auckland, Spennymoor, Barnard Castle or Shildon, local residents overwhelmingly tell me that they want us to take tough action to tackle crime, particularly on things like anti-social behaviour, which has such a sustained impact on people's day-to-day lives. Several times in Spennymoor, a bus in transit has had its windows shattered, with air rifles the suspected weapon. In the last incident, the projectile narrowly missed hitting a passenger. That cannot be allowed to continue. For people out there, cracking down on crime is not rocket science, but a common-sense policy, and that has been championed by the Blue Collar Conservative group, which I am proud to be a part of.

We tackle crime in a variety of ways and a large part of that is through empowering our incredible police. Increasing police numbers is so important and I am delighted that County Durham will receive an additional 68 officers in the first tranche of recruitment. I will, of course, be lobbying for a group of those officers to come to crime hotspots in areas such as Spennymoor to help keep my constituency's streets safe. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns) is right to highlight the plight of rural crime. The additional officers are also welcome to help to support our incredible, award-winning local farm watch in Teesdale to help to crack down on farm theft and other rural crime.

On extra officers, Labour Members say often, "It's not enough". If they were cast in "The Greatest Showman", their favourite song would inevitably be "Never Enough",

because whatever the Government propose, it is never enough. Labour always pledges more, with no transparency over how that will be funded.

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady not accept that the Government that she represents as a Back Bencher have cut police since 2010 by more than 20,000? Does she not want to say that they should take some responsibility for that savage, deliberate and unnecessary cut to policing?

Dehenna Davison: Labour Members seemingly forget that the reason that the purse strings had to be tightened at all was the mess in our public finances that we were left with. We have brought those public finances under control and strengthened our economy, meaning that we can now invest properly but sustainably in our public services, and that is exactly what we are doing.

There will be 68 new officers for County Durham, but let me emphasise that this is only the first tranche of recruitment and there is more to come. This is about not just the number of officers, but making sure that our existing officers feel valued. I am delighted to support the police covenant and the moves to allow special constables to access the full benefits of being members of the Police Federation. Those are all positive steps to support our incredible police.

Something that I reckon I will not say too often in this place is that I agree with the shadow Home Secretary about the need for serious policy on law and order, but I reject strongly her view that her party is the one that will deliver that serious policy. Labour's talk on sentencing is weak and feeble, while we are planning a new sentencing Bill to review sentencing right across the board. As an early part of that, the House debated a new statutory instrument yesterday on ending the automatic halfway release point for serious offenders. I admit that I was a bit disappointed to see so few Labour Members in that debate, although I welcomed the really strong and moving contribution from the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), and her contribution was similar today.

Getting sentencing right is so crucial. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton is right to speak about the importance of protecting our prison officers. Following the recent incident at HMP Deerbolt, I raised this with the Justice Secretary and met the prisons Minister—the Minister of State, Ministry of Justice, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer)—to discuss the need to roll out additional protective equipment to keep our prison officers safe.

As someone whose father was killed through violence, as I have mentioned in this place several times, I spoke yesterday about the need for victims to be represented in the legislative process on crime and justice. On that note, how does the shadow Home Secretary dare accuse Government Members of having disdain for victims of crime? It is a shameful accusation and totally trivialises a debate of such crucial national importance, for the sake of a snappy 10-second social media clip. The victims of violent crime do not want rhetoric; they want action and results. That is why the Government are listening and taking steps to extend stop-and-search powers.

We plan to extend emergency stop-and-search powers only to help to get weapons off our streets and protect our citizens. In 2017-18, stop and search resulted in over

48,000 arrests, with almost 8,000 of those for weapons and firearms. Our proposed changes have been welcomed by many, including the National Police Chiefs Council lead for stop and search and Caroline Shearer, who founded Only Cowards Carry after her 17-year-old son, Jay Whiston, was fatally stabbed in 2012.

The victims and families of the victims who have been affected by violent crime know that it is common sense that stop and search can save injuries and save lives. After all, the job of any Government is to keep their citizens safe, which we as a party recognise and are further acting upon. With 20,000 new police officers, funding for the roll-out of protection through tasers, enhanced but targeted stop-and-search powers, tougher sentences and more, I am proud to support the Government's amendment.

3.18 pm

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Dehenna Davison), who clearly wants the best for her constituents. Unfortunately, like so many in her party, she appears to have forgotten the global financial crisis. The cuts were a choice, ditched when convenient, and they have had a consequence.

Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend not think that such empty soundbites are not appropriate for the Chamber today, on an issue as important as this?

Thangam Debbonaire: Indeed I do, because my constituents, like the constituents of Members across the House, have had to suffer 10 years of cuts.

The Minister seems to expect us to be grateful, but on behalf of the people of Bristol West, I say that we are not. We wanted investment in our police in 2011, 2012 and 2013. We have faced cuts every year. We have seen the cuts, we have felt the consequences, and the Prime Minister's announcement of the growth in police numbers does not make up for it. In Avon and Somerset, it will mean just 403 new officers, but over three years—and we have lost 700 over the last 10.

Meanwhile, crime has not gone down, and the nature of crime has changed, partly as a consequence of other cuts—cuts to drug treatment; cuts to youth services; cuts to mental health provision; cuts across the board. All have had a cost. My constituents are smart people. They can add up, and they are not fooled by being told that we are now going to get some new officers over the next few years.

Of course I am proud that Avon and Somerset police managed to rise to the challenge of those budget cuts, but it is not what I wanted for them, and it is not what I wanted for my constituents, who deserved better. I pay tribute to our police and crime commissioner, Sue Mountstevens, and our chief constable, Andy Marsh, and to every single officer and civilian working in the constabulary of Avon and Somerset, because they have worked so hard to keep us safe; and to the PCSOs, the specials and the officers who put their lives on the line daily.

I am proud that my niece's husband James is a serving police officer in the Dyfed-Powys police force. We are really proud of him and we are grateful to him and all our officers, but they should not have had to work in such conditions. It is the specialist services as

well as the overall numbers—as the Minister said, it is not just about numbers; it is also about specialist services, and that is where a lot of the cuts have fallen. It is not fair; it is not sustainable. It is affecting our safety as civilians and our feelings of safety.

I briefly mention knife crime. Bristol had 1,237 knife crimes in the past 12 months, an 11% increase on the previous year. Like so many other constituencies, we have a knife crime problem, but when the Government first announced a response to knife crime our force was not initially among the seven allocated money; our police and crime commissioner and chief constable had to fight for it. We are grateful for the fact that we have got some now, but we should not have needed to beg for it.

We need long-term certainty. We need more attention to be paid to the other factors in responding to and preventing knife crime, particularly among young people. I hope that every word that my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) said today, and on so many occasions as chair of the Youth Violence Commission, will be heeded.

I am angry, because 10 years of cuts to youth services, 10 years of cuts to other help and support for families, such as Sure Start, domestic violence support and mental health services, and 10 years of cuts to drug and alcohol services have all had consequences, and we are living with them. We are living with drug-related crime, for instance.

Ministers have mentioned their concerns, which I understand. Members across the House have concerns about how we respond to drug crime. Even on the Opposition Benches we are not in agreement. I respect the different points of view, but I would like everyone to understand, when we discuss drug consumption rooms, that we already have a drug consumption room: it is called the streets of Bristol, and it is dangerous for people who consume drugs and dangerous for the bystanders. I would really like the Minister to work with other Ministers to find out what the potential solutions are. I believe they are having some form of drug safety in treatment rooms. The Minister may disagree, but I would really like to know what she thinks.

As in the areas of other police forces, one in three violent crimes in Avon and Somerset area is domestic violence and one in five of homicides is domestic. As my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford said, there is a strong connection between childhood exposure to domestic abuse and other adverse childhood experiences, and future harm and harmful behaviour. It is good that domestic abuse reporting has increased as public tolerance has decreased, and I am really grateful to the Minister for all she has done to champion responses to domestic abuse. I urge her to redouble her efforts to get the Bill back before us, because that had cross-party support. She knows—I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests—that I shall be pressing her on the responses to domestic violence perpetrators. It is not just about current victims; it is about future victims and their children.

However, our entire criminal justice system has suffered under austerity, which was not necessary and has undermined the responses to police work and prevention. I did not want us to create the posts of police and crime commissioners, but I have really appreciated the attention to violence against women, to child sexual exploitation

[Thangam Debbonaire]

and to knife crime that our police and crime commissioner, Sue Mountstevens, and others have shown. She has shown determined, locally focused leadership.

That is the plus side of localism, but on the downside it has many weaknesses, such as fewer economies of scale, and weaker responses to crimes of an international dimension, such as modern slavery and trafficking. It has meant passing the blame for the impact of national cuts to the local police and other services.

I want to mention the Brexit word, briefly; I am not afraid to mention it. I know that the Prime Minister would like it all to be over on Friday, but as we leave the European Union on Friday we will be hampered in the international dimension unless the negotiations for the future relationship prioritise safety and security and data sharing. At the moment, if our police make an arrest, they can share information about risk and gain information about risk with forces across the EU. They can issue a European arrest warrant, which helps to respond to the flight of criminals to other EU nations. I urge the Minister, in her closing remarks, to tell us how the Government will be prioritising, in the future relationship negotiations, those aspects which are about keeping us safe.

Finally, I ask the Minister a few questions. I hope that if she cannot address them in her final remarks, she will perhaps consent to meet me to discuss them. I ask for a focus on the preventive health approach to knife and violent crime. That covers all forms of violent crime: intervention in schools and awareness on safe relationships and the difference between safe and unsafe relationships, as well as long-term, sustainable funding structures for local authorities, youth services and police, because that is what we need to bring the number of serious violent and knife crimes down.

The Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service said in his opening remarks that it was not all about numbers of police officers and he is right, but it is also about the funding of those other services. He cannot duck the consequences indefinitely. I would like a multi-year funding settlement for our police forces, so that they can plan. I would like an acknowledgment—just once—of the damage done by 10 years of unnecessary cuts and the impact on police officers, such as my nephew-in-law and his colleagues and our police across the country, who too often have had to be on single crewing in call-outs and had to deal with the fact that they knew they could not manage all the things they wanted to do. I would like the Minister to commit to an end to the boom-and-bust approach, because our constituents and our police deserve much better than this.

3.26 pm

Dean Russell (Watford) (Con): I would like to thank hon. Members for such a great debate today. I would particularly like to thank the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) for raising the phrase “boom and bust”, which is the reason we have had 10 years of so many challenges. It is because, over the past 10 years, this Government have looked after the coffers that we are able to invest in our brave coppers. It is because this Government have looked after the purses of the taxpayers of this country that we are now able to invest in our doctors and nurses.

But let us be realistic: the reason why this has been done is not because of some spiteful approach to those on the frontline; it is because actually we have been forced into it, and now we are coming out and seeing the light. Let us be honest: the voters in some constituencies may have disagreed, but the rest of the voters across the country saw through the boom and bust.

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is the Government’s handling of the economy in the last 10 years that has allowed us to fund the 20,000 extra police?

Dean Russell: Absolutely. The key point is that it is because of that that we now see conservatism coming back to the fore. We will invest in the heroes on the frontline: the police, the nurses, the doctors and teachers.

If I am honest, that was not what I was going to start my speech with, but I could not resist, given the previous speech. I wanted to say that across Watford, which is of course the best place to live, work and play in the country, we have our own challenges with crime. The issue is often not the act of crime but the fear of it and the follow-on effect. A recent spate of burglaries in Watford has caused concern across local communities. We also have briefings and updates on county lines crime, which is driven most prominently by drugs and is awful for those caught up in it and for the communities damaged by it. There is a bigger issue, however, and that is the challenges facing those caught up in crime. We need to be tough on crime, so that people see it is not the right option, but we also need to support them so they know they have an out—another option.

When I was at university, I worked in the car parks at a local airport, and one thing that stuck with me was doing night shifts. Incredibly, I used to patrol the car parks at night—not that the criminals found me particularly frightening. I remember meeting families just back from holiday—two parents, two kids, freezing cold in T-shirts, even though it might be winter here—and arriving to pick up their car, only to find it is not there, but I am there telling them, “I’m sorry, but it’s been stolen”. It ruins holidays and leaves memories that linger for a long time.

We forget sometimes that the police being there and being a deterrent is important. As I mentioned yesterday, we often also forget to put victims first, which means having the right police on the frontline. I urge the Government to make sure that the 20,000 extra police officers are community police officers out on the street. It is no good just having them in back offices, although that is important from an intelligence perspective. When the police are out there, they are not just police officers; they are people to have conversations with and role models for young people, who can look at them and aspire to be not in a criminal gang but a part of the community, helping to stop the problems around them. It also means having conversations and getting that intelligence to know what is happening on the streets and in homes.

There are all sorts of abuses of the system—personal abuses, awful abuse of individuals and abuses of the criminal justice system—and we need to tackle them all. When I speak to the police, they often tell me that one of their biggest challenges is not just that they cannot get out and do the work because they are spending

hours every day doing paperwork, which is a waste of their time, but that they are getting stuck in hospital wards and other places because, having caught somebody, they then have to sit with them for hours waiting for them to be processed. That means that they are not out on the streets catching and deterring criminals. Instead, they are caught in a trap of time.

As part of this approach, we must think not just about the numbers—the 20,000 extra police officers—but about the time they put into their work, so let us multiply that figure by the eight hours a day they spend deterring and catching criminals. That would also help people on the street—our voters, our constituents, the public—to feel safe. Ultimately, is that not the goal of the Government? Is it not our role to make sure that every individual across the country feels safe and knows that their children and elderly parents are safe and will be for years to come. So I applaud the Government's approach. It is the first brilliant move in making sure we have safer streets and a safer Britain. I applaud them for moving in the right direction for this country.

3.32 pm

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): I welcome any increase in police funding, of course, but we have to look at the reality: since 2010, we have lost 20,000 police officers, as well as PCSOs and support staff, which has had a huge impact on communities across the country and in my area. My area is quite unique, certainly in Wales, in that it spans two police authorities: the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough, under South Wales police, in the upper Rhymney Valley part of my constituency, and Gwent police. We have those two perspectives, therefore, and over the past few years we have seen a negative impact on policing across the area.

Even after the first year of the new recruitment, South Wales police will still be down 161 officers and Gwent police will be down 129 officers compared with 2010. Even when we reach the full recruitment the Government are planning, they will still have fewer officers than they inherited in 2010 from the last Labour Government. It is hugely disappointing, when we look at things in the round. Funding for youth services across the country has fallen by 70% since 2010. Together with the reduction in police numbers and the cuts to other areas of community safety, this has had a negative impact on our communities.

Local authorities have been forced to make these cuts because of Tory austerity. As we have heard a number of times this afternoon, cuts have consequences. Let us be absolutely clear: austerity was always a political choice. Other factors include a reduction of almost half—from £145 million to £72 million—in the funding for youth offending teams since 2010, and a 68% increase in the number of knife offences in England and Wales. Taken together, those issues paint a depressing picture of what we have seen under this Tory Government since 2010.

It is good to hear, at last, an admission from Ministers that allowing the police grant to be cut by a third in recent years was a big mistake on the Government's part, but they must fill that funding gap as well as providing additional officers. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens) about the need for the Home Office to consider providing specific funding for Cardiff as the capital city. Although my constituency is some miles from Cardiff, the fact

that South Wales police has to spend some £4 million on its responsibilities to Cardiff as the capital has a knock-on impact on it, and on other constituencies throughout the South Wales police area.

The question of the apprenticeship levy is also a cause for ongoing concern. I should be grateful if the Minister confirmed that she will provide money for police officer graduate apprenticeship training for the four Welsh forces, because the uncertainty has gone on for far too long.

Despite the big financial and other challenges, as a result of the hard work of local officers we have some positive news. We still have a commitment to neighbourhood policing in Wales, which—as was mentioned by my hon. Friends the Members for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) and for Newport East (Jessica Morden)—is largely due to the Labour Welsh Government's commitment to continue to fund 500 PCSOs across Wales, although their own budget has been cut by some £4 billion a year since 2010.

South Wales police in particular has been doing excellent work in tackling domestic violence, and I hope that the Minister will join me in congratulating the South Wales police and crime commissioner on his foresight in promoting the DRIVE programme to tackle the perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse. Research published by Bristol University last week demonstrates the value of that approach in reducing violent incidents, and the team in Merthyr Tydfil is a particular success story. The commissioner, Alun Michael, has told me that he is so pleased with the work of Safer Merthyr Tydfil, and similar work in Cardiff, that he and the chief constable, Matt Jukes, are determined to roll it out to every part of the South Wales police area. Intervening with perpetrators as well as supporting victims helps to prevent misery for women and children, while also reducing demand on the NHS, courts and councils as well as the police. That positive approach is having good results for the people I represent.

I urge the Minister to consider the shortfall in the pension fund, which equates to some 5,000 police officers, and could therefore have a really positive impact in increasing the number of officers across the country.

Other Members have paid tribute to their local police authorities. I want to pay tribute to both of mine, South Wales and Gwent, and to thank them for all the work they do in communities throughout my constituency. I particularly thank them for their support for me and my staff in recent months. Most other Members have experienced similar support.

Let me now return to the issue of frontline policing, and urge the Government to recruit an additional 2,000 frontline officers to enhance the approach to community policing across the country. It is important to stress the effectiveness of community and neighbourhood policing in tackling the causes of crime and antisocial behaviour. Tackling what is sometimes perceived as low-level crime is effective in stopping the escalation of crime and disorder.

I urge the Government—and all Members—to support the motion.

3.38 pm

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): This has been a fantastic debate, featuring some very experienced and well-rounded views and speeches from Members in all

[*Louise Haigh*]

parts of the House. We have been blessed with two excellent maiden speeches. As a former special constable in the Metropolitan police, I am delighted to welcome another former Metropolitan police officer. I hope that, in future, the hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Allan Dorans) will regale us with some tales from his days as a detective inspector. He gave a passionate account of his constituency, and I know that he will serve his constituents well in this place—as, I have no doubt, will the hon. Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger), who made an articulate, thoughtful and interesting speech. It is not often that the House sits in silence, and I congratulate the hon. Gentleman.

We also heard excellent speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens), for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones) and for Newport East (Jessica Morden), all of whom spoke about the Welsh Government's work in securing neighbourhood policing and a commitment to PCSOs despite brutal budget cuts over the last 10 years. In particular, they put forward really thoughtful defences of the work of police staff and the important roles that they play. We heard an excellent speech, as ever, from my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch), who is seeking to build on her work and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) on the protect the protectors campaign, which, unfortunately has not borne the fruit that we would have liked it to over the past few months. My hon. Friend made some important points about pensions and the disincentives for progression within the police, which I hope the Minister will respond to when she sums up.

The hon. Members for Fareham (Suella Braverman), for Mansfield (Ben Bradley), for Bolsover (Mark Fletcher), for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns) and for Birmingham, Northfield (Gary Sambrook) spoke about their constituency experiences of antisocial behaviour, burglary and knife crime. It is welcome to hear Members from the Conservative Benches speaking openly about these issues in their constituencies and, in some cases, to hear their Damascene conversions to the need for additional officers on the beat in our communities. The hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Dehenna Davison) paid a welcome tribute to South Yorkshire police and the Durham constabulary, with which I would agree, although I am afraid I did not agree with much else in her speech. The hon. Member for Watford (Dean Russell) made an important point about the need for the criminal justice system to put victims at the heart of the system, which unfortunately has not always been done over successive Governments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) made a typically powerful speech on the need for a long-term public health approach—an issue that was, as she said, conspicuous by its absence from the Minister's opening remarks. I hope that when the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), sums up, she will say something about the continued need for the Government to commit to a public health approach. I also agree with what my hon. Friend said about how important the “Victoria Derbyshire” show has been in the campaign for the Government to commit to a public health approach. The hon. Member for Milton Keynes North (Ben Everitt) spoke powerfully

about the particular types of crime in his constituency, including violent crime and rural crime, which often mask organised criminality.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) spoke typically about her experience and expertise in child sexual exploitation and her disappointment, which I share, in the Government's failure to come forward with a national CSE strategy and in South Yorkshire police's unwillingness to name the officer that the Independent Office for Police Conduct found had repeatedly let down CSE survivors. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) gave a barnstorming speech on the consequences of officer loss and of cuts to Sure Start, drug services and mental health services. As always, she made a passionate case for drug consumption rooms. My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) also made a compelling speech about the cost of losing neighbourhood policing from our communities.

I should like to start on a positive note by welcoming the investment. We have been calling for it for some time, and it offers a generational opportunity to change the make-up and composition of our police with what has the potential to be a watershed moment for diversity in policing. At the current rate of progress, the Metropolitan police will remain disproportionately white for another 100 years. There is not a single chief constable from a black or minority ethnic community, whose representation among the senior leadership is pitifully low. During the last major recruitment under the last Labour Government, diversity increased but not fast enough. We cannot wait a century for the police force to reflect our society, so I would be keen to hear what specific plans the Policing Minister has in place to ensure that this recruitment round will allow diversity to increase far beyond where we are today. Policing can never be effective unless officers understand the communities that they police, but sadly, that understanding and that presence in our communities have been profoundly undermined by the last 10 years of austerity.

There can be no doubt that the consequences of the past decade have been severe: 21,000 officers, 16,000 police staff and 6,800 PCSOs have all gone, and the consequence of those choices—and they were choices—has been the crime that we have seen rising nationwide year on year for the last seven years. Knife crime is at record levels, and police-recorded violent crime has more than doubled. Swingeing cuts across the criminal justice system have led to the lowest-ever prosecution rates across all offences, and in the words of the End Violence Against Women Coalition, rape has been effectively decriminalised, as just 1.4% of offences are prosecuted. There can rarely have been a more challenging climate for our police or a more fundamental failure of the last three Conservative Governments to keep their citizens safe and to deliver justice. In that context, it is extremely welcome to witness the Government's recent conversion to the necessity of recruiting additional officers. However, the know-how that experienced officers have brought to the job over the past 10 years is gone for good.

Ten years of unnecessary cuts have permanently changed the picture of crime. The former Deputy Commissioner of the Metropolitan police, whom the Minister mentioned earlier, found that fraudsters “operate with impunity” because the police are not adequately equipped to investigate cases, and millions of victims are being failed. In our

towns and cities, ruthless organised criminal gangs now trade children as part of a profitable enterprise. The Children's Commissioner estimates that 27,000 children between the ages of 10 and 17 are part of a gang, and this is about not only police cuts, as we have heard time and again, but the soaring numbers of children who are in care, who are homeless or living in temporary accommodation, who are excluded from school, and who cannot rely on youth services or social services. All that has left them lacking in resilience and support and horribly vulnerable to the exploitation of gangs. It will take more than recruiting officers, as welcome as that recruitment is, to bear down on the complex picture of crime in this country.

What is more, under current plans officer numbers will not even be restored to 2010 levels. Resources will be allocated via the outdated and inadequate funding formula, which the Government have been promising to reform since 2015. The Policing Minister himself said:

"For many years it has been an unspoken secret—something that senior police officers sniggered about behind their hands—that the formula that was put in place 10 years ago was so manifestly unfair, but nevertheless politically sensitive, that politicians would never have the courage to meddle with it. During the four years that I was deputy Mayor for policing, there were constant complaints about the police formula and nobody really had the *cojones*, if that is parliamentary language, to get a grip on it."—[*Official Report*, 4 November 2015; Vol. 601, c. 1060.]

Does the Minister wonder whether using what he called a "manifestly unfair" method to fund his recruitment pledge is the right thing to do? When will he get the *cojones* to reform it?

In the absolute best-case scenario, where 20,000 of the new recruits go to local forces, 22 of the 43 forces, many experiencing the most punishing levels of violent crime, will not see their numbers restored. The reality is that the spending review confirmed that territorial police officers will not be the whole picture and that other national priorities will also take their share, which would leave a staggering 25 police forces down on where they were 10 years ago: Greater Manchester down 1,000, Hampshire down 700, Merseyside down 600, Staffordshire down 400, and the West Midlands down 1,100.

Across the length and breadth of this country, communities that will have heard the Prime Minister's promise to restore police numbers are set to be badly let down. Is this not fundamentally a question of trust? Are those not the same communities that heard the Prime Minister's promise to invest in them and then witnessed the local authority fair funding review cut £320 million from hard-pressed councils? Will those communities not have the right to ask whether promises made seem, for this Prime Minister, harder to keep?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I call the Minister.

3.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): May I welcome you to your position, Mr Deputy Speaker, and thank colleagues across the House for their contributions during this important debate on crime and policing? Members on both sides have spoken powerfully about their constituents' concerns and, indeed, about the sad stories of those who have fallen victim to crime. One line from my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Ben Everitt) struck home: his home town has seen four murders in

10 weeks. Those families and other families across the country are having to live with their terrible losses, and we all know that an act of violence may last no more than a few seconds, but it leaves a destructive legacy of human tragedy. We in this place will never forget that, which is why the Prime Minister made it clear that cutting crime and keeping our streets safe is an absolute priority for this Government—a point backed up forcefully by my new colleagues, my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Northfield (Gary Sambrook) and for Bishop Auckland (Dehenna Davison). The Government's commitment to cut crime and keep our streets safe is absolute.

However, there remains no short cut to solving violent crime. We need a clear, well-funded plan to stop violence where it appears, to identify the repeat offenders and knife carriers more likely to be involved, and to address the root causes of violence, giving young people a future that does not end on the point of a blade.

Ms Lyn Brown: Will the Minister come to update the House on the work of the National Crime Agency and what it is doing about the so-called county lines? County lines have almost become an immovable part of our landscape, and it should not be like that. We need to do something to protect our children from exploitation in the pursuit of profit.

Victoria Atkins: The hon. Lady is a real advocate for her constituency, which is sadly so often blighted by serious violence. The National Crime Agency, of course, conducts a national threat assessment, and I am happy to update the House on its report either orally or through other means.

We owe it to our young people to offer them a better future and to end the pervasive sense of hopelessness that drives so many into the arms of criminality. This principle was eloquently articulated in the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger). Representing Devizes, he is perhaps the only Member of this House who can call the great historic monument of Stonehenge a "vulgar upstart." One sentence of his speech struck home with me:

"Our love of our country begins with love of our neighbourhoods."

He brings to the House his experience of working with young people in prisons and of the vital role of independent civil society organisations in helping to cut crime and in helping those young people, which I will address later in my speech.

We have heard a lot today about the Government's plan to bring 20,000 extra officers—new officers—into police forces across the country. One of the first acts of this Government was to make that pledge, and the work has already started. I am delighted that all forces have joined us in meeting this commitment to the public and have prioritised recruitment. Some £700 million from the police settlement will be made available to police and crime commissioners to help forces recruit the first tranche of 6,000 officers by the end of March 2021.

Jo Stevens: Will the Minister talk to her colleagues in the Ministry of Justice about the prison officers who had to be recruited after thousands were removed from the Prison Service? There are real problems with recruitment and retention, and these are very inexperienced officers. The danger is that the same could happen with this recruitment of new police officers.

Victoria Atkins: This is a whole-system response, and the Prime Minister has made clear his commitment to ensuring investment in the Prison Service, the prison estate and increased police numbers, exactly as the hon. Lady says, to ensure that the criminal justice system as a whole addresses the public's needs.

The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Allan Dorans) made an interesting maiden speech, and I thank him for his long service as a senior police officer in London, the great capital city of our great United Kingdom. He made some interesting points about the importance of mental health treatment and the impact it can have on police forces.

Opposition Members have raised the issue of cuts, and some raised it with anger and power. I hesitate to repeat the sound points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Dean Russell), but we have had to make these very difficult decisions because of the previous Labour Administration's mismanagement. By way of illustration, £1 in every £4 of Government spending in 2010 was borrowed; it is now around £1 in every £30.

That is a significant difference, and it means that we are now able to announce the biggest increase in police funding for a decade. For the second year in a row, we have issued a record-breaking rise in our police settlement. With the help of police and crime commissioners, the total funding available to the policing system next year will increase by over £1 billion. For those worried about what that means in their local area, it will work out at less than 20p a week for the average band D household.

The increased funding will help to tackle the crimes about which the public are most worried. We are targeting high-harm crimes, with £150 million to fight organised crime and, in particular, to crack down on online child abuse. The hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) can always be relied on to continue her campaign to ensure that child sexual abuse in her constituency is tackled properly. I do not see her in her place, but I am happy to meet her, because the issues she raises are so complex. The shadow Home Secretary and the shadow Policing Minister raised the issue of sexual violence. We are conducting an end-to-end rape review to see what is happening in the criminal justice system and in the police investigation of sexual violence, because we all want the rates of prosecution and investigation to improve.

We are also getting tough on serious violence, with an extra £39 million, including £20 million to tackle the county lines gangs terrorising our towns and communities. Several colleagues mentioned the impact that the illegal drugs market has, particularly with county lines gangs and violence, and I hope they will be reassured to know that the national county lines co-ordination centre has already arrested more than 2,500 people and helped to safeguard more than 3,000 vulnerable people, underlining how ruthless these gangs are that operate these county lines.

This is not just about money; it is about how we spend it, too. The Queen's Speech announced that we will be introducing a new serious violence Bill, which will place new duties on agencies to work collaboratively and put in place plans to prevent and reduce serious violence, and will strengthen stop-and-search powers. The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) raised the issue of violence reduction units. We are

investing £35 million in VRUs to ensure that local solutions are found to local crime problems, and of course the serious violence Bill will help to support that effort.

My hon. Friends the Members for Fareham (Suella Braverman) and for Bolsover (Mark Fletcher) made the point that their constituents are worried about not just serious violence, but other crimes such as antisocial behaviour, burglaries and car theft. We have launched a £25 million safer streets fund to support areas that are disproportionately affected by acquisitive crime, and the fund will provide investment in well-evidenced interventions to prevent crime from happening in the first place.

My hon. Friends the Members for Mansfield (Ben Bradley), for Bolsover and for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns) rightly raised the issue of public confidence in the criminal justice system. To ensure we have that, we must look at every aspect to ensure that the criminal justice system works for victims, witnesses and the most vulnerable. Alongside the royal commission set out in the Conservative manifesto, we are working across government to ensure that all parts deliver. Only yesterday, the House of Commons considered a statutory instrument on extending automatic release for the most violent offenders from halfway through their sentence to two thirds of the way through it.

We can all agree that prevention and early intervention are key to stopping violent crime and other types of crime. Last year, we passed the Offensive Weapons Act 2019, which introduced new laws giving police extra powers to seize dangerous weapons. It also included knife crime preventions orders, which will provide an additional tool for police to steer adults and young people away from serious violence before conviction. The early intervention youth fund of £22 million is supporting 40 projects endorsed by police and crime commissioners across England and Wales until March this year. We also have the youth endowment fund of £200 million locked in for 10 years, which will offer targeted intervention and support to those young people most at risk of serious violence.

We also need to look to the future of our young people. Last year, I met young former gang members, articulate young men who were clear that they had made bad choices. Listening to them, I could see the difference that work and training opportunities could make to their lives, so I am working closely with businesses, both national and local, to see what more we can do to give employment and development opportunities to young people at risk of being involved in violent crime, giving them a chance and a choice to walk away from crime. Because when a young person goes into a hospital, I do not want them to be there as a victim of knife crime, I want them to be there as an aspiring neurosurgeon or cardiologist. We need to show young people that there is an alternative—to offer them real opportunities to divert them away from crime and improve their life chances—because crime is not an ungovernable law of nature. This is not an insurmountable challenge. Now that we have a Government with the ambition, resources and will to succeed, I truly believe that we can stem the violence and offer vulnerable young people a path to a better life.

Question put (Standing Order No. 31(2)). That the original words stand part of the Question.

The House divided: Ayes 224, Noes 330.

Division No. 25]

[4 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Tahir
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella (*Proxy vote cast by Peter Kyle*)
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendry, Drew
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana

Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Mr Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah (*Proxy vote cast by Kate Osamor*)
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Reeves, Ellie (*Proxy vote cast by Bambos Charalambous*)
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Liz Twist and
 Colleen Fletcher

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Ahmad Khan, Imran
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Kemi (*Proxy vote cast by Leo Docherty*)
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham

Braverman, Suella	Fletcher, Mark	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Quin, Jeremy
Brereton, Jack	Fletcher, Nick	Knight, Julian	Quince, Will
Bridgen, Andrew	Foster, Kevin	Kruger, Danny	Randall, Tom
Brine, Steve	Fox, rh Dr Liam	Kwarteng, rh Kwasi	Redwood, rh John
Bristow, Paul	Francois, rh Mr Mark	Lamont, John	Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Britcliffe, Sara	Frazer, Lucy	Largan, Robert	Richards, Nicola
Browne, Anthony	Freeman, George	Leadsom, rh Andrea	Richardson, Angela
Bruce, Fiona	Freer, Mike	Levy, Ian	Roberts, Rob
Buchan, Felicity	Fuller, Richard	Lewer, Andrew	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Buckland, rh Robert	Fysh, Mr Marcus	Lewis, rh Brandon	Robinson, Gavin
Burghart, Alex	Garnier, Mark	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Robinson, Mary
Burns, rh Conor	Ghani, Ms Nusrat	Loder, Chris	Rosindell, Andrew
Butler, Rob	Gibb, rh Nick	Logan, Mark	Ross, Douglas
Cairns, rh Alun	Gibson, Peter	Longhi, Marco	Rowley, Lee
Carter, Andy	Gideon, Jo	Lopez, Julia (<i>Proxy vote cast by Lee Rowley</i>)	Russell, Dean
Cartlidge, James	Glen, John	Lopresti, Jack	Rutley, David
Cash, Sir William	Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Lord, Mr Jonathan	Sambrook, Gary
Cates, Miriam	Gove, rh Michael	Loughton, Tim	Saxby, Selaine
Caulfield, Maria	Graham, Richard	Mackinlay, Craig	Scully, Paul
Chalk, Alex	Gray, James	Mackrory, Cheryllyn	Seely, Bob
Chishti, Rehman	Grayling, rh Chris	Macleane, Rachel	Selous, Andrew
Churchill, Jo	Green, Chris	Mak, Alan	Shannon, Jim
Clark, rh Greg	Green, rh Damian	Malthouse, Kit	Shapps, rh Grant
Clarke, Theo	Griffith, Andrew	Mangnall, Anthony	Sharma, rh Alok
Clarke-Smith, Brendan	Griffiths, Kate	Mann, Scott	Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Clarkson, Chris	Grundy, James	Marson, Julie	Simmonds, David
Cleverly, rh James	Gullis, Jonathan	May, rh Mrs Theresa	Skidmore, rh Chris
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Halfon, rh Robert	Mayhew, Jerome	Smith, Chloe
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse	Hall, Luke	Maynard, Paul	Smith, Greg
Colburn, Elliot	Hammond, Stephen	McCartney, Jason	Smith, Henry
Collins, Damian	Hancock, rh Matt	McCartney, Karl	Smith, Royston
Costa, Alberto	Hands, rh Greg	McVey, rh Esther	Solloway, Amanda
Courts, Robert	Harper, rh Mr Mark	Menzies, Mark	Spencer, Dr Ben
Coutinho, Claire	Harris, Rebecca	Merriman, Huw	Spencer, rh Mark
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey	Harrison, Trudy	Metcalfe, Stephen	Stafford, Alexander
Crabb, rh Stephen	Hart, rh Simon	Millar, Robin	Stephenson, Andrew
Crosbie, Virginia	Hayes, rh Sir John	Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Stevenson, Jane
Crouch, Tracey	Heald, rh Sir Oliver	Milling, Amanda	Stevenson, John
Daly, James	Heappey, James	Mills, Nigel	Stewart, Bob
Davies, David T. C.	Henderson, Gordon	Mohindra, Gagan	Stewart, Iain
Davies, Gareth	Henry, Darren	Moore, Damien	Streeter, Sir Gary
Davies, Dr James	Higginbotham, Antony	Moore, Robbie	Stride, rh Mel
Davies, Mims	Hinds, rh Damian	Mordaunt, rh Penny	Stuart, Graham
Davies, Philip	Hoare, Simon	Morris, Anne Marie	Sturdy, Julian
Davis, rh Mr David	Hollinrake, Kevin	Morris, David	Sunak, rh Rishi
Davison, Dehenna	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Morris, James	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Dinenage, Caroline	Holloway, Adam	Morrissey, Joy	Syms, Sir Robert
Dines, Miss Sarah	Holmes, Paul	Morton, Wendy	Thomas, Derek
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Howell, Paul	Mullan, Dr Kieran	Timpson, Edward
Docherty, Leo	Huddleston, Nigel	Mumby-Croft, Holly	Tolhurst, Kelly
Donelan, Michelle	Hughes, Eddie	Mundell, rh David	Tomlinson, Justin
Double, Steve	Hunt, Jane	Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Tomlinson, Michael
Dowden, rh Oliver	Hunt, rh Jeremy	Murrison, rh Dr Andrew	Tracey, Craig
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Hunt, Tom	Neill, Sir Robert	Trott, Laura
Drax, Richard	Jack, rh Mr Alister	Nokes, rh Caroline	Truss, rh Elizabeth
Drummond, Mrs Flick	Javid, rh Sajid	Norman, rh Jesse	Tugendhat, Tom
Duddridge, James	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	O'Brien, Neil	Vara, Mr Shailesh
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain	Jenkin, Sir Bernard	Offord, Dr Matthew	Wakeford, Christian
Dunne, rh Philip	Jenkinson, Mark	Opperman, Guy	Walker, Sir Charles
Eastwood, Mark	Jenkyns, Mrs Andrea	Parish, Neil	Walker, Mr Robin
Edwards, Ruth	Jenrick, rh Robert	Patel, rh Priti	Wallis, Dr Jamie
Ellis, rh Michael	Johnson, Dr Caroline	Paterson, rh Mr Owen	Warman, Matt
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	Johnson, Gareth	Pawsey, Mark	Watling, Giles
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie	Johnston, David	Penning, rh Sir Mike	Webb, Suzanne
Eustice, George	Jones, Andrew	Penrose, John	Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Evans, Dr Luke	Jones, rh Mr David	Percy, Andrew	Whittaker, Craig
Evennett, rh Sir David	Jones, Fay	Philp, Chris	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Everitt, Ben	Jones, Mr Marcus	Pincher, rh Christopher	Wiggin, Bill
Fabricant, Michael	Jupp, Simon	Pow, Rebecca	Wild, James
Farris, Laura	Kawczynski, Daniel	Prentis, Victoria	Williams, Craig
Fell, Simon	Kearns, Alicia	Pritchard, Mark	Williamson, rh Gavin
Fletcher, Katherine	Keegan, Gillian		Wood, Mike

Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Young, Jacob
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Maggie Throup and
Tom Pursglove

Question accordingly negated.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 31 (2)),
That the proposed words be there added.

Question agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to (Standing Order No. 31(2)).

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the Government's commitment to the people's priorities to drive down crime in all its forms including serious and violent crime; further welcomes the Government's commitment to recruit 20,000 additional police officers and increase police funding to its highest level in over a decade, including over £100 million to tackle serious violence; and welcomes the Government's intention to bring forward the necessary legislation which will provide police officers with the powers and tools they need to bring criminals to justice and give victims a greater voice.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Transport Secretary has just today put out a written statement about the nationalisation of Northern Rail. This is a matter of huge interest to Members of Parliament. I wonder whether you and your office have had any notification of whether there is a plan to have an oral statement given to Members. I note that the company that has lost the franchise, Arriva, is the same company that only a few months ago was given the east midlands main line franchise, so this is a matter of great concern. Can you tell us whether you have been notified that Members will get an opportunity to scrutinise this important matter?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Thank you very much for that point of order. I have not been given any notification that the Secretary of State for Transport or any other Minister intends to make an oral statement on this particular matter. However, I advise the hon. Gentleman that it is Transport questions tomorrow, so if there is not an oral statement, at least he and other Members will have an opportunity to question Transport Ministers then.

Homelessness

4.16 pm

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes with concern that the number of people sleeping rough on the streets of England has more than doubled since 2010 and that the number of homeless children in temporary accommodation has risen to 127,000; further notes that the number of people dying homeless in England and Wales has risen to 726 people a year; recognises that by contrast there was an unprecedented fall in homelessness under a Labour Government by 2010; and calls on the Government to take action to end rough sleeping and tackle the root causes of rising homelessness starting by making 8,000 homes available for those with a history of rough sleeping, restoring funding for local housing allowance, and re-investing in local homelessness services, including £100m a year for emergency accommodation to save lives this winter.

This is our first Opposition day of the new Parliament, and it is fitting that we are debating the country's homelessness crisis. It is fitting, too, that so many Members from all parties and all parts of the country want to speak. The measure of any country is the way it treats its most vulnerable citizens. We are proud of Britain, but it shames us all that tonight people will be sleeping rough on the streets in almost every town and city. Any patriot knows that the social contract at the heart of our country means that we can never accept people wanting for something as basic as a permanent roof over their head.

Last year, 726 people died homeless in a country as decent and well-off as ours; in Britain in the 21st century. That does indeed shame us all, but most of all it shames Conservative Ministers over the past 10 years. This is a Government who are failing on homelessness. This is a Government in denial about the root causes of homelessness. This is a Government with no proper plan to fix the crisis that they themselves have caused.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for bringing this incredibly important debate to the House and for referring to the number of people who died while homeless. David Fuller died sleeping rough in Chesterfield at Christmas in 2017. Is it not the case that every single death of that sort is not only a tragedy but a travesty, and an avoidable travesty if only the Government would take the actions they need to take in building the number of houses we need and having a welfare policy that does not punish the most vulnerable people in our country?

John Healey: My hon. Friend is right. I believe that Members on both sides of the House will tell this afternoon of some of the local and individual tragedies behind the national statistics. He is quite right that every one is a tragedy and every one is a travesty. Many are preventable. It cannot be acceptable for any of us in this House, in this day and age, that over 700 people died homeless in our country.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I entirely agree with the right hon. Gentleman. Conservatives have every wish to see the end of homelessness, just as his party does, and Ministers are now making more money available. What advice would he give Ministers on how best to spend that money to achieve our shared objective?

John Healey: Wishes are not enough. The right hon. Gentleman has been around long enough to know that it is important to will the means. He has also been around long enough to remember that in 1997, when I was elected, Labour took on a country where homelessness was high and rising, mass rough sleeping was widespread, and tent cities were common in parts of central London, directly as a result of deep cuts to social security and council programmes over the preceding 18 Conservative years.

I say to those on the Treasury Bench: do what we did before—do what was done under Labour, because we turned it round. We turned it round with groundbreaking legislation, new funding, greater prevention and a taskforce led from the top by the Prime Minister. That is what led to homelessness charities describing what they said was an unprecedented fall in homelessness by 2010, with rough sleeping down by around three quarters.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): One way we could stop the rise in homelessness is by addressing the concerns about universal credit. Just this week, Hull City Council published a report which says that rent arrears are at a wholly unsustainable level. Three quarters of tenants on universal credit are behind with their rent, and they are at increased risk of eviction. One way that the Government could deal with the homelessness problem is to address the failings of universal credit.

John Healey: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As I said, this is a Government in denial about the root causes of high and rising homelessness, and she puts her finger on a very important root cause. It used to be the case that government in Britain was based on evidence—we had evidence-based policy making—but all the evidence about universal credit is that it leads to higher levels of debt and higher levels of rent arrears, and of course higher levels of rent arrears lead to higher levels of homelessness.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way; he is being very generous and making a compelling speech. As he rightly says, this issue was dealt with by the last Labour Government successfully, and the reason for the return of high levels of rough sleeping and homelessness is a return to the ideology that the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) favours. Office for National Statistics data show that the average age of the estimated 641 homeless males who died in 2018 was 44. The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government is 38 years of age. I wonder how we as a country can stomach that sort of statistic.

John Healey: My hon. Friend is right. This shames us all—in government, in opposition and across the country. We need a new national mission to tackle homelessness, not just a new determination from Government. It cannot be done without Government. The free market solutions that we have too often seen over the last 10 years have failed—indeed, we have seen failure on every front on homelessness over the last 10 years.

James Cartledge (South Suffolk) (Con): There is a real danger with political point scoring on this, particularly in venerating the previous Labour Government. In May

1997, the average home in England was worth £62,000. Ten years later, it was £188,000—a threefold increase. This is an affordability problem at root. No one is in denial about that. Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that there has been a huge and unsustainable rise in the cost of accommodation under successive Governments?

John Healey: Quite honestly, I do not know where to start. For the thousands of people who will sleep out tonight, the level of the housing market is a long way from their concern. If the hon. Gentleman does not like the points that I am making and regards them as political point scoring, let me give him some straight facts. Directly as a result of Ministers' decisions over the last 10 years, 86,000 households are now homeless and in temporary accommodation—up 71%; 127,000 children have no home—up 75%—and many are placed in temporary accommodation miles from their school, their friends and their community; and 4,600 people are sleeping rough on the streets—up 165%. Of course, every charity working in the homeless field and every expert knows that this is a huge undercount of the true scale of street homelessness. Just today, in a new report from St Mungo's, we learn that 12,000 people who were homeless last year also went without the drug or alcohol addiction help they needed.

At a time when perhaps some of the old certainties in politics appear to be in flux, one thing is certain and one thing remains true: the legacy of every Conservative Government is high homelessness, and the job of every Labour Government is to fix the problem.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend also believe that the rise in homelessness is connected with the continuing fall in the number of social housing properties, which actually fell by a further 17,000 in the last year alone?

John Healey: I do indeed. The Government published statistics yesterday that, in a sense, show the very scale of the point my hon. Friend rightly makes. When I stood on the other side of the Chamber as Labour's last Housing Minister in 2009, 120,000 more social rented homes were let in that year than last year. That is an indicator of how short social housing is and how chronic the crisis that we face is.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

John Healey: I am going to make some progress now because so many hon. Members on both sides want to speak.

Our homelessness crisis now, as it was in the 1990s, is the direct result of decisions taken by Conservative Ministers over the previous decade. There have been 13 separate cuts to housing benefit, including the hated bedroom tax, and the breaking of the link between the level of housing benefit and rents for private renters. Some £1 billion a year has been cut from local homelessness services. There are almost 9,000 fewer homeless hostel beds now, at a time when they have never been needed more. We see £2,200 extra a year for average private rents, with no action from the Government to protect private renters either from eviction or from huge rent hikes.

Only 6,287 new social rented homes were built in this country last year. That is the second lowest year since the second world war, with the lowest being two years before that. If anyone doubts the significance of the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck), in Labour's last year in government we built nearly 40,000 new social rented homes. If the Conservatives had only kept building those homes at the same rate as Labour did, we would now have in this country an extra 200,000 social rented homes, which is more than enough for every household homeless and in temporary accommodation; more than enough for every person sleeping rough on the streets; and more than enough for every individual in every homeless hostel across the country.

After 10 years, the hard truth is that homelessness is high and rising, and what the Government are doing is not working. Based on the Government's own statistics, at the current rate of progress, Ministers will not end rough sleeping in this country before 2082. On current progress, they will not even bring the level of rough sleeping back to the level it was in 2010 for nearly 40 years. Meanwhile, the number of households that are homeless and the number of children who are homeless continue to rise.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): At my surgeries, homelessness and housing dominate among the issues people come to see me about. Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that, as well as building social homes, the Government also need to increase the local housing allowance?

John Healey: I have bad news for my hon. Friend. I hope she was not listening to Ministers recently when they said that they are ending the benefits freeze and that housing benefit will rise again. In April, housing benefit will rise at the level of the consumer prices index, which is 1.7%. In my hon. Friend's constituency, many people, both in work and out, who rely on housing benefit in the private sector—the local housing allowance—will have seen over the past two years the Government putting in rises of 3% through their targeted affordability fund. However, instead of a 3% rise next year, people will get a 1.7% rise; instead of an end to the benefits freeze, they will get rises at a lower rate. What the Government will not say is that that fund goes with the end of the benefits freeze, and in areas such as that of my hon. Friend, where rental pressures are highest, people in private rented accommodation will feel the tightest pinch. At best that is underhand; at worst it is simply dishonest.

The bad news for all new Government Back Benchers is that their Ministers and Government have no proper plan to fix the homelessness crisis. The good news, however, is that there is a plan that would end rough sleeping within a Parliament and start to fix the causes of the homelessness crisis: our Labour plan. It is radical, credible, fully fledged, and fully formed—you could even say, Mr Deputy Speaker, that it is oven ready. It is based on what works because we know what works; we have done it before.

I hope the Secretary of State will take our Labour plan and make it a national plan to tackle homelessness. First, we must establish a new taskforce, led by the Prime Minister, to end rough sleeping for good. Secondly, we must make available an extra 8,000 homes from housing associations for those with a history of rough sleeping. Thirdly, we must place a levy on second homes

that are used as holiday homes, and use that to fund a new duty for emergency support in every area during the winter when it is cold. Fourthly, we must relink the housing allowance to rents, so that people do not end up on the streets because they cannot cover the growing shortfall. Finally, we must make good the £1 billion a year cuts to local homelessness services over the past decade. Those are radical, common-sense steps to solve our homelessness crisis.

The Secretary of State will soon say, no doubt, that the Prime Minister has pledged that the Government will end rough sleeping within five years. We have heard that before from the Prime Minister. Some of my hon. Friends, particularly those from the capital, will remember that when he was elected as London Mayor, he said:

"It's scandalous that, in 21st century London, people have to resort to sleeping on the streets, which is why I have pledged to end rough sleeping in the capital by 2012."

He did not, of course—in fact, rough sleeping in London more than doubled during his time as Mayor. He has a long history of making promises and letting people down. If the Prime Minister means what he says, if he does what he says, and if he wants to lead a one nation Government, he must deal with the national shame of homelessness. I say to him this: make Labour's plan the country's plan, and personally lead a new national mission to end homelessness for good.

4.34 pm

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from "House" to end and add:

"notes the Government's commitment to ending rough-sleeping in this Parliament; further notes that the latest annual figures showed a fall in rough sleeping numbers; notes the steps already taken by the Government including implementing the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and delivering successful programmes like the Rough Sleeping Initiative and Housing First pilots; welcomes the Government's commitment of £1.2 billion to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping; notes the Secretary of State's announcement this week of an extra £112 million for the Government's Rough Sleeping Initiative, taking the total sum being invested over the next year to £437 million; notes this House's concern that more is done to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping so that everyone has access to accommodation when they need it most; and notes the clear steps this Government is taking to achieve this."

We are fortunate to live in a country that is widely and rightly regarded as one of the most fair, prosperous and advanced in the world. It is, therefore, a serious moral failure that we still have people sleeping on our streets and struggling to secure something so basic as a roof over their heads. That feels especially poignant at this time of year, when most of us take for granted a warm bed on a cold night. The deaths of people sleeping rough right here on the doorsteps of Parliament in recent years have been a sobering reminder of the challenges we face. That was brought home to me powerfully when I volunteered at a homeless shelter in Birmingham on Christmas day, and when I had the privilege of meeting a lady called Claire in Walsall just before Christmas, who is one of over 200 people to have been helped off the streets by the Housing First pilots. Initiatives such as Housing First give us all some hope.

Mr Perkins: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Robert Jenrick: I will come to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

[Robert Jenrick]

The figures showing that rough sleeping fell last year, for the first time in several years, give us evidence that these policies are working, but there is clearly a lot more to be done. Everything begins with a stable home and somewhere to put down roots, which is why the Government have made it their overriding priority to reduce all forms of homelessness and to end rough sleeping during this Parliament.

Mr Perkins: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. I appreciate the tone of his rhetoric, but it bears no relation to the performance of the Government's policies over the past nine and a half years. He talks about homelessness as though it remained a problem, but it is an escalating problem. It is a problem that is running out of control on this Government's watch. When he comes back to the Dispatch Box, will he not talk about homelessness as though what we are seeing is a continuation of a longstanding problem? What we are seeing under his Government is as a result of his policies. The situation is getting—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Let us make this clear from the start: we cannot have long interventions. If Members make long interventions at the beginning of the debate, those sitting here hoping to speak at the end will get only two minutes, and that is really not fair. We must have short interventions.

Robert Jenrick: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

As I said, the figures for the past year suggest we are seeing a reduction in street homelessness—a modest reduction, I admit, of 2%, but a reduction none the less. We will not find out the official figures for the most recent count taken in November until next month, but having been to a number of local authorities across the country in recent weeks and spoken to them it seems to me that we will see a further, more significant fall in rough sleeping when we receive those figures. I have not for one moment suggested that that is an end in itself. We need to go much further and much faster. In my remarks, I will set out exactly what this new Conservative Government intend to do.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): I am glad the Secretary of State raised Housing First. I know he will join me in congratulating Councillor Yvonne Davies and Councillor Sharon Thompson, who had to take back control of delivering it to drive some of the reductions we have seen in the west midlands. The point really is this: for Housing First to work, we first need houses. The truth is that the number of social homes built in the west midlands has fallen by 17% in the past year and by 18% since 2010. Surely that must be turned around.

Robert Jenrick: I am very happy to praise anybody who has been involved in Housing First. As I said, a few days before Christmas I visited a Housing First pilot in Walsall and was tremendously impressed by the work there. I met a lady who had been taken off the streets in Walsall. She had been sleeping rough in a park for a long time, but was spending her first Christmas for a number of years in a home of her own and would shortly be having her children over for Christmas lunch, which she had not managed to enjoy, I think, for over a decade. It is a tribute to the housing associations that

are willing to participate in Housing First. I want more housing associations to do so. We will clearly need to provide both the funding and the certainty of that funding, because it is a significant endeavour for a housing association. That housing association, for example, is not only giving property and a home to that lady, but promising to provide wraparound care, an individual to visit or phone that person, every day for up to three years. That is an incredibly sophisticated and bespoke level of care, but one that is working extremely well.

Emma Hardy: The Secretary of State must have heard me say to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) that eviction rates for tenants on universal credit are three times higher than for tenants who are not on universal credit. What conversations is the Secretary of State having with the Department for Work and Pensions about how to stop the high eviction rate of tenants on universal credit?

Robert Jenrick: I speak regularly with my colleagues at the DWP, including the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince), who is sitting beside me. However, we do not recognise those figures. For example, the figures that I have seen most recently show that for individuals who come on to universal credit with pre-existing rent arrears we see a one-third reduction in rent arrears after four months. The statistics that I have seen are far more encouraging than those given by the hon. Lady.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Robert Jenrick: I will make some progress, as I think Madam Deputy Speaker asked me to.

The question of funding seems to have been at the heart of the debate so far. We are backing our commitment to this agenda with very substantial funding. Yesterday, I announced that we will take the total sum being invested in this challenge next year to £437 million. That is on top of the £1.2 billion that has already been committed, marking a £69 million increase in funding from the current financial year, and £15 million more than we committed at the spending round a few months ago.

However, we are not stopping there. The Government have already made good on their promise to end the benefits freeze, with benefits due to rise in line with inflation from April. The majority of people in receipt of housing support in the private rented sector will see their housing support increase. In our 2019 manifesto, the Government committed to introducing a new stamp duty land tax surcharge on non-UK residents buying residential property in England and Northern Ireland, with that revenue going to support rough sleepers. No one should sleep rough on our streets. That is why we are focused on helping those living on the streets now, as well as ensuring that we consign rough sleeping to history once and for all.

John Redwood: Does my right hon. Friend agree that people sleeping rough quite often have drink or drug addiction problems, for example, and that we need to persuade them to get help? Are there not generous programmes to deal with those kinds of issues? [Interruption.]

Robert Jenrick: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right and I do not understand the chatter from Opposition Members. The street homelessness challenge that this

country faces is not simply a housing issue but an issue of addiction and mental health, and this Government intend to bring those together for the first time in a properly co-ordinated approach between our Departments.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The Secretary of State referred to the local housing allowance. About a year ago, the National Audit Office did a damning report for the Public Accounts Committee, stating that the Government had done no proper analysis of the connection between their welfare reform policies and homelessness. Will he rectify that with his colleagues in the DWP and produce such an analysis for the House?

Robert Jenrick: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are working together very closely—I regularly meet my colleagues in the DWP, and in fact we will meet this week. All our proposals will be co-ordinated and done jointly because we understand that this issue needs to be joined up—not just with the DWP, as I said, but with the Health Secretary, so that we get the added links to addiction and mental health, and the Home Secretary, so that the law enforcement side of this works together. We will be taking forward a co-ordinated strategy across all Departments.

Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): As the Member for the Cities of London and Westminster, I know a thing or two about rough sleeping, with Westminster having more rough sleepers than the next three boroughs combined. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need a multifaceted approach? It is about mental health. It is about drug addiction. This is not just about homelessness and rough sleeping, particularly in places such as central London and other main cities in the United Kingdom.

Robert Jenrick: My hon. Friend speaks with great personal experience and she is right; we must all beware of resorting to simple explanations for this complex challenge. It is about bringing together all the relevant authorities; where homelessness has been tackled most successfully, that is exactly what is happening. The other day I visited St Mungo's, who are excellent at bringing together the police, local councils, central Government, the NHS and others. Yesterday I was at Newham, where the council is doing exactly that, with a superb supported housing centre called Anchor House.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that St Mungo's started the campaign on rough sleeping, in the late 1980s, with a lot of Conservatives supporting it? The initiatives that John Major's Government put in place under Sir George Young, as he then was, were the start of the work to really try to solve the problem. *[Interruption.]* It is not true to say that the Conservatives did not do anything in the 1990s; I was here and they did. The right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) was not.

Robert Jenrick: I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right. I am very happy to pay tribute to the fantastic work of St Mungo's. As I said, it pioneered bringing together all the parts of government, central and local. That really has an impact.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab) *rose*—

Robert Jenrick: I will give way in a moment, if I may.

The strategy that we published in 2018, backed at that time by a £100 million package, is a vital step towards our shared goal. The strategy is built around three pillars: first, preventing rough sleeping before it happens; secondly, intervening at crisis points; and, thirdly, helping people to recover with flexible support that meets their needs.

Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West) (Con): I am sure my right hon. Friend is aware of the great work being done in Wolverhampton by Good Shepherd Ministry and other such organisations. What is he doing in this Parliament to end rough sleeping?

Robert Jenrick: I will come on to the strategy. I know the Good Shepherd centre's work; in fact, I volunteered there as a child, growing up in Wolverhampton.

The centre of our work is our rough sleeping initiative. That involves our team of rough sleeping advisers working closely with local authorities to deliver vital services to help people who are sleeping rough. I take the opportunity to pay tribute to those local authorities, and the charities and organisations and their volunteers, who are taking part in the RSI. Our evaluation concluded that the rough sleeping initiative was working. It is seeing an almost one-third reduction in vulnerable people sleeping rough in those areas that are funded by the initiative, compared with what would have happened if those areas had not been part of the initiative.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD) *rose*—

Robert Jenrick: We are keen for more parts of the country to benefit from the initiative.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way; he has been very generous. I have had constituents living in tents, cars—one even in a cave. All those cases—I have many more, and I am not just talking about street homelessness—were related to problems with social security. Two thirds of local authorities predict that the roll-out of universal credit will increase homelessness. What are the assessments of both the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince)?

Robert Jenrick: I think I have answered that question. We do not recognise some of the figures that we have heard. In fact, the evidence that I have seen has suggested that rent arrears have fallen over time in the case of those individuals who have moved on to universal credit.

To support the rough sleeping initiative programmes such as those that I have visited in recent months, I allocated this week up to £112 million to fund the programme for a third year. That represents a 30% increase in funding for this already proven successful programme. Councils, charities and organisations throughout the country will be able to use that money to fund up to 6,000 new bed spaces and 2,500 rough sleeping support staff.

Layla Moran: The Secretary of State is being very generous in giving way. I am pleased to hear him outline the strategy for rough sleeping, but is he aware that rough

[Layla Moran]

sleeping in this country is illegal, under the Vagrancy Act 1824, which is still on the statute book? We are running a campaign with St Mungo's, Crisis and others to have it repealed.

Robert Jenrick: As the hon. Lady may know, we are reviewing the Act; we are very aware of that and want to see it changed.

We are determined to build on the work of our Housing First programme pilots, which we have already heard about. The pilots, in Greater Manchester, the west midlands and the Liverpool city region, have already helped more than 200 people off the streets and into a home and provided each with a dedicated support worker. A further 800 people are due to benefit by the end of the programme.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way—he has been extremely generous with interventions. Does he agree we should commend organisations such as Dogs on the Street, which cares for homeless people with pets? Those pets very often are people's only lifeline, yet it is difficult to get into a hostel with a pet. That must be addressed.

Robert Jenrick: The hon. Lady makes an important point. Anybody who has spent time meeting rough sleepers, particularly those who slept rough for a longer period, will know that a dog can be an incredibly important companion, and it is true that a large proportion of shelters do not take individuals with pets, although some do—in fact most of those I have visited recently, particularly in central London, allow them. Nevertheless, I would encourage shelters to find a way through this problem, because it is a significant issue.

I turn now to the issue we have already discussed around health and the underlying causes of rough sleeping. In 2018, 41% of the rough-sleeping population in London were assessed as having a drug dependency need, 42% as having an alcohol dependency issue, and 50% as having a mental health support need. Recent figures also show that 80% of rough sleepers who died in London had mental health needs. The data is very clear: people sleeping rough with a mental health condition are significantly more likely to die than those without a mental health need.

We must not forget that behind each statistic is an individual with their own story. They all deserve the support we can give them. That is why my Department is now working closely with the Department for Health and Social Care to ensure they get the support they need. That support includes £30 million in funding from NHS England to support specialist mental health services and £2 million to help test different models of community-based healthcare, particularly focused on substance misuse and mental health treatment. I can assure the House that as we progress and develop our rough sleeping strategy we will do everything we can to co-ordinate it with the Department for Health and Social Care.

Mike Amesbury: If the Secretary of State was to be kicked out of his house and find himself in the unfortunate circumstance of living on the street, of course mental health issues, depression, drug dependency and alcoholism

might then result, but the Government have cut homelessness support by £1 billion a year over the last decade—this is nothing new—and cuts have consequences. I think, for example, of the 726 people—an increase of 50%—who lost their lives last year

Robert Jenrick: As I have said, we are increasing funding for this issue. We are spending £1.2 billion. This year, we are adding £430 million and more—for example, the £112 million I have devoted this year to the rough sleeping initiative. That is a 30% increase, and the funding the previous year was more than the year before that, so the Government are giving this national issue the resources it deserves. I hope that meets with approval across the House.

We are also taking action by implementing the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which will play a crucial role in tackling this issue. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) and all those who played an instrumental role in taking this ambitious legislative reform forward. It means that everyone, not just those deemed a priority, can get the support they need to prevent them from becoming homeless. The legislation also means that people can access support earlier, with new duties on public bodies, from the NHS to our prisons, to intervene earlier, and councils are now providing support of up to 56 days, ahead of someone needing help finding secure accommodation.

Since the Act was implemented, more than 130,000 households have had their homelessness successfully prevented or relieved, and nearly two thirds of the applicants receiving help have been single households who previously would have been less likely to have been offered support.

The duty to refer, which came into force in October 2018, is also encouraging strong local partnerships. It requires public authorities such as our prisons, our emergency departments and Jobcentre Plus to refer service users who they think may be homeless, or threatened with homelessness, to a local housing authority of their choice. That is a clear example of public services working closely together in the interests of the most vulnerable in our society.

We are also taking decisive action on the delivery of fairer, more affordable housing of all tenures, so that we can prevent and reduce homelessness and rough sleeping. The Government have delivered more than 464,000 affordable homes since 2010. Our commitment to increasing the housing supply means that we will go even further than that, delivering, on average, more affordable homes each year than the last Labour Government—and there is more to come, with 250,000 more new affordable homes due to be delivered by March 2022 through the affordable homes programme, which we have boosted with a further £9 billion.

In our manifesto we committed ourselves to a further affordable homes programme, which I hope will be even more ambitious. That commitment is underlined by our manifesto pledge to publish a social housing White Paper, which will set out more measures to empower tenants, provide greater redress and better regulation, and improve the quality of social housing.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister has agreed to introduce a Bill that will, hopefully, get rid of no-fault evictions and to provide a

decent redress system. Will he meet me, and some representatives of Shelter? I presented a ten-minute rule Bill in the last Parliament that would pay for some of that, protecting deposits and allowing a disputes resolution mechanism, and working out some of the details so that we do not have to do it through amendment.

Robert Jenrick: I should be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman. He will not be surprised to hear that we have already met a range of stakeholders, including representatives of Shelter and other important organisations, to discuss this issue. We want to ensure that the social housing White Paper does the job that is required, and we are working closely with organisations such as Grenfell United to learn the lessons of that tragedy. We are also working with organisations such as Shelter in connection with our renters' rights Bill, which will bring an end to no-fault evictions and create other important initiatives, including a lifetime deposit which will help those on low incomes and others throughout society by making it easier and cheaper for tenants to move.

We have a clear plan—backed by substantial investment and a proactive approach, and widely welcomed—to tackle homelessness and end rough sleeping for good. As the Prime Minister has made clear, that is an absolute priority for him and for this new Government. We are encouraged by the progress that we have made on rough sleeping in the last two years, and through measures such as the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, the Housing First pilots and the rough sleeping initiative we are seeing results, but we know that we have to go much further to give some of the most vulnerable people in our society the future they deserve. I believe we can do this; I believe we must do this; and, as a compassionate, one nation Conservative Government, we will not rest until we achieve it.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Before I call the spokesman for the Scottish National party, I should give notice that, as we have only two hours left for this debate and it is obvious that a great many Members wish to speak, we will start with a time limit of six minutes, but that will soon be reduced to considerably less. The time limit does not, of course, apply to Mr David Linden.

4.58 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): In the interests of being collegiate, I will seek to limit my remarks to eight or nine minutes in order to allow others to get in.

Let me first thank the official Opposition for tabling the motion. Understandably, because this is a devolved issue, the text of the motion refers only to the situation in England, but we all know that homelessness does not stop at the border. Even in my own city of Glasgow, homelessness is still a major concern, and that is something I will come back to later in my remarks.

Put simply, one person sleeping rough is one too many and we must always do more to eradicate the scourge of homelessness from our society. As well as acknowledging where we must improve, it is important to highlight what we are doing right in Scotland. I do not do this to give the Scottish Government a pat on the back; this is more in the spirit of sharing good practice. Having said that, I am incredibly proud that in Scotland we have some of the strongest rights for homeless people in the world. There is more to be done, though,

to tackle rough sleeping, and I would like to touch on some of the Scottish Government's actions and policies in my contribution today.

A couple of years ago, it was an honour to hear from Josh Littlejohn, the founder of Social Bite and a leading homelessness campaigner in Scotland, when he spoke passionately about the Housing First model in his address to the Parkhead Housing Association's annual John Wheatley lecture. I was struck by the Secretary of State talking about Housing First earlier, but most people in the Gallery this afternoon and most people watching at home might not know what Housing First does. For their benefit, let me tell the House that it is based on the simple premise that accommodation should be provided as the first step in tackling homelessness, in order to create the stability required to deal with other complex needs and issues that a person might have.

The Housing First model derives from Finland, where it has delivered significant positive outcomes for people, so it is not hard to see why Social Bite threw its weight behind it. The Scottish Government have backed Social Bite's Housing First programme, which is now starting to bring welcome results. Between April and December last year, 186 people were housed through the scheme, 91% of whom continue to sustain their tenancies. That is a remarkable figure that speaks for itself. It must be highlighted that this model truly shows that there has to be a different way of doing things to break the cycle of homelessness. The Conservative manifesto in December committed to expanding its own Housing First pilot, and the Government should be in no doubt that there are many Members on these Benches who will hold them to that promise. There needs to be a lot more than lip service and words in a manifesto, so we will certainly hold them to that.

Most of us know from our casework that many people who become homeless or end up sleeping rough have complex needs that require specialist support as well as a house. The usual approach—which has arguably failed—has been to provide support to get a person tenancy-ready before giving them a house, but that can mean that they spend long periods of time in temporary accommodation, making it harder for them to address the other issues they face. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) said, for example, a number of people cannot get into temporary accommodation because they have pets.

At this juncture, I want to pay tribute to the Bethany Christian Trust, which has a project in my constituency that is supported very ably by Shona Howard, its community resettlement worker. At the end of October last year, I was privileged to be able to join Paul and Colin, who had been housed by the Bethany Christian trust in flats in the Tollcross area of my constituency. One of the things that I was most impressed by when I visited Paul and Colin at the New Charter was the fact that Bethany was not only housing them but proactively helping them to develop other life skills. For the guys in that case, it was through a cookery course. We know the benefits of that kind of wraparound support, not just for housing but for the wider community.

The Scottish Government's £50 million Ending Homelessness Together fund is helping to deliver the actions recommended by the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group, because we recognise that we

[David Linden]

have much more to do to end rough sleeping in particular. Now, 39 of the 49 actions in the 2018 Ending Homelessness Together action plan have already either commenced or been completed, and plans for the remaining 10 are in place for this year. But we are under no illusion: the work is not finished. As the Secretary of State said, winter is always a particularly challenging time for homeless people, and that is why over £350,000 of extra funding has been provided to help people to stay safe and warm. This also involves a new multi-agency one-stop hub in my own city of Glasgow to support people who are sleeping rough and those who are at risk of homelessness.

Getting people off the streets and into warmth and safety is imperative, and we cannot do that without the support of the Glasgow Night Shelter, which is hosted by colleagues at the Glasgow City Mission. Last year, that centre provided beds for 691 people, and I commend the many churches—including my own, the Parkhead Nazarene church—that are taking turns to provide volunteers to staff the night shelter. We also need to provide accommodation for people on a permanent basis, and the solution to that is clearly to build more social rented affordable homes. That is something that the Scottish Government are committed to, with their record investment of £3.3 billion to deliver on the ambitious target of getting 50,000 affordable homes by 2021.

We cannot have a debate on homelessness without looking at supply issues and social housing. In the four years to 2019, the SNP Government delivered five times more social rented homes per head of population than were delivered in England and almost twice the number of affordable homes delivered in Wales. Meanwhile, under the Tories, we know that council house building in England has fallen to its lowest level since the 1920s, evictions are at record levels, and a mere one in five council homes has been replaced when sold. That firmly tells us that this Government have learned nothing from Margaret Thatcher's disastrous right-to-buy policy, which left a lasting scar on my constituency of Glasgow East.

Homelessness can be triggered for a multitude of reasons, including mental health and addiction, but there can be no doubt that the spike in homelessness has not been helped by the austerity agenda imposed by the British Government over the past decade. Whether it is the swingeing cuts to social security or the punitive bedroom tax, people losing their homes or ending up in extreme poverty can be attributed to all those things. In Scotland, we have acted to end the punitive bedroom tax, but that comes at a cost of £150 million a year to the Scottish Government, so I guess that raises a broader question about the purpose of devolution and devolved budgets. For example, is devolution merely to act as a sticking plaster for bad policy made here in London? On so many occasions, Scotland tries to tackle issues such as homelessness only to have one hand tied behind its back while being hindered by bad law made in this place. Regardless of the constitutional settlement in these islands, Scotland will play its part to eradicate the scourge of homelessness in 2020, and we intend to work flat out until that is achieved.

As I said, I do not want to speak for too long, because I know that other colleagues want to contribute tonight, but I end by quoting Jon Sparkes, chief executive of Crisis, who said in September last year:

“Making sure that everyone has a home where they can begin to rebuild their lives benefits all of us. Once again Scotland has shown it is a world leader in tackling homelessness and this commitment is a major step forward towards it being the first nation in Great Britain to end homelessness for good.”

That is the mission, and we are intent on accomplishing it in the coming months.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. We now have a formal limit of six minutes.

5.6 pm

Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con): I shall be fairly brief. Over the years since the early 1990s, I have spent several months living undercover for television programmes on the streets of London, Birmingham and New York. Between when I first did it in 1992 and the last time I did it last year, I observe that almost nothing has changed. We still have the scandal of people with the most difficulties in our society—the untreated mentally ill and the drug addicted—prowling the streets of our cities. I therefore entirely agree with the Secretary of State—this is also my own experience—that street homelessness is primarily a health issue, not a housing issue.

I remember in the 1990s seeing a guy drinking like a dog from a puddle by Charing Cross station. I saw a similar thing last year. Things have not changed. Last year, I was sleeping next to a guy called Andy by the goods-in entrance of McDonald's at Victoria among all the people smoking Spice. Andy was probably drinking 30 cans of beer a day, but he was not actually homeless. It was extraordinary. He had a flat—he showed me the keys—but Andy was living in Westminster for two reasons. First, he was lonely in his flat in north London. Secondly, how on earth is an alcoholic going to generate enough money to buy beer if not from begging on the streets?

I did not meet him, but a friend of mine reported that a guy who had been a heroin addict in Covent Garden for many years—he eventually had his leg cut off—absolutely maintained that if the public were not so generous and did not enable people to buy heroin and alcohol, he would have got off the streets an awful lot earlier. The reality is that many people choose to be on the street—[*Interruption.*] Before anyone stands up in outrage, let me say that there is a reason for that. People like Andy who are addicted to a drug have a problem: they need money. They cannot get money from begging if they are sleeping on the floor of one of the Government's “no second night out” hostels, and they cannot get money to buy heroin if they are sitting in their council flat; they get it by being out on the streets.

When I was taken off the street under the “no second night out” policy, I was whisked off to a warm, safe place, but if I were a drug addict, there is no way I would have wished to be there. I would have felt safer and freer going back to my place on the Covent Garden piazza.

The reality is that, overwhelmingly, these are ill people. There are about a dozen rough sleepers in my constituency and, according to the excellent Gravesham Sanctuary homeless charity, the majority of them are addicted to drugs or alcohol. [*Interruption.*] This is my experience. Members who are shaking their head should intervene.

If this debate is really about street homelessness, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care should be at the Dispatch Box as this is a health problem. I know the Government are genuinely determined to do something about it. In fact this guy here, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, came and spent a night out on the streets of Covent Garden with me last year. He did not make a big song and dance about it, and he did not issue a press release. My friend Chris, a former crack addict, took him round and showed him how the begging works and how, when people have the money, they go off and hunt for drugs before the cycle starts all over again.

I am convinced that this guy, the Secretary of State, has got the message that we will not deal with rough sleeping unless we see it as a health problem. We need to be honest about this. When people give cash to a beggar—not in every case, but in the vast majority of cases—they are buying heroin, alcohol or zombie Spice. We have to stop giving money to beggars. We need wet accommodation where people can take drugs and continue to drink, and we need good emergency psychiatric assessments.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: If the hon. Gentleman thinks we should have wet accommodation, does he support consumption rooms or shooting galleries so that we can also help people to wean themselves off these awful drugs?

Adam Holloway: The truth is that I do not know, as I have not looked into it.

There is no point spending all this money if none of it gets to the tip of the spear—to the people in real need and in real crisis. There needs to be drug rehabilitation when people need it and when they are ready for it. I had one guy who decided he wanted to come off crack, and it took three months for him to get a place in rehab. We have to make sure that people are put in accommodation in which they want to stay.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): My hon. Friend mentions homes, but does he agree with the Secretary of State that recruiting support workers would be a good way of spending money? Does he agree that having a key worker, a mentor or, perhaps, some peer support is a good way of helping people not only to get into a home but to stay in that home once they are there?

Adam Holloway: Absolutely, and it is another hard reality. We cannot have groups of young people in what starts as a street party but soon descends into a ghastly cycle of addiction. We have to be more robust about moving people on to prevent them from falling into addiction.

I say it again: we will get absolutely nowhere in helping these people at the very bottom—why on earth do we have social security if we cannot deal with this?—until we do what this Government are doing and understand that this is a health problem. I congratulate the Secretary of State.

5.13 pm

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): I have a very different set of prescriptions for some of the problems set out by the hon. Member for Gravesham (Adam Holloway).

Debates in this place are always political, but they sometimes touch on the personal, too. I am the adult son of an alcoholic. Since I lost my father to a lifelong struggle with alcohol five years ago, I have sought to campaign for those in my home city of Birmingham who are self-medicating trauma with drugs and with alcohol. The reality is that what we see on our streets is that the safety net in this country—the social insurance system of which we were once proud—has now so comprehensively collapsed and the holes in that safety net are so big that anyone now hit by a twist of fate without a family to help them will fall straight through and hit the pavement, where in my region, on average, one is now dying every 10 days. That is why I say to this House that the subject of this debate is a moral emergency, which is why the response we need from Her Majesty's Government is an awful lot stronger than what we heard today.

In cities such as Birmingham, we may have planes in the sky but we have homeless people dying in the doorways. Having this in the second city of the fifth richest country on earth is not a morally acceptable situation. I could give the House a barrage of statistics—

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Liam Byrne: I will come on to Walsall in a minute. I could give the House a barrage of statistics about how rough sleeping in my city is up by 1,000% since 2010; how the number of homeless children has trebled; and how we now have a crisis of overcrowding, with one in five homes in inner-city Birmingham and the Black Country now overcrowded. But I do not want to talk about statistics. I want to talk about a story. It is the story of a man I met in an underpass next to Birmingham New Street station when I was out on a Sunday morning last year with an amazing team of people called Outreach Angels. We saw a man lying on the floor in acute distress—a double amputee next to his wheelchair. This was in an underpass that stank of urine. He had been there for three days, and he was still dressed in his hospital gown with a hospital tag on his wrist. It took us nearly two hours to get that man an ambulance. How on earth have we come to this in this country?

Thank God across our region we now have a coalition of kindness that is fighting back, with extraordinary people and organisations, including Hope into Action: Black Country; Matt Lambert, who does great work in Wolverhampton; Nobby Clarke, the Coventry night shelter and Hope Coventry; Langar Aid and Khalsa Aid International; SIFA Fireside; the outreach teams across the west midlands, which are doing extraordinary work; and Councillors Yvonne Davies and Sharon Thompson, who do extraordinary work and who have taken back control of the Housing First programme in our region, because they understand that for Housing First to work we first need homes. Can we guess the grand total of the number of social homes built last year in the hon. Gentleman's borough? It was zero. The number of social homes built in the west midlands last year fell by 17%, and is down by nearly 80% since 2010. So I will take his intervention, but will he at least agree that we cannot bring together a shared agenda to tackle this problem unless we start building council homes again?

Eddie Hughes: I am just disappointed that the right hon. Gentleman did not mention the excellent work of YMCA Birmingham, where I was assistant chief executive until I came to Parliament. That organisation has been given about £3.5 million over the past five years by this Government to provide accommodation for homeless people in Birmingham.

Liam Byrne: I would add to the hon. Gentleman's list, because not only does the YMCA do an amazing job, but so do St Basils, with the work of Jean Templeton; Tabor House; the Good Shepherd Ministry in Wolverhampton, which the Secretary of State mentioned; Homeless One; and the Ummah Care Foundation, where I used to work in a soup kitchen on a Sunday night. This coalition of kindness is basically the last bastion of civility in our country. Thank God for them.

What we now need in our region is the biggest council house building programme since the second world war. What we need is a private sector, region-wide licensing scheme to stamp out bad practice. What we need are street teams delivering 24/7 addiction and mental health support. We need to radically expand the shelter that is available from places such as Tabor House and the Good Shepherd Ministry—places that provide not only shelter, but sanctuary, not just a house, but a home. But we need a Government who help, too.

We need the Government to start by abolishing the Vagrancy Act 1824. I cannot be the only person in this House who thinks that homeless people do not need handcuffs—they need a helping hand. We should replace that with Kane's law. We should bring together the Department for Work and Pensions, the Prison Service, the health system and local government, and create an obligation on them to collaborate not only to remedy homelessness, but to prevent homelessness. I have met too many people fresh out of prison at 4 o'clock in the morning in Birmingham. I have met too many people who have been sanctioned on to the streets by the DWP. Let us end this injustice once and for all.

Mr Betts: My right hon. Friend is making a valid point. I am sure he recognises that we tried to amend the Homelessness Reduction Bill in Committee to place a responsibility on other public agencies to address homelessness. What we got was a duty on them to refer people to housing departments, not to address it themselves.

Liam Byrne: What we need is what I have called Kane's law, in memory of Kane Walker, who lost his life on the streets of Birmingham last year: a duty on public agencies to collaborate to prevent homelessness from happening in the first place. Let us put alongside that the restoration of housing benefit for young people, who do not pay lower rents than anybody else; let us make sure that we take off the caps on housing benefit, which cover only two thirds of the average rent in a city like Birmingham; and let us end the shame of "no recourse to public funds", which means that those who come to our country to seek sanctuary are ending up on the streets.

The great tragedy of this debate is that if we summoned the will, we could, together, make homelessness history. We on the Opposition Benches are determined either to find a way or to make a way. We want to know whether the Secretary of State is with us or against us.

5.20 pm

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne). He spoke with great passion, which I share and I am sure the whole House shares. We want to end homelessness. It is a shared goal.

I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests: I am a director of a shared-ownership property portal, so I have a great interest in the issue of first-time buyers. In fact, when I was involved in the business day-to-day, before I became an MP, we used to give part of all our mortgage commissions to the Broadway homelessness charity, which is now part of St Mungo's. From my experience of working with Broadway and meeting many homeless clients, I can say, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Adam Holloway) did, that one should resist the temptation to generalise about the reasons why people have found themselves in very difficult circumstances. It was often drugs or alcohol, in particular it was family breakdown, and many times it was a combination of them all. I therefore very much welcome the additional £112 million that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has announced. It will include £30 million for mental health, which is very welcome. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham said, health is a significant issue in this context.

Having said all that—that we cannot generalise about the individual factors and that each case is different—we must all be concerned about the worrying underlying structural trend in causes of homelessness, which is that there has undoubtedly been a significant increase in the number of people becoming statutorily homeless because they have reached a certain point in an assured shorthold tenancy and been unable to renegotiate it, the rent has then been pushed up, they cannot afford it, and the property has been re-let. That is incredibly worrying, because more and more families are now in rental accommodation because of the affordability crisis that I referred to earlier in an intervention on the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey). The price of homes has gone up hugely under successive Governments. It is a widespread problem, particularly in our largest cities. So, what can we do about it?

When we talk about high rents, the other side of the coin is of course wages. There is no doubt that this period in which the end of an AST has become a factor in rising homelessness has coincided with a period of flat wages and significant rising rents, particularly in London and the south-east. The good news is that wages are now rising at their fastest rate in a decade—that is an incredibly important part of the issue—but on the other side of rents, the Government are entirely right that we need more supply. We cannot get around that. If a tenant finds themselves at the end of their tenancy, having to renegotiate, and the landlord knows that they can easily re-let—that there is an under-supply in the market—we know who will be wearing the boot on which side of the equation, and that will mean pressure on the tenant to accept a higher increase than they otherwise would. We need more supply and more choice.

I wish to make two points on how we can move forward. There is no easy solution, but what is called the build-to-rent sector offers a potential solution. Build to rent is generally institutionally funded and there is huge potential finance available for it from City institutions

and so on. It is growing significantly: there was a 20% increase in build-to-rent development last year, and I believe that 148,000 units have been developed in the UK under build to rent. The key thing about build to rent is that under the national planning policy framework, tenancies should be offered of at least three years—what are called family-friendly tenancies. If we were to see a widespread increase in the supply of these types of properties in the market, with better-quality tenancies, it would force those in the sector who may not offer such good tenancies to improve their offer.

Feryal Clark (Enfield North) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, in addition to his suggestions around build to rent, the Government need to hurry up on their proposals to end section 21, so that we can put an end to no-fault evictions? In my borough of Enfield, the no-fault eviction rate is the highest in the capital and the second highest in the country. The way to end that is to ask the Government to hurry up with their proposals that they have been sitting on and talking about for several years now.

James Cartlidge: That is a very fair point, but the Government are, of course, looking at it, and we await further details. None the less, it is a perfectly valid point. I was simply arguing that, ultimately, the best thing that can happen to those tenants in that position is for them to have choice—to have more supply. Here we have a sector with build to rent that can bring significant extra supply. When we talk about supply, the key thing is additionality, which is a terribly technical word. In other words, it really is additional stock that has come about as a result of an intervention in the planning or funding system, and that additional stock would not have happened without that intervention. It is an incredibly important point.

I also want to talk about regeneration. If we look at the NPPF, we will see that there is encouragement for that type of tenure, for build to rent, where there is large-scale urban regeneration. Something that concerns me about the current housing dialogue, particularly in some Labour-controlled London boroughs, is that, let us be honest, regeneration has become something of a dirty word. It is seen as enforced gentrification by some. Actually, there is a point in that. There have been urban regeneration schemes in some areas, particularly in London, where, arguably, some of the people who lived in the development before the regeneration lost out afterwards. It is difficult, because in theory the great thing with regeneration is that greater density brings more supply and improvement to the current stock for those who already live in the development. It is about regenerating and improving an area. That is something that has been supported by parties from across the divide, but we need to see much more of it and more joined-up support from Government for it. We can build on greenfield, on brownfield or on existing stock through regeneration. There is nothing else available unless we reclaim the sea through polderisation, and I do not think that that is about to happen any time soon.

If we do not have significant urban regeneration, we see disproportionate pressure on the countryside, and easy planning decisions of just building more and more on greenfield sites. Brownfield sites come under pressure

when we need economic development—when we need land for industry and so on. Regeneration is the key, and that combination of large-scale build-to-rent developments in densely populated urban areas is one part—only one part—of delivering that increased supply so that there is less pressure on rents and, as wages increase, we can reduce the number of people becoming statutorily homeless at the end of an assured shorthold tenancy. There is no easy single answer, but those factors can form a joined-up, holistic, one-nation Conservative housing policy.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I am delighted to call Abena Oppong-Asare to make her maiden speech.

5.27 pm

Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech on an issue that has such huge importance for so many in my constituency and beyond.

I start by praising my predecessor, Teresa Pearce. Many in this House will know her as a fighter, a socialist and a feminist. She served our community with passion and distinction first as a councillor and then as a champion in this place. Many of my newly elected colleagues have big boots to fill, but none more so than me. I am sure that the whole House will join me in wishing her a very well earned and happy retirement. I also pay tribute to Teresa's predecessor, John Austin, who has given me fantastic support. He now spends time with his family and his allotment. John, if you are watching this, I am still waiting for my jam.

Each of us has travelled our own path to represent our constituents in this House. This morning, I travelled by tube and train—just in case you were wondering, Madam Deputy Speaker. In all seriousness, I stand here along with my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Bell Ribeiro-Addy) as the joint first female MP of Ghanaian descent. My journey into politics has not been easy. I did not come from a political background. I remember telling a careers adviser that I wanted to get into politics and learn more about working for an MP. I was laughed at and literally told that the chances of someone like me getting a job in Parliament were very slim, and to not even bother trying. I will not misuse parliamentary privilege by naming him, but I hope he is watching me now. When I see injustice, I always turn anger into action. That feeling of unfairness drove me to challenge the barriers that I faced as a black woman. I became the first ever black chair of the Labour Women's Network, and I mentor and train many women like me, who do not normally get a chance in politics. It is also why I became a Unison grassroots trade unionist.

I am able to represent my community in part thanks to the trailblazers who came before us: Lord Boateng, Bernie Grant, Baroness Amos and, of course, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). Their legacy in the House can be seen throughout the Chamber today, and they remain an inspiration to those of us who follow them. I also stand here on the shoulders of a century of sisters who came before me, and I am delighted that the parliamentary Labour party now reflects the gender breakdown of the

[Abena Oppong-Asare]

country—51% female. As the chair of the Labour Women's Network, building on the work of my predecessors Liv Bailey and Jo Cox MP, I could not be prouder of the role that the Labour Women's Network has played in training hundreds of women for public office, introducing and defending all-women shortlists, tackling sexual harassment and abusive language in politics, ending the scourge of all-male panels, and introducing parental leave arrangements for councillors and MPs.

My constituency of Erith and Thamesmead is diverse, beautiful and fascinating. Erith pier offers stunning views of the Thames. Crossness pumping station, built by Sir Joseph Bazalgette, is a Victorian engineering masterpiece that is described as "a cathedral of ironwork". The ruin of the abbey at Lesnes is a scheduled ancient monument that is haunted by the ghost of one of its former monks. Why not come for a visit, Madam Deputy Speaker? I will treat you to a fry-up at Zehra's Café in Plumstead, some chips from the Frying Pan in Belvedere, or a cheeky cake from Crumbs bakery in Northumberland Heath. You can come to see the mighty Erith Town football town, and I will bring along some Ghanaian jollof rice—accept no imitations. There is one thing that I admit my constituency is sadly lacking; it contains one of the only parts of London without a train station. Simply put, that must change. I will be campaigning with local people to ensure that Thamesmead is put well and truly on the transport map.

I am here today to debate homelessness—an issue that, sadly, all too many of my constituents have experienced at first hand. Across the country, the numbers of people forced to rely on temporary accommodation are stark, but it is the stories behind the statistics that are truly heartbreaking: the family placed in accommodation two train journeys from their children's school, travelling for hours to and from, desperately trying to ensure that their children can make it to school while they try to get to work; the mum and her infant daughter placed in a hotel that has no fridge for her to store milk; and the family with a young child placed by another borough in a shared property with someone on the sex offenders register. All of us in this place will have our own litany of examples—each harrowing, and each a stain on the reputation of this Government.

The Government must step up to end homelessness, rather than stepping over the homeless to get into this place. The housing crisis is one of the great injustices of our time. The people of Erith and Thamesmead have put their faith in me, and I will always fight to ensure that they have a safe and secure place to call home. When I see injustice, I always turn anger into action.

5.34 pm

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): What a great pleasure it is to be called so early in this debate and to follow the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare), who spoke with poise and with passion. She mentioned that she does not come from a political background. She will find that many of us in this place, including me, share that with her. I am disappointed not to have been invited for a cheeky cake. I hope that she remedies that in due course. I look forward to her future contributions in this place.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartledge) also mentioned passion, but I want to start by mentioning compassion, because there is no doubt that there is no lack of compassion among those on the Conservative Benches, just as there is no lack of compassion among those on the Opposition Benches.

The debate so far has focused on rough sleeping, and I too will devote a large portion of this short speech to that issue. As the Secretary of State himself set out, it is encouraging that, according to the latest count, the number of rough sleepers count, has decreased, but of course it is only a very small step in the right direction. I welcome it, but far more needs to be done. I am encouraged that locally in my constituency, Dorset County Council has reported that the number of rough sleepers, while still too high, has fallen substantially, from 38 to 18. I commend the council and its partners for the excellent work they have done. I think there are two main reasons for the decrease: first, there is no doubt that the Housing First programme has made a difference; secondly, the Navigator scheme does simple things such as signposting the most vulnerable people in the right direction. The Housing First programme is helping those who have experienced multiple homelessness.

Perhaps one of the most important pieces of legislation was mentioned by the Secretary of State: the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) that became the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. I was delighted and honoured to be asked to serve on the Committee that considered that Bill, and I remember well going through it clause by clause over a period of weeks. The Act, which had support on both sides of this House, has been referred to as the biggest change to homelessness legislation in a generation, but while there have been some encouraging signs of improvement, it is clear that to fulfil both the spirit of the Act and our manifesto commitment more still needs to be done. I am encouraged that the Government are pressing on with the consultation and looking at how to make the best use of prevention.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Adam Holloway) rightly mentioned drug addiction. There is no doubt that many rough sleepers are unwilling or unable to take up offers of accommodation because of addiction or substance misuse; alternatively, as the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) mentioned, there may be practical issues, such as having a beloved pet. By taking a more pragmatic approach in relation to Housing First and providing sufficient support for councils, clearly more can be done to support the most vulnerable into housing. The Secretary of State mentioned funding, and of course I welcome the £470,000 that Dorset County Council is to receive, as well as the £1.4 million for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council.

I must mention a number of local organisations. Routes to Roots, a charity in Poole that I have supported, does excellent work in supporting some of the most vulnerable people who are on the streets—yes, even in Poole. Many of those threatened with homelessness are young people, often from chaotic backgrounds. Waverley House in Wimborne is an organisation run by Bournemouth Churches Housing Association. I have had the privilege of meeting residents and staff, who provide, in particular, peer support, with key workers or mentors who can work alongside these young people and help them to manage their lives—not just to get

accommodation but actually to stay in it once they are there. Housing is, of course, essential, but ongoing and consistent support from schemes such as Waverley House is also vital. I encourage the Government to look at those successful schemes—to look at what has worked—and to ensure that money is channelled to them. All young people need a stable home, but they also need consistent boundaries and guidance from supportive adults. That is exactly what support workers, key workers and mentors give. The additional funding is welcome, but I encourage the Government to look at schemes that are already successful, even if they are small-scale, to see what works and what can be scaled up. The Government have shown a clear desire and they have shown their will through increased funding, and together we can end the scourge of homelessness.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I give notice that, after the next speaker, the time limit will be reduced to three minutes. *[Interruption.]* Yes, three minutes, because there is only one hour of debate left. It gives me great pleasure to call Mick Whitley to make his maiden speech.

5.40 pm

Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab): Thank you for allowing me to speak on this important subject, Madam Deputy Speaker. I congratulate you on your appointment and all the other Members who have made their maiden speeches during this session.

It is one of the greatest privileges of my life to have been elected to represent the place where I was born and spent my formative years, and I would like to thank all those who placed their faith in me last December. As I stand here, I am conscious of the fact that a Member for Birkenhead has not delivered a maiden speech in this House for over 40 years.

My predecessor, Frank Field, was a long serving and greatly respected presence in this House, and he served the town of Birkenhead well. He was particularly noted for his powerful campaigning on the issues of poverty, hunger and the deep failings of our welfare system. He also moved Members of the House to tears by highlighting the misery endured by many people claiming universal credit. He would no doubt have had much to contribute to this debate.

I applaud my party for choosing homelessness as the subject of this Opposition day debate. Homelessness is—I doubt anyone would disagree—one of the most pressing issues of our time. Certainly it is a real and growing concern in my constituency. Birkenhead Park, a proud reminder of Birkenhead's prosperous and industrious past, now regularly hosts rough sleepers seeking sanctuary and a safe night's sleep. As a volunteer at Charles Thompson's Mission every Sunday, helping to serve hot breakfasts to homeless people and families suffering in-work poverty, I see at first hand how homelessness devastates people's lives.

Charles Thompson's Mission is one of many community initiatives in my constituency attempting to fill the cracks. Every night, homeless people seek shelter at Wirral Ark or the YMCA on Whetstone Lane. These projects embody the very best of Birkenhead—our sense of solidarity and community spirit—but the truth is that they should not have to exist. For far too long, the Government have failed to address the crisis of homelessness

with any seriousness at all. Since the Conservatives came to power in 2010, homelessness has risen by 165%, and over £1 billion has been cut from homelessness budgets across the country.

While the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 mandated local authorities to take action to prevent homelessness, many councils and third sector organisations are still struggling to provide basic support for homeless people due to massive demand and sweeping cuts in funding. The announcement yesterday that local authorities would share £112 million in rough sleeping initiative funding was rightly described by the shadow Housing Secretary as a “paltry sum”. It is simply too little, too late.

If we are serious about tackling the homelessness crisis, we must also begin to address the economic factors that have given birth to it. In my constituency, the skilled and dignified work that my generation took for granted is largely gone. Unemployment in Birkenhead now stands at nearly twice the national average, and everywhere I see the potential and promise of younger generations being stifled by a low-pay economy dominated by zero-hours contracts and precarious employment. So too do I see families and young people struggling to secure the kind of quality, affordable housing in which I was able to raise a family. As the recently redundant Thomas Cook workers said so clearly, those out of work find themselves victims of universal credit, lost in a bureaucratic maze designed to make their lives more difficult, not to provide them with a much-needed safety net.

The consequences of this low-pay, precarious economy are chilling. Last year, Shelter revealed that 3 million people—half of all working people living in privately rented accommodation—are now only one paycheque away from homelessness. The average person is only two paycheques away. Right to buy, the failure of successive Governments to build adequate social housing and the inability of local councils to regulate the rental sector effectively mean that many tenants are now too scared to speak up against rogue landlords for fear of losing their homes.

Even on my short walk from Westminster tube station to Parliament today, I passed, as I have done each day since being elected to this House, a line of homeless people on Bridge Street between Portcullis House and the Palace of Westminster. Even here, at the very heart of our democracy, in one of the five richest boroughs in the richest city in the sixth richest country in the world, we are still faced with the outrage of homelessness, and that should shame us all into taking action.

The homelessness crisis has no easy solutions. We must commit, as Shelter and other housing charities have so often urged, to a radical and ambitious house building programme that will create 90,000 new social houses. We must also end the right to buy and preserve our existing social housing stock, ensuring that it is available for those who need it. We must pledge far greater investment in our crumbling health and social care system so that the most at risk of homelessness are properly looked after and so that their needs, in their complexity, are fully addressed. We must also build a fairer economy so that we can provide security and stability for all. We can end homelessness in Britain.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. We now have a time limit of three minutes.

5.46 pm

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): It is an absolute honour to follow the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) and to listen to his maiden speech. I worked very closely with his predecessor on various issues. He was a very passionate man, and I can see that the hon. Member is already following in his footsteps.

I welcome the opportunity for this House to discuss homelessness and rough sleeping, and I thank the Secretary of State for the tone of his speech. I had the privilege of sitting on the rough sleeping and homelessness reduction taskforce as a junior Minister, when it was chaired by the then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, David Lidington. He passionately believed that to support those who find themselves facing homelessness or rough sleeping on our streets not only did we need an understanding of the complexity of the issue, but we absolutely needed Departments and agencies working together as one team. Homelessness can be prevented in most cases, and in every case it can and should be ended. Other countries, such as Finland, have shown that to be the case.

I want to thank the brilliant charities and organisations that help support those who are homeless. Many are super-local—we have them in our own constituencies—and they are run by dedicated volunteers. I want to thank the brilliant advocacy organisations, such as Crisis, Shelter, St Mungo's and Porchlight, which reach out to us as policy makers to make changes that make a difference. I also want to thank the teams in agencies and local authorities that work really hard to provide accommodation and support services, often with little recognition for doing so, including those in Medway, Maidstone, and Tonbridge and Malling Councils.

Chatham and Maidstone town centres border my constituency, and this is where most people will visibly see homelessness. I need to focus my remarks on rough sleeping, but if we had more time I would touch on homelessness as a consequence of the demand for housing.

Adam Holloway: One of the factors that I think people do not consider is that if we add a couple of hundred thousand to our population every year and fail to build new homes, at some point that will inevitably impact the people at the very bottom.

Tracey Crouch: I thank my hon. Friend for his point, and I also think it is really important for those of us with constituencies in the south-east that at some point we discuss the problem of having people who are normally housed in London boroughs being moved out of London and into other councils. Last year, 20,000 households in London were offered alternative accommodation outside the local authority that accepted their homelessness application. This is an important issue on which we need to have a debate.

I am a fully subscribed member of the “official counting method does not quite work” gang. It is a one-night snapshot in November, and it is subject to being skewed by various factors. I know the figures are not out yet, but unofficially I hear that in Medway, Maidstone, and Tonbridge and Malling, the figures have declined. But just one person sleeping rough on our streets is one too many. Medway Council has received a significant chunk of the money that the Government have distributed,

with £1.1 million to spend on specific activities. Measures introduced by the council included a Somewhere Safe centre, an assertive outreach team, a designated rough sleeper co-ordinator, 11 units of supported accommodation, and so on—exactly the holistic approach we need.

Michael Tomlinson: My hon. Friend mentioned supported accommodation. Does she agree that such support is a vital part of this mix? This is not just about providing a home; it is about providing support once people are in a home.

Tracey Crouch: I concur entirely. People need a health worker, a mental health worker, and a private sector brokerage worker—all those holistic issues.

Time is running short, so let me list a few things we need to do. First, we must ring-fence an allocation for rough sleeping, so that Housing First and other schemes can be planned over a whole Parliament, rather than being planned ad hoc or for short periods. Many of those who sleep rough have severe mental health conditions, so NHS England should prioritise mental health services to complement the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the rough sleepers initiative.

We need much better working between the Ministry of Defence, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to support those released from prison and help them to have a roof over their heads. It is ridiculous that we release prisoners at 4 o'clock on a Friday and are surprised when they find themselves on the street. We must expand social impact bonds, deliver a proper empty homes strategy, and scrap the blunt instrument that is the Vagrancy Act 1824. There is no place in our modern society for criminalising those who live on our streets. Most of all, however, we need compassion, and co-ordination, and to tackle the root causes of homelessness if we are to end it in all its forms, and we need to do that now.

5.51 pm

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare) and for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) on their excellent maiden speeches. I am sure that the warm tributes they rightly paid to their predecessors were recognised by many Members across the House.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 is the only Act to have involved pre-legislative scrutiny of a private Member's Bill by a Select Committee, and the benefits of that were shown by the involvement not only of the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), who introduced the Bill, but by that of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, the Government, Crisis and the Local Government Association. They produced an Act that is good in so many respects, as it concentrates on the prevention of homelessness, while also dealing with the issues faced by those who are not a priority for housing provision, but who still need appropriate advice and assistance.

I wish to consider how the Act might be made to work better. At the beginning of the process the Committee was concerned about a lack of funding, and the LGA still expresses those concerns. At Sheffield City Council, the Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods, Janet Sharpe, and cabinet member Paul Wood told me that generally speaking they have had good working relationships

with Government officials. Indeed, I think Sheffield is now regarded as something of a model for how the Act should be implemented, and I receive virtually no complaints from constituents about homelessness—a real change from where we used to be.

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods also told me that the council is having to take on more staff to deal with the 56-day extension to the prevention requirements in the Act, and to offer extra advice and assistance to people in non-priority categories. However, those staff are not covered by the extra money provided by the Government. She also said that, as opposed to previously when the supporting people programme provided all the money, the council now has to apply for a whole range of different funding streams to get the necessary resources to deliver on the Act. Those schemes must be applied for, monitored, and contracts drawn up. Indeed, the council is employing an officer just to do that applying and monitoring. Can we not change that and make it simpler?

Secondly, because of the extra demand, and the extra requirement for temporary accommodation with the 56-day rule, in order to avoid increasing the number of families in bed and breakfasts, the local authority wants to build two new projects for temporary accommodation. I support that good and positive move, but Homes England's policies are not flexible enough to recognise the difference in funding needs and requirements for temporary accommodation, compared with ordinary residential accommodation. Will the Secretary of State look again at that?

Those are two proposals from Sheffield's housing department for ways in which the Act, and its delivery, could be improved.

5.54 pm

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), with whom I worked on supported housing issues. He took a less political line than the opening speech by the shadow Secretary of State, which I personally felt rather overlooked the fact that homelessness and rough sleeping is a major social issue for all of us in this House, particularly those of us with urban constituencies. It is what we have to tackle. We have to take ownership of it in our own patch.

How are we trying to tackle homelessness in Gloucester? It is worth noting that under successive Labour MPs during the previous Labour Government from 1997 to 2010 not one additional unit of social housing was built in our city, so although it is fine to talk about making 8,000 homes immediately available, I am afraid that that is not what happened when the shadow Secretary of State was a Minister for eight of those 13 years. I am glad that today, after good work done by the former Chancellor of the Exchequer in writing off all of Gloucester's housing debt, we now have Gloucester City Homes building new social accommodation. We need to do more of that—I am in no doubt about that.

Let me highlight one particular issue that I suspect others will also face in their constituencies. The major issue for us in Gloucester at the moment is the number of EU nationals with no recourse to public funds. I am afraid it will be the reason why the number of rough sleepers on the statutory count, when the results are announced publicly, will have risen from eight in 2018

to probably close to 20 in 2019, which is not what the Secretary of State wants to see. He wants those figures to come down. He has provided us with funding, but the truth is that two thirds of our rough sleepers are EU nationals in that situation. I know that for London and Birmingham he has waived the no-recourse situation. I would be grateful if the Minister, in replying to the debate, could say a little bit about what more can be done, or whether he believes this issue will just fade away at the end of the year after we finish the transition period and people coming from the EU will have to have longer-term jobs. That will undoubtedly have an impact on the problem for us and I suspect elsewhere in the country.

It is also worth highlighting the fact that the money given by the Government to help us with rough sleepers has made a huge difference. We have been able to house 100 people through the "Somewhere Safe to Stay" hubs and I welcome the additional funding that has been announced this year. It will make a difference to maintaining the hubs and expanding the outreach. I am convinced that we can get on top of these things.

Lastly, I would like to highlight the work done by a new charity, HaVinG – A Voice in Gloucester. We aim to try to provide a pathway not just for housing but for skills and, later, jobs. That is the long-term solution to this problem.

5.57 pm

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): In the brief time I have available—I am very sorry the Secretary of State is leaving, just as I am starting to speak—I want to focus on the Government's approach to delivering directly funded services for rough sleepers. I am sure we could all talk a lot about the drivers of rough sleeping, but I want to focus on the approach to directly funding those services, which is very problematic. It is based on a very short-term approach, which is failing many people who need those services. I will set out why in the time I have left.

I welcomed the stamp duty surcharge, especially once the Government had resiled from their previous decision to slash the amount coming from it by two thirds. At least it has been put back to the previous amount. I welcomed it because I thought it would lead to a situation where we would not have a bidding-led system of a pot into which different bodies have to bid for very short-term funded projects. But no, we seem to have the same approach now. The problem is that it does not lead to reliable support for projects that we know work. For example, in Oxford we have received funds from the rough sleeper initiative and the rapid rehousing pathway. I am really grateful for them—of course I am—but they are only for a year or 18 months. We have had absolutely brilliant projects—the hub at Bonn Square and the Trailblazer project—but they were funded only for the short term. Virtually by the time staff had been taken on and services got going, the funding was evaporating.

Oxford City Council has just set up a brilliant facility, Floyds Row, investing £2 million in capital—of course, it is not the authority that should be funding it in the first place, but it has done so because of the rough sleeping crisis we have in Oxford—but it will now be at the mercy of finding different pots of short-term funding to deliver the running of that facility, as is St Mungo's, which will be helping with it. So much effort is going

[Anneliese Dodds]

into chasing around after short-term funds—I could not have agreed more with what my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) said about the situation there. This is really problematic not just for the staff who are trying to deliver excellent services without knowing whether they will be employed in the future, but for the users. We have the data and we know the evidence. We know that when the same workers are delivering services, especially to those who are hardest to reach, they are far more effective. I would be delighted to send the Minister evidence from the Old Fire Station, working with Crisis, which shows that clearly in black and white. We need that continuity of provision. If he reports back on anything at the end of the debate, please deal with the issue of the funding being too short term.

6 pm

Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the maiden speeches from Opposition Members. The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) was incredibly generous to his predecessor, who was clearly very well thought of by Members on both sides of the House, and the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare) was passionate and sincere—I am sure I join everybody else in this place in hoping that her careers adviser saw her speech.

There are 48 rough sleepers in Milton Keynes—that is, of course, 48 too many—but the really shocking statistic is that there are 2,244 people in temporary accommodation. This is a complex issue. Each of those statistics has an individual behind it who will have complex needs, such as domestic violence, adverse childhood experiences, substance misuse—be that alcohol or narcotics—poor school attainment and attendance, family breakdown, debt and mental health issues that are either underlying and exacerbated by homelessness or caused by homelessness and other issues.

The extra money does help. Earlier this month, Milton Keynes received £1.7 million more to tackle homelessness and only this week it received £870,000 to target rough sleeping. Obviously, however, there is a correlation between the number of people who are homeless and the number of homes that are available, so I welcome the Government's record and the Secretary of State's commitments to delivering more affordable homes.

Planning is a complex and devolved issue. At this point, I should declare my interest as a district councillor on Aylesbury Vale District Council, which deals with planning activities, but Milton Keynes is the area that I have been elected to represent in Parliament and Milton Keynes Council has been Labour-run since 2014. It recently released a plan to double the size of Milton Keynes—I say “plan” but it is more of a land grab, complete with a map with “Dad’s Army” style arrows going north, south, east and west into other boroughs. While it plans to double the size of Milton Keynes, a shocking 24,000 existing planning applications have currently not been built out.

We need to build not only more houses but the right kind of houses in the right places, so that our homeless people can have somewhere that they can practically expect to live. I welcome the Government's commitment to building more affordable houses and I look forward to voting for the next housing Bill.

6.3 pm

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): As I am sure we all agree, even one person sleeping rough in this country is one person too many. I am delighted to hear that the Government are going to make sure that this does not happen by the end of this Parliament, but I want to ensure that everything that we can do now is also happening. We can do one thing immediately: scrap the Vagrancy Act 1824. That would encourage all agencies to take a much more holistic approach to the problem.

For those who do not know, only sections 3 and 4 of the Act are left, and the Act makes rough sleeping illegal. This growing body of opinion has been formed on the back of a campaign in Oxford run by the students, who could see with their own eyes how fast the number of people affected was increasing in our city centre. I brought the matter here and I am delighted to see how many Members from across the House have now taken it to their hearts, because the legislation does not, I believe, reflect our values. The stance is also popular: a new survey from Crisis shows that 71% of people do not believe that sleeping rough should be illegal.

I found myself in violent agreement with the thrust of the points raised by the hon. Member for Gravesham (Adam Holloway), who argued that in the case of many of the rough sleepers he has met, rough sleeping is actually a health issue. That is what we need to focus on.

It is all very well, in this room, to say that we want to change the law and take a different approach, but people also judge us by our actions. I draw attention to what happened last year, when the homeless gentleman died on our doorstep in the Westminster tube entrance. The answer to that from this place was to evict the group of homeless people who were there, and put up a gate. For shame! It means that now, as we walk in, we do not have to be bothered by that in the same way; they are slightly further down. I do not think that that reflects the values of Members in this House, and I think we need to do things as soon as possible to show what does.

The Government insist on a review and are waiting for that to conclude, but it is not necessary. Crisis, which I have been working with, has done that. It can show how it is possible to repeal not just section 4 but also section 3. To those who say that the Act is not used, I say that it is. In 2018, 11 people were prosecuted for sleeping rough. That is not right; it must be stopped. Let us make this the year that we scrap the Vagrancy Act.

6.6 pm

Dean Russell (Watford) (Con): I applaud the earlier maiden speeches, which were excellent. They showed that the next few years will be very tough on all of us, newbies or not, because of the fantastic challenges those Members made.

As time is tight, I want to take a few moments to mention two things. In Watford, as in many urban areas, we have our challenges with homelessness; but we have a fantastic community, and charities, especially, that are really working hard to reach out to everyone and ensure that no person is lost in the system. New Hope is a charity that reaches out to people on the streets and makes sure that they get repeated support. Recently, I spent time at Wellspring with Tim and

Helen, who have a coffee area designated specifically for people to come in and spend time together; in many cases they are rough sleepers.

In the time I have left, I want to raise a subject that I do not think many people are aware of—the bizarrely named issue of “cuckooing”. Increasingly often, especially on county lines and where drug gangs and organised crime are involved, somebody who is vulnerable on the street will get somewhere to stay and then be befriended by someone who says, “Let’s have a coffee.” Then they will say, “May I leave something in your new flat?” It might be just a little bag. Then they will leave some drugs—“Do you mind if we just leave a few more things?” It gets worse and worse. Over a period of time that “friend”, just as a cuckoo takes hold of another bird’s nest, will take hold and live in that space, and usually will have gangs operating out of there, leaving the vulnerable person in a state of absolute despair, not knowing where to go for help.

Ultimately, once the vulnerable person—and especially their new home—has been used and abused, the “cuckoo” will leave, but the person whose home it is has to deal with the fact that their home has been trashed. So what happens? They get kicked out, they go back on the streets and the cycle starts again.

I would like to raise that as an issue, because I am not sure whether it has been mentioned in the House. It may well have been, but we need to look at it, because it falls into a crack between the areas of organised crime, housing and mental health. Organised crime, especially on county lines, is taking advantage of poor, vulnerable people who are rough sleeping, or in many cases homeless, and then taking them into a situation they cannot get out of—and the cycle continues.

6.9 pm

Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): I want Government Members to understand the root causes of much of the homelessness in West Ham. More than a third of my constituents work hard for less than the London living wage. A month’s rent for a cheap two-bedroom property in Newham is £1,300. If someone has one of the lower quarter of pay packets locally, they will earn just £1,266 to pay the bills. It is less than the rent alone. For many, it is a choice between food and rent, between buying new shoes for their children and the rent, between paying the bills and avoiding debt and the rent. Most people choose the rent because they know in their hearts that nothing is more damaging for them and their children than becoming homeless, and yet homelessness is rising and rising.

The Government have chosen to increase housing payments by 1.7% this year, and that is good. It is better than zero—even with my maths, I get that—but it will do nothing to repair the damage, and in a huge part of London, including Newham, not a single extra two-bedroom home will be made affordable by this increase. For us, it is actually worse, because rents in Newham are so unaffordable that we received a little extra help: a 3% uplift in housing support for people on social security. We are now losing that 3% and getting 1.7%. The Government’s decisions are making rents less affordable, not more affordable, in Newham. Newham—which has the second-highest child poverty rate in the country. Newham—which has the highest homelessness rate in the country. Newham—where one in 12 of our children is without a safe, secure, warm home. It beggars belief.

Newham now has only 17,000 council properties, which is 10,000 fewer than the number of people on the waiting list alone. The only way we will reduce the cost to people’s lives and to the public purse is through building social homes with social rents for all that need them. West Ham needs a Government who will commit to that, and any Government who do not must live with the responsibility for the continued poverty and homelessness that is completely and utterly blighting the lives of the people I represent.

6.12 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): We all need to do more to address homelessness. That is quite clear from this debate. To their credit, the Government have come forward with a range of initiatives and policies to address the challenge we face. In the past few weeks, the Secretary of State has announced his Department’s allocations of funding to address homelessness and rough sleeping. The feedback I am receiving from Lowestoft in my constituency is that this funding is adequate but that the way it is provided needs to be reviewed. It is not easy to plan and bring about sustained improvement if funds are only confirmed a few weeks before the start of the financial year and are then only there for one year. Longer commitments of three years should be provided to enable meaningful and lasting results to be achieved.

Some specific issues need to be addressed. First, the Homelessness Reduction Act is very welcome, but to achieve its objectives local authorities need to be adequately funded and housing associations need to be more fully involved in its delivery. Secondly, we need to look closely at the impact of universal credit on homelessness. To my mind, the five-week wait for the first payment is making the situation worse and does need to be changed. Thirdly, at the forthcoming Budget, the Government need to consider seriously restoring the local housing allowance rates to at least the 30th percentile of the local market.

Once people are off the streets, we must do all we can to get rid of the revolving door back on to the streets, and this means building more social rented homes. The affordable homes programme will achieve this, but it needs to be introduced immediately so that housing associations can get on with acquiring the land on which to build these homes. I am also mindful of the vital role played by supported housing. From 2016 to 2018, Parliament, in both Chambers and on both sides, spent a lot of time reforming the policy framework. We now need to ensure that the sector can play its full role in alleviating homelessness. I ask the Government to give careful consideration to the National Housing Federation’s campaign for £1.4 billion in the forthcoming Budget for supported housing providers.

I believe that the Government have introduced many of the policies and initiatives that are required to address the blight of homelessness, but there is a need to get on with it, and to provide greater long-term certainty in funding commitments. That will enable those who work night and day with the homeless to make a sustained and lasting difference.

6.15 pm

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): I am glad that my right hon. and hon. Friends tabled this motion, because I believe that homelessness is one of the most

[Mr Toby Perkins]

significant issues facing our country. I do not doubt the Secretary of State's sincerity. He addressed many of the relevant issues, and I think we began to sense that the Government's position was moving towards a recognition that this is not purely a question of housing, but a much broader question. However, I think we need to go much further, and recognise the extent and significance of the impact of welfare policy on the level of homelessness. While I welcomed the Secretary of State's tone to some degree, the test will be whether the means of putting a stop to this catastrophe are willed as well as the end, and whether the Government can ultimately accept the reasons for the current level of homelessness.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) was right to refer to the amazing reduction in homelessness that occurred under a Labour Government. A couple of people have said that the issue should not be politicised, but I am afraid that it is a political issue. Housing supply is a political question, as are welfare policy and the often catastrophic impact that sanctions have had on people, the reduction in the number of hostels for the homeless, the reduction in local government funding, and the fact that people who are incredibly vulnerable feel that they are not being supported. In fact, it often seems to be the Government's policy to be tough on benefits because they think that there are votes in that toughness, which, ultimately, has led to the homelessness that we are now seeing.

Homelessness used to be a city issue. Back in the days of the last Tory Government, we were used to the appalling level of homelessness in London, but we did not have it in Chesterfield. We do now, and that is why there is such a drive throughout our communities to get something done about it.

I hope that the Minister who responds to the debate will answer our questions about the Government's housing policy. It is dreadfully disappointing that only 6,000 new social homes were built last year, a reduction from 40,000 in the year in which Labour lost power. I also hope it will be recognised that this is a health issue, an alcohol and drug support issue, and a welfare policy issue. If the Government adopt a collective approach, they will certainly have my support for their efforts to tackle the problem.

6.18 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friends the Members for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare) and for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) on their excellent maiden speeches. I was particularly pleased to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead, who in his previous life did an awful lot to help working people in my constituency and throughout the north-west. If he shows the same passion and determination to fight for justice here, he will serve his constituents proudly.

During the four years I have been here, I have noticed—as I am sure other Members have—a significant increase in the number of people sleeping in doorways on my walk into work. This morning, as on most mornings, there was clear evidence in many of the streets that people had been sleeping there the night before, and this morning, as on most mornings recently, there were people sheltering in the subways outside this place. I feel

ashamed that people are sleeping rough outside the corridors of power in one of the richest countries in the world. We must do better. We also know that rough sleeping is only the most visible form of homelessness, and that there are many people whose homelessness is less visible.

Mr Perkins: My hon. Friend is right to speak of the sense of shame that I think we all feel when we see people sleeping outside Westminster tube station, but they are not just sleeping there. Someone actually died outside Westminster tube station. How much should that shame all of us?

Justin Madders: It is a complete shame. I am going to talk about the number of deaths in a minute or two.

I want to say a bit more about the invisible homelessness: those living in temporary accommodation or relying on families and friends and sleeping on sofas. Many, including in my local authority, are in temporary accommodation far away from their families, their work or their school. Children are sometimes missing out on their education because they cannot get to school from where they have been placed. That accommodation is better than nothing, but this shows just how much pressure there is on the system.

It has not always been this way. In 2010, the end of rough sleeping appeared to be in sight. It is not inevitable; it can be prevented. Indeed, the Government seem to accept that rough sleeping can be prevented by setting a target to eradicate it by 2027, but even one night out in the cold is one too many, and seven years is a very long time for those currently experiencing homelessness. The Government have said that that is also the year by which this country will have full 5G coverage. I know which one I would like to see delivered sooner.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr Perkins) said, the number of people who have died while sleeping rough or in emergency accommodation is a terrible, damning statistic. It is up by 51% in the last five years, rising to 726 people in 2018. That is the equivalent of two people dying almost every night. That is more homeless people dead in one year than there would be Members in this Chamber if it were full. Yet, according to the Government, ending rough sleeping is as much of a priority as dealing with 5G. These are real men and women, who are on average younger than me. Their deaths are premature and entirely preventable, and it is a stain on this country that we do not do more to stop this happening every night of the year.

If the Government are to reach their target of halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027, they must address the key drivers behind homelessness, including spiralling housing costs, lack of social housing, insecurity for private renters and cuts to homelessness services—all the things we have touched on in the debate. Let us not forget that we have had a net loss of 60,000 social homes through sales and demolitions in the last few years, despite the totally hollow pledge from David Cameron for the one-for-one replacement of houses lost through the right to buy. That has been one of the failures of this Government, and it has to change.

Shelter tells us that the leading cause of homelessness is the loss of a private rented home, and I have concerns about the way that people in that situation are not given much help. They are given no special priority and they

have to wait until an eviction order is granted by the court, which puts more costs, pressure and stress on them. We also know that those extra costs make it even harder for them to get a new home of their own. We absolutely need to do more, and I am glad we have debated this subject today.

6.22 pm

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): I speak as a co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on ending homelessness, which I got involved with in 2016 because of the very visible rise in homelessness in my community in Southwark. Southwark Council deals with the highest number of homeless applications in London. It has 11,500 households on the waiting list and nearly 2,500 households in temporary accommodation, but despite significant problems and severe cuts to Southwark's funding since 2010, the council also has the largest council house building programme in the country, with 11,000 new homes in the pipeline. Today, its information line is showing the 172 sites across the borough where those homes will appear. My first ask is that the Government should match Labour's ambition in the national council house building programme.

On local housing allowance, the main problem is affordability. There are almost no properties in Southwark that are affordable at the current LHA rate or at the rate it will reach in April. The Government must reflect local prices in rates. At the extreme end of homelessness is rough sleeping. The Secretary of State described it as a serious moral failure, but there is no accurate measurement of rough sleeping. The local authority headcount is an insufficient estimate. Ministers say that they will end rough sleeping by the end of 2024, but in 2018 the total reduction in the number of rough sleepers was 74. At that pace, it will take until 2081—57 years behind schedule. It would take the Government six decades to tackle a problem that they have created in one. They must develop a robust measure of the problem.

In 2018, a ministerial taskforce on homelessness and rough sleeping was created, but the Department refuses to reveal when it meets. It claims that that information cannot be disclosed because it involves confidential communications. Only under this Government has tackling homelessness become a state secret. I hope the Minister will agree to be more accessible and transparent about those meetings.

The Office for National Statistics has revealed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) just mentioned, that two homeless people died on our streets every day last year. That is unacceptable, but what is worse is the normalisation of those deaths. None of them is investigated and no one asked whether they could have been prevented. I want the Minister to ensure a safeguarding review of every death of a homeless person. That would help to identify the interventions that could have prevented the homelessness and the premature deaths.

Justin Madders: Does my hon. Friend agree that more needs to be done to advocate for the people who lose their lives, as he says, to understand what led them to that sad situation in the first place?

Neil Coyle: Absolutely. As the Secretary of State mentioned, there is often an overlap with mental health issues, but we are not going to identify the cause if the deaths are not investigated.

My final request today is that we use the Domestic Abuse Bill to help the 2,000 people last year who fled domestic violence and were provided with an immediate refuge but did not qualify for long-term accommodation. The A Safe Home campaign aims to break the link between homelessness and domestic abuse. No one should be left facing a choice between returning to a violent, dangerous partner or being made homeless, and the Bill should ensure that everyone fleeing domestic abuse who is homeless is automatically considered in priority need. I hope that the Minister will agree today to meet representatives of that cross-party campaign to see how we can make that happen in the Bill.

6.25 pm

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): Homelessness is the manifestation of a society that is not working. The soaring numbers of rough sleepers and people living in unstable accommodation should shame this Government, because it betrays a policy agenda that has utterly failed people. The housing crisis has made it difficult for anyone facing relationship breakdown to get a new home, and the crisis in social care has made it difficult for anyone with mental health problems to access services. People can wait months or even years to get help, by which point their health has deteriorated to such an extent that their problems are compounded and become even more difficult and costly to treat, or they lose their jobs and become unable to pay their mortgage or rent.

While I am pleased that the number of people sleeping rough in Bedford has fallen thanks to a number of initiatives, including Bedford Borough Council's "Assessment & Somewhere Safe to Stay" hub, the SMART Prebend Centre, the King's Arms Project's night centre, and the work of the Salvation Army and other charities, levels of homelessness continue to rise. From my constituency inbox, I know that the homelessness problem is not so much on the streets but hidden in temporary accommodation. More and more people and families are living in totally inadequate, unstable accommodation.

This month's brilliant report by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism found that only five of the 200 two-bed homes in Bedford are affordable to rent on housing benefit. The rise in the allowance from April under the Government's new proposals will mean that only two more homes would be affordable. The allowance in my area is set to rise by just £10, but the report found that local housing allowance would need to increase by £225 a month to allow people to afford the cheapest 30% of homes in Bedford. These barriers must be removed, and the stigma attached to homelessness that leads to hostile policies must end if we are to stop such practices. We require a long-term, common-sense strategy, a radical and progressive approach to social housing, and an end to piecemeal funding to give children, families, individuals what is surely a basic human right: a safe and decent place to live.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I call Fleur Anderson.

6.27 pm

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in a debate that is important for my constituents in Putney, Southfields and Roehampton. I pay tribute to Glass Door, a charity

[Fleur Anderson]

which runs night shelters in local churches. There are no homeless shelters run by the state or the council in Wandsworth, so Glass Door is making up the shortfall.

I will focus on the hidden homelessness of temporary accommodation and what that really means for so many families in my area and across the country. The latest figures show that 3,070 children are living in temporary accommodation in Wandsworth—just one London borough—and that 35% of them, meaning nearly 700 from my constituency, are housed out of borough.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Does my hon. Friend agree that out-of-borough housing, often in seaside towns, means that people move away from their communities and support networks?

Fleur Anderson: I absolutely agree, and I will share the story of one family to illustrate how the benefits and housing system are failing. I have been working with the family for several years as a councillor—I am also a Wandsworth councillor.

The hard-working dad of three children works on the buses, so he is suffering from in-work poverty. At their lowest point, the family, including the three children, had been evicted and were sleeping in their car. One council provided help, providing them with temporary accommodation and storage for their possessions, but that is a postcode lottery; most councils do not provide storage for possessions at a time when people need it most. The temporary accommodation they were offered was in Colchester—miles away—and the dad had to spend his income on commuting back to London for work. The children had to move schools.

The family were then moved to other temporary accommodation, where they did not have enough room even for a table for the children to do their homework or to have a TV. They are now in other accommodation in my constituency, but the three children have to travel for two hours on three buses to get to school, and then two hours back. This is making them so tired that they cannot do their best at school.

There are families criss-crossing London, with children sleeping on their mother's laps. Parents are having to wait near their children's schools because they do not have time to go home and come back again, so they cannot seek work. That means they cannot save money for a deposit, so they cannot get out of this cycle.

Temporary accommodation is a symptom of a failing housing and benefits system, and the details of it really matter to parents. They need storage and they need funding for school journeys, and they should always be a priority. There should be a duty to place families closer to their children's schools.

This system is failing hundreds of children from Putney, Roehampton and Southfields, and the 127,000 children across the UK who are in temporary accommodation tonight. The Government have had 10 years to fix this scandal, and it is shocking that this is happening in 2020. I hope they will finally take action.

6.31 pm

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): The street count system is not working, and people do not trust it. When they see the increasing number of

people sleeping on our streets but the statistics say the numbers are going down, something is wrong and the Government need to review it.

Despite Labour-led Brighton & Hove City Council creating 50 new rough sleeper move-on beds and the country's first 365-day emergency shelter, hundreds still remain on our streets and in our emergency accommodation every night, and it is costing lives. Five people have died in two months at one local emergency accommodation. The staff of another emergency accommodation call the basement room the "suicide room."

Fleur Anderson: I have already mentioned that Wandsworth does not have emergency accommodation, so does my hon. Friend agree that there should be more emergency accommodation and that it needs to provide services, not just rooms?

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Exactly, and that might stop some of the deaths, but the deaths are not just in emergency accommodation; they are on our streets. In the past year Robert Bartlett, aged 30, died on 29 October. Robert was sleeping rough and died of an overdose.

William Morrow, aged 45, died on 4 April. He was described as an extremely likeable person. He had been living rough for a little while, and the inquest found he died of a heroin overdose after detoxing—a very familiar story.

Arna Bud-Husain, 49, died on 11 April. Arna was a resident at one of our homeless hostels. Andrew O'Connell, 54, was violently attacked for being homeless and died on 8 August while sleeping rough.

There are those who have not been named but are confirmed as having died while sleeping rough in Brighton. In October, a 39-year-old man died sleeping rough and a 60-year-old died while living in emergency accommodation. In November: a 34-year-old man who died from sepsis; a 41-year-old woman; and another 41-year-old who had been evicted from their emergency accommodation only the day before. In December, a 35-year-old woman. In January, a 50-year-old died in temporary accommodation. The year before: in March, a man in his 50s and a 33-year-old man died; in April, a 45-year-old man died; and in July, a 36-year-old man died. Those are just the people who have died in Brighton up until July 2019—many more have died in the past six months on our streets, in our city. Three of the men's bodies were so badly decomposed when they were discovered that forensic testing was needed to identify them.

The failure to address the rising tide of homelessness under the Conservative Government is not only causing an increase in rough sleeping; it is literally causing the deaths of my constituents. We are talking about a 51% increase in the past five years alone, and the average age now for someone on the streets is 44. Being homeless is in itself a vulnerability and many councils up and down our country treat it not; they say, "You have to be vulnerable within the street homeless community to get support." That must change, and I hope we can change it.

6.35 pm

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): I am grateful for being called to speak in this incredibly important debate. Parliamentarians must grapple with many vital issues,

but none is more important than the safety and welfare of the people we represent up and down the country. We cannot and should not forget that the national shame of high and rising homelessness is a direct result of decisions made by Conservative Ministers. The past decade of Tory austerity has seen a steep drop in investment in affordable homes, crude cuts to housing benefit, reduced funding for homelessness services and a lack of action to help private renters.

Those on the Government Benches like to make reference to the last Labour Government, so I will as well. We need to remember that the last Labour Government inherited high and rising homelessness in 1997, after 18 years of the Conservative party being in government, and took decisive action to turn that Tory legacy around. It did not happen overnight, but Labour's action led to what Crisis and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation have called an "unprecedented" decline in homeless in the 13 years of good Labour government.

In contrast to our legacy in government, homelessness has dramatically increased under the Tories since 2010. We must do whatever we can to end the scourge of homelessness, and we must all be genuinely committed to taking action and addressing the disgrace that is homelessness. I pledge to play my part, on behalf of all the people in Newport West, to right this wrong. I volunteer at a local night shelter, Eden Gate, in Newport West. I do not do it for political reasons—most definitely not; like many other people I do it because we cannot walk by on the other side. We cannot continue to see people reduced to seeking shelter and somewhere to sleep in doorways, parks and other public places, and then turn away and do nothing. I encourage all colleagues in this House to think about volunteering at their local night shelters; the stories and experiences of people they will meet there will inspire, sadden and amaze all those who find time to do it. I will continue to volunteer until we see clear, emphatic and coherent leadership from this Government. The time to act came a long time ago, but we have a chance to act now—and act we must.

6.38 pm

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): Homelessness is a crisis and it has been a growing crisis under successive Tory-Lib Dem and Tory Governments in the past 10 years. Members from across the House have articulated well the causes of and potential solutions to that crisis, none more so than my hon. Friends the Members for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) and for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Opong-Asare), who made their maiden speeches this afternoon. My hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead was right to praise the feminist socialist Teresa Pearce, who once honoured me by calling me "sister". My hon. Friend spoke of her Ghanaian heritage and the fact that she was told that she would never make it in politics. Clearly the message bearer did not have quite the measure of the lady who is sitting behind me today. My hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead is representing the place he calls home, where he was born. It had been 40 years since somebody from Birkenhead had made a first speech in this place, and he was right to praise Frank Field and his work in tackling poverty. No one can speak with authority better than those who work with homeless people. I am sure that my hon. Friend will bring great knowledge to future housing debates.

The hon. Member for Gravesham (Adam Holloway) said that homelessness was a health problem and that people should not give to beggars as the vast majority of them buy drugs with the money. I disagree. He is right that the failure of all manner of services is to blame, but it is under his Government that they have collapsed.

Adam Holloway: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Alex Cunningham: I will not, no.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) lost his own dad to alcoholism. We heard a longer speech from him on this subject in Westminster Hall just a few months ago. He spoke of a homeless person in his area dying every 10 days, which he said was a moral disgrace. No wonder he was angry.

The hon. Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) highlighted the crisis created by high rents and the need for a greater housing supply. He is right. As the shadow Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), said in his opening remarks, if social housing building had been maintained at Labour's 2009 levels, the hon. Gentleman would have that supply.

The hon. Members for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) and for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) agree that the Vagrancy Act should be scrapped, so instead of a review why does the Secretary of State not just get on and do it? He should scrap it, and while he is at it he should deal with section 21 as well.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) used his usual concise approach in a targeted speech that offered solutions to the Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds) focused on directly funded services, the short-term approach to which is failing so many rough sleepers.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Ms Brown) spoke about a third of her constituents working for less than the London living wage, with many people earning less than the total cost of their rent. What a disgraceful set of circumstances.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr Perkins) talked about homelessness being one of the most important issues facing the country, and today's speeches have illustrated that. He went on to say that we need to recognise more and more of the impact of welfare policy on homelessness, yet it appears that Government Members are in denial as far as that is concerned.

Adam Holloway: We are not going to get anywhere in helping these people in dire need if we continue to conflate street homelessness with some of the other things the hon. Gentleman is talking about. Street homelessness is primarily a health problem, and unless we accept and understand that we will get nowhere. We are no use to those people if we talk like that.

Alex Cunningham: Health is of course an element, but I remind the hon. Gentleman that the most recent Labour Government, which left government in 2010, had almost eradicated homelessness, but we now see increase upon increase upon increase. Members have talked about the number of people who are dying homeless. Yes, we need to tackle all these things, and it is not all to do with drugs.

[Alex Cunningham]

My hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield also talked about how the reduction in benefits has affected homelessness, along with the reduction in funding for hostels and, of course, the lack of new social housing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) talked about rough sleeping being the most visible form of homelessness—and don't we know it? Every day that I walk into this place and every night when I leave, I see them in Westminster station, and if I walk along the way I see them there, too. I do not see any of them shooting up, to be perfectly honest.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle) talked about no properties being affordable when people depend on the local housing allowance. There is just insufficient income for them to pay their rent. He talked about the need for a robust measure of homelessness, and said that such measures appear to be a state secret, because the Government will not tell us how they measure homelessness. My hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) agreed with that, and went on to name young people who are dying on our streets—on the streets of his constituency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) talked about the collapse of social care and mental health services, which has meant that people are not getting the support they need. Like others, he praised the charities and other organisations that work with homeless people. We could list 20, 30, 40 or 50 of them, as they were probably named in this debate and in previous debates, but, of course, they all need one very important thing, which is resources.

My hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) talked about the hidden homelessness of families in temporary accommodation, highlighting the fact that 700 people in her area live in temporary accommodation, but they do not have that specific accommodation in the area where they should have it, which is in their home town. She also talked about the stress caused to children who actually end up living well away from their schools, and have to struggle to get there.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones) talked about homelessness being a direct result of the decision making of the Conservative Government and also that lack of support to help private renters. I just hope that, tonight, we have a Government prepared to listen to my hon. Friends and to those on the Conservative Benches who share our concerns over failure and inaction. Knowing that there are thousands of children out there without a home to call their own should keep us awake at night. It is easy to play the blame game, which successive Governments have done, particularly over the past decade, but it is time that the Government took some responsibility for their failure.

In 1997, Labour took action to tackle homelessness, and we achieved what organisations such as Crisis and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation have called an “unprecedented” decline in homelessness. I can only conclude that, after nearly 10 years of Conservative-Lib Dem and Conservative Governments, this has never been, and still is not, a priority of this Government. Homelessness has dramatically increased since 2010 on

every measure. No matter how the Minister tries to spin it, the Government have failed and they will continue to fail until they start taking tough action to tackle what is a tough issue. They will spout chosen statistics such as rough sleeping falling last year by 2%—2%! Can Members believe that we almost had the Secretary of State boasting that that was some form of success? It is a small drop that can be accounted for by a range of reasons that have nothing to do with Government action. The number of rough sleepers on the streets has more than doubled since 2010, but that is not a slight change. It can therefore be directly attributed to Government inaction on tackling homelessness and the devastating cuts to local authority services.

Despite the funding the Government have thrown at homelessness, it is not enough to fill the funding hole that they have created. We know all too well that it is not simply about getting people off the streets, incredibly important as that is. It is about all the other things that can lead to people becoming homeless: income; private renting; tenants' rights; social care; local authority funding and resource; and mental health. They are all areas with fundamental problems that the Government have simply not done enough to address.

The Secretary of State spoke about a death being a sobering reminder of what we face today, but there have been an increasing number of deaths over the past 10 years under his Government, and we have still not had the action that is necessary. If they do not take action, the problems will not get fewer, they will grow and then they will take even more resources to address.

I met representatives of AKT—formerly known as the Albert Kennedy Trust—last year. I also met some young LGBT people who had difficulties with housing. House sharing can be more difficult for a young LGBT person. They may have experienced a family breakdown, which forces them to leave their family home, yet support from cash-strapped local authorities is limited for such people—if it exists at all. None the less, we cannot let it just be a case of handing out some cash in the hope that the homelessness crisis can get better.

We need strategic and concentrated efforts to ensure that housing works for everyone in this country: for young adults who currently spend two thirds of their income on rent; LGBT people who may have experienced family breakdown and need secure housing; veterans coming out of the armed forces, who may have little support in getting back into daily life, including getting a roof over their head; older people who need housing suited to reduced mobility, particularly some help to make it easier for them to downsize if they want to; survivors of domestic violence who feel that they have nowhere safe to live if they leave an abusive partner; children who should not be living in B&Bs or temporary accommodation after temporary accommodation; and lower-income families who need the grounding of a family home, so that they can get on in life. Right now, I do not really know what the Government are doing for these groups. You have to up your game, Secretary of State. We need solutions to this crisis, and we look forward to you finding them.

6.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Luke Hall): I thank the Opposition for bringing this debate to the House

today. On the whole, we have had a constructive debate in which we have talked about many of the issues facing homeless people and rough sleepers in this country.

I congratulate the two Members who made their maiden speeches today. The hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare) made a passionate speech about her journey to this place. It was incredible to hear that her careers adviser told her not to bother even applying for a job in the House of Commons; I am sure that he will be hanging his head and wondering what sort of advice he is giving. The hon. Member gave us an incredible tour of her constituency; I would be delighted to take up her offer of chips in the Frying Pan in Belvedere. Of course, I am happy to meet her to discuss homelessness in her constituency as well.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) started by paying tribute to his predecessor, and I join him in that. Frank Field was an excellent Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee, and a fantastic advocate for working across the House. I hope that the hon. Member will follow his predecessor in that regard.

In 2020, it is unacceptable for anybody to have to sleep rough, particularly at a time of year when those on the streets are enduring sub-zero temperatures, on top of the enormous strains being placed on their physical and mental health. I do not have too much time, so I want to start by putting it on record that the cold weather fund that we have doubled this year, and extended by a further £3 million, is still open and available for people to apply for. I am around if any colleagues want to speak to me about how to apply for this fund, and would be delighted to have those conversations.

A number of colleagues, including the hon. Members for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) and for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle), have put on record their concern about deaths of homeless people on the streets. Every premature death of someone who is homeless is one too many. We take this matter extremely seriously, and are working closely with the Health Secretary to ensure that rough sleepers get the health and care support they need. That is why, as part of the rough sleeping strategy, the Government have committed £30 million of NHS England funding to address rough sleeping over the next five years.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Will the Minister give way?

Luke Hall: I will not at the moment, I am afraid—just because of the limited time.

We are working to implement test models of community-based provision across six projects that are designed to enable access to health and support services for people who are sleeping rough, with both physical and mental ill health, and substance dependency needs, being managed by Public Health England. All these projects are being informed by people who have lived experience of rough sleeping to ensure that rough sleepers receive the right support. In Portsmouth, Westminster and Newcastle, these projects include placing nurses and other specialist staff in homeless services to provide wraparound and intensive support.

Neil Coyle: Will any of the pilots introduce a safeguarding review of any of the deaths in those areas, to try to identify possible interventions that could have prevented each death or the homelessness itself?

Luke Hall: We are holding safeguarding reviews where appropriate, but I am happy to continue that conversation with the hon. Gentleman, and to take up his offer to meet the domestic abuse charity that he mentioned.

In West Sussex, people who sleep rough will be directed away from A&E, and supported to access more appropriate and suitable healthcare services.

A number of colleagues from across the House raised the issue of social housing, including my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham), with whom I enjoyed visiting some of these services over the Christmas period. My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) put on record his experience on the matter, and spoke passionately about the importance of choice and supply. The hon. Member for West Ham (Ms Brown) was a passionate advocate for her constituents and the issues they raise. I am always happy to speak to her about those issues in more depth. We have committed to increasing the supply of social housing, and have made £9 billion available through the affordable homes programme to March 2022, to deliver approximately a quarter of a million new affordable homes in a wide range of tenures, including social rents.

Layla Moran: Will the Minister give way?

Luke Hall: I am afraid I will not at the moment.

Since 2010, we have delivered more than 464,000 new affordable homes, including 331,000 affordable homes for rent. My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Ben Everitt) raised his concerns about temporary accommodation. Temporary accommodation means that people are receiving help and support, but of course we want to see those individuals and their families moved into settled accommodation as soon as possible, and on a permanent basis. We recently announced £263 million of funding for local authorities to support the delivery of homelessness services—an increase of £23 million on this financial year. That funding will also support prevention programmes to help those who are at risk of becoming homeless.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Will the Minister give way?

Layla Moran: Will the Minister give way?

Luke Hall: I will not at the moment, but I will come back to some of the issues that have been raised in the debate.

A number of colleagues, including the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr Perkins), raised concerns about welfare and the local housing allowance. We have of course delivered on our commitment to end the benefit freeze, and the majority of people in receipt of housing support will see their support increase as a result.

Mr Perkins: Will the Minister give way?

Luke Hall: In a second.

We have also committed an additional £40 million in discretionary housing payments for 2021 to help those facing affordability challenges in the private sector. We understand the importance of this issue in tackling and meeting our ambitious target to end rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament, but we are always happy to come back to this matter.

[Luke Hall]

We have talked a lot about substance misuse. My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Adam Holloway) put on record his experience in this matter and talked about the importance of substance misuse needs. My hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Dean Russell) spoke eloquently about his experience of cuckooing. We know that many rough sleepers have substance misuse needs and can struggle to access the support they need to tackle substance dependency. Indeed, data collected in 2018-19 identified that the second most prevalent reported support need among people seen rough sleeping in London related to alcohol, at 42%, while 41% of rough sleepers were assessed as having a support need related to drugs. Through our rough sleeping strategy, we have made a number of commitments to address this issue, including new training for frontline workers to help them to support rough sleepers under the influence of new psychoactive substances such as Spice. We are also working with the Home Office on the development of the cross-Government job strategy, as well as working closely with Dame Carol Black's team to provide evidence and data to support the forthcoming independent review of drugs policy.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Will the Minister talk to his health colleagues who, in the public health grant to local councils, do not require a minimum standard of substance misuse services, meaning that it is a postcode lottery? Please, please sort that out.

Luke Hall: We are providing specialist funding. I am happy to go into that in more detail with the hon. Gentleman.

We understand that enabling access to and better outcomes from services that prevent mental ill health, improve mental health support recovery and promote good mental health will contribute to our ambitions to end rough sleeping. That is why, as part of our strategy, the Government have committed £30 million of funding from NHS England over the next five years for specialist mental health support for those who are rough sleeping.

Layla Moran *rose*—

Luke Hall: I will now address the point that the hon. Lady raised about the review of the Vagrancy Act. I know that she has written extensively about this issue and raised it in the House before. My hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) also raised it today. They both put on record their experience in and work on this issue. Our rough sleeping strategy committed to reviewing the Act, as they know. We are clear that nobody should be criminalised for simply having nowhere to live and sleeping rough. Because of the engagement with stakeholders that we have undertaken, we know that this is a hugely complex matter with diverging views between charities, the public sector, police forces and local authorities. That is why we believe that this review is the right course of action for now.

I want to address some of the wider points that have been raised on rough sleeping. This issue has been highlighted by a number of Members across the House, including my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson), who talked about

the £470,000 rough sleeping initiative grant funding going into his constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford referred to the encouraging signs that her local authority is seeing through the funding. Our commitment to tackle this issue is demonstrated very clearly by bringing forward by three years the commitment to end rough sleeping altogether by the end of this Parliament.

Our strategy sets out a far-reaching £100 million package to help people who sleep rough now and to put in place the structures that will end rough sleeping completely within the next five years. This means preventing rough sleeping before it happens, intervening at crisis points, and helping people to recover with the kind of flexible support that meets their needs. Across Government, we are working with a renewed ambition to scale up our successful programmes, such as the RSI, and to devise new interventions to meet this important manifesto commitment. We are providing a further £437 million in 2020-21 to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping. This marks a £69 million increase in funding from the current year and builds on the £1.2 billion that we have already invested over the spending review period to April this year. We have also expanded the Government's support through the rough sleeping initiative this year, with £46 million of funding, including £12 million for areas joining the initiative. We expect that to deliver 750 staff and 2,600 bed spaces this year.

This has been an important debate on what we all understand to be a complex and challenging issue that the Government are determined to permanently address. We are glad to have had the opportunity to explain our considerable ambitions—

Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab): *claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).*

Question put forthwith, That the Question be now put.

Question agreed to.

Question put accordingly (Standing Order No. 31(2)), That the original words stand part of the Question.

The House divided: Ayes 215, Noes 311.

Division No. 26]

[6.59 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Tahir
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, Jonathan
Bardell, Hannah
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blake, Olivia
Blomfield, Paul
Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre

Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Callaghan, Amy
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Clark, Feryal
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crawley, Angela
Cruddas, Jon

Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debonnaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal

Kinnock, Stephen
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morgan, Mr Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Reeves, Ellie (*Proxy vote cast by Bambos Charalambous*)
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick

Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl

Twigg, Derek
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Winter, Beth
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:

Liz Twist and
 Colleen Fletcher

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Ahmad Khan, Imran
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Bacon, Mr Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Kemi (*Proxy vote cast by Leo Docherty*)
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, rh Conor
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carter, Andy
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clarke, Theo
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evnnett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick

Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkins, Mrs Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus

Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Largan, Robert
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast by Lee Rowley*)
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherylyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryl
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Penning, rh Sir Mike

Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg (*Proxy vote cast by John Whittingdale*)
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane

Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob

Tellers for the Noes:
Michelle Donelan and
David Rutley

Question accordingly negated.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 31(2)),
 That the proposed words be there added.

Question agreed to.

The Speaker declared the main Question, as amended,
to be agreed to (Standing Order No. 31(2)).

Resolved,

That this House notes the Government's commitment to ending rough-sleeping in this Parliament; further notes that the latest annual figures showed a fall in rough sleeping numbers; notes the steps already taken by the Government including implementing the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and delivering successful programmes like the Rough Sleeping Initiative and Housing First pilots; welcomes the Government's commitment of £1.2 billion to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping; notes the Secretary of State's announcement this week of an extra £112 million for the Government's Rough Sleeping Initiative, taking the total sum being invested over the next year to £437 million; notes this House's concern that more is done to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping so that everyone has access to accommodation when they need it most; and notes the clear steps this Government are taking to achieve this.

Speaker's Statement: Select Committee Chairs

Mr Speaker: We now come to the announcement of the results for the election of Select Committee Chairs. The results for Chairs who were unopposed were announced on Monday and the election for the contested votes were held by secret ballot today. Five hundred and eighty-six ballot papers were submitted. The results are as follows:

<i>Committee</i>	<i>Elected</i>
Defence	Mr Tobias Ellwood
Digital, Culture, Media and Sport	Julian Knight
Environmental Audit	Philip Dunne
Foreign Affairs	Tom Tugendhat
Health and Social Care	Jeremy Hunt
International Development	Sarah Champion
International Trade	Angus Brendan MacNeil
Justice	Sir Robert Neill
Northern Ireland Affairs	Simon Hoare
Petitions	Catherine McKinnell
Procedure	Karen Bradley
Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs	Mr William Wragg
Science and Technology	Greg Clark
Transport	Huw Merriman
Work and Pensions	Stephen Timms

I congratulate colleagues who have been elected and thank all the candidates for taking part. The full breakdown of voting in each contest is set out in the paper that will be available shortly from the Vote Office and on the website. The Members elected take up their positions formally when the Committee has been nominated by the House.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Earlier this week at Health questions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands) raised a question about scaremongering around the Parsons Green walk-in centre. The Parsons Green walk-in centre is not closing and anyone who claims that is not following the facts, but I wanted to come to the House at the earliest moment to apologise, Mr Speaker, to you, to the House, and to the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), because I did not follow the parliamentary custom of letting him know in advance that I was going to mention him. I am afraid that I did not know the subject was going to come up, although I should not have been surprised given my right hon. Friend's assiduousness. I do not apologise for the substance of what I said, nor for the force with which I said it, because I think that this sort of scaremongering worries the most vulnerable, but I do apologise for not letting the hon. Member know in advance.

Mr Speaker: I hope the Secretary of State will go a little bit further than that. Calling an hon. Member a total disgrace should be retracted.

Matt Hancock: I am very happy to retract that and I hope that this will be the end of the matter.

Mr Speaker: Let us leave it at that.

Wards Corner Redevelopment

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*James Morris.*)

7.18 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): I am very grateful to have the opportunity to have the Adjournment debate this evening.

Mr Speaker, you may not know that Seven Sisters tube station in my constituency has about 3 million people visit it every year. I can tell that you are aghast. It is because it is the home of Tottenham Hotspur and people arriving to see them often come through the station. It is very much the gateway to my constituency.

Wards Corner is part of that gateway. It is the first building that people see on exiting Seven Sisters tube station. In the year of my birth, 1972, the former Edwardian department store was left abandoned. Soon it fell into a state of disrepair and throughout my childhood and teenage years, the space remained unused. It was not until the early 2000s, when new arrivals came to Tottenham—from Peru, Honduras, El Salvador, Brazil and other countries across South America—that it became lively again. Many had fled chaos and upheaval at home, but in Wards Corner they spotted an opportunity to build a new home out of the disused space.

Stepping inside the Latin Village that they created is like entering a whole different world. Inside is a magical maze of shops, food stalls, barbershops and nail bars. Salsa and Spanish music vibrates the shelves of groceries. Kids run excitedly though the aisles. Men and women sit and chat, sipping strong Colombian coffee. The smell of Argentinian meat, freshly made empanadas and tamales is impossible to resist.

As day becomes night, the aisles fill up with young couples, groups of friends and families sitting down at tables to eat. The volume of the sound system is turned up. Beers imported from South America are passed round. People chat, their faces illuminated by fairy lights and the hues of shop fronts. Couples dance. Out of the rubble, Tottenham's South American community has created a treasure trove of culture, community, love and life. London is often hailed as a centre of openness, diversity and multiculturalism; this is a corner of the capital that lives up to the hype.

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

Mr Speaker: I am not sure that the debate will roam as far as Northern Ireland, but I am sure that there will be a reason—perhaps the hon. Gentleman is a visitor to the precinct.

Jim Shannon: I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. What he has been describing sounds almost idyllic. Does he not agree that any development strategy—I think he will come to this—must be robust and ensure that those who are from different communities, which he mentioned, within the overall community feel important and that they are heard and understood? Further, does he believe that we must be at pains to ensure that plans never, ever exclude people from their businesses and marketplaces and that we should understand their effect on people's ordinary lives?

Mr Lammy: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point in the way he did. He knows something about what it means to be excluded and excluded communities, and he is right that I will come to that. I know that those listening to the debate will be very grateful that he and others have taken interest.

Today, the Latin Village hosts the United Kingdom's second largest concentration of Latin American businesses. Around 60—mostly female—traders run businesses in the Latin Village, providing a living for some 80 families, but for those who work and shop and have even grown up in the plywood jungle, the market represents so much more than a pay cheque.

Tottenham has witnessed two riots in my lifetime: in 1985 and 2011. Its current challenges, including London's knife and gang-crime epidemic, are well known. In that context, the Latin market is a vital space, where social belonging is promoted and a sense of collective identity is built. Across families and generations, residents rely on the village as a safe and inclusive space for socialising and raising their families. It is a thriving model of community wealth creation, of affordable and effective childcare, and of inter-generational bonding. The demolition of Wards Corner represents a very real threat to that social cohesion. For many, it could mean the end of their way of life.

Almost everyone accepts that Wards Corner would benefit from investment, but at present there are two competing visions of its future. The first redevelopment plan is that of Grainger plc, which was selected as a development partner by Haringey Council in 2004. In 2012, the council granted Grainger plc planning and conservation area consent for the redevelopment of the Wards Corner site. It sets out a blueprint to build 196 new luxury flats—with no allocation for social or affordable units—and a new retail and leisure space. Just six commercial units will be allocated to independent stores. The rest will be filled with generic coffee shops and chain restaurants—a world away from the vibrant and unique stalls inside the market. In addition, it was agreed that the Seven Sisters market, including the Latin Village, would be temporarily relocated, before getting a new site on the other side of the road.

However, planning documents show that the new market will come with a dramatic increase of rent—effectively locking out the traders and family businesses that make up the Latin Village. For the first five years there will be a 2% cap on rent increases, but after that rents will be subject to the market. Traders have estimated that that could mean a rent increase of up to 300%.

UN human rights experts have already condemned the scheme, calling it “a gentrification project” that

“represents a threat to cultural life”.

Traders could be forced to shut up shop, families may have to look for new incomes and the jewel of the Latin Village could shatter and ultimately be swept away.

The second vision for the future of Wards Corner is the “community plan”, proposed in a planning application to the council by the West Green Road and Seven Sisters Development Trust. Earlier versions of the community plan have had planning permission, but you would not know that from the public statements of Haringey Council, Transport for London or the developer. The community plan outlines a vision for a high-quality,

tasteful restoration of the Wards Corner building to its former glory and its use as a community asset and space, rather than demolition of the Wards Corner department store building. The plan says:

“We believe that it is not necessary to demolish existing historic assets or to dislocate an entire community that has lived and worked on the site for a generation and more. We regard restoration as a more sustainable form of regeneration, building as it does on already existing community assets. Top-down, developer-led regeneration is not the only way.”

The redevelopment of Wards Corner is a local issue in Tottenham, but it is part of a national, and even global, story. We have heard it so many times, in so many different places. Migrants turn a run-down space into a cultural and business centre, but then a corporate entity threatens to take it away. The questions it raises are the same in Tottenham as they are in Glasgow, just as they are the same in the Bronx. When a deprived area is “redeveloped”, are we not meant to improve the lives of deprived people who already live there? Why does it take an influx of wealthy new people to an area before anyone bothers to invest in it? Should we not bring the existing communities along with the redevelopment, rather than kick them out? Is the purpose of redevelopment social cohesion or social cleansing?

The traders who depend on the Latin Village have been treated with gross disrespect and a lack of compassion throughout this process. The firm Quarterbridge was appointed the “market facilitator”—a supposedly independent body responsible for looking after traders' interests during the redevelopment. However, the director of Quarterbridge, Jonathan Owen, is also the director of Market Asset Management. How can the market manager be the same man as the market facilitator? The very person who is supposed to stand up for the Latin Village's market traders has an interest in the new development's going ahead. Jonathan Owen has made his conflict of interest very clear, by adding insult to injury of those he is supposed to protect. Owen has used phrases such as “bloody illegal immigrants” and declared that, “If I wanted to I could get rid of 90% of the traders here”. When traders asked whether drains could be cleared, he replied, “When was the last time you cleared the drains in your house?”

Jonathan Owen and Quarterbridge were chosen and paid for by Transport for London. They were supposed to look out for the traders. Transport for London should have done proper due diligence when awarding the lease. If traders had experienced even a fraction of the racism and bullying that they have had to endure while on the platform of Seven Sisters station, Transport for London would have acted. However, moments away in the market, on land owned by Transport for London, there has been deflection and inaction when blatant acts of discrimination have taken place. This is not acceptable. Jonathan Owen, Quarterbridge and Market Asset Management must now be fired and sent packing from the market. There needs to be a thorough review of why this level of unacceptable conduct has been allowed to carry on over such a long and sustained period on public land without Transport for London having done anything meaningful to stop it. There also needs to be an investigation into the very serious allegations of overcharging of traders for electricity and other utilities by the market operator—allegations that might amount to fraud and which ought to require police involvement.

Haringey Council has technically given the community plan permission to go ahead, but at the same time it says there is no way for the Grainger plc plan to be stopped. The council's housing and regeneration scrutiny panel undertook a thorough review, which lasted several months and heard evidence from traders, council officers, Transport for London, Grainger, Quarterbridge, architects, experts and academics. For the first time in years, traders at the market felt listened to. It was a model of good overview and scrutiny work.

Last week, however, the cabinet of Haringey Council rejected eight, partially agreed with three and fully agreed with just three of the 14 recommendations made by its own scrutiny panel on the redevelopment. The council maintains that some of the recommendations were simply not within its remit. I spoke to the council about this just this week. The recommendations it rejected, however, included recommendation 5, which calls for a review of how all section 106 conditions are monitored and enforced in order to make sure that people with protected characteristics are protected under equalities legislation.

An investigation undertaken by Haringey Council's own planning department into section 106 concluded that it indeed was breached and that the council should have known and should have acted earlier. In addition, when the compulsory purchase order was granted by the department, the planning inspector, John Felgate, gave an "erroneous interpretation" of Grainger's commitment to guarantee the traders' rent. The report suggested that traders' rents should be guaranteed to rise by no more than 2% per year indefinitely. In reality, this guarantee only holds for five years. Given these issues, does the Minister maintain that the CPO is still valid?

Other recommendations rejected by the Haringey Council cabinet include the recommendation to "explore the feasibility and cost benefits of all approaches for a full or partial buy-out".

This means not giving the community plan a chance. Worse still, the council even rejected the recommendation to work with Grainger plc and relevant community groups to co-ordinate a combined solution. Surely that is wrong. How can we bring partners together, how can people sit down with traders, with the council, with Grainger, to broker a solution that all of us can get behind?

We say we are on the side of the many, not the few. We should not be sending enforcement officers to hassle family traders. When a Labour council rightly talks about putting people before profit, that means being led by the voices of the communities, not developers. Some of the evictions we have seen just this week are a scandal and have caused real concern in the constituency. That is how people in my constituency have been treated by what has been called the first "Corbyn council". We cannot claim to do housing differently and then simply do it in the same way. Due process matters. Proper scrutiny and accountability matter. Standing up to racism, bullying and victimisation in all their ugly forms matters.

The good thing for Haringey Council, TfL and this Government is that it is not too late. There is still time to do the right thing. All it will take is swallowing some pride and applying simple principles that should have been followed from the start. It means recognising the huge cultural and social value of the Latin Village,

investing in the traders who created it and taking their plans for its redevelopment seriously. I want to see the market operator got rid of, properly investigated and, if applicable, met with the full force of the law. I want to see the community plan for the market given proper and active consideration as a viable part of a new vision for Wards Corner. I want the Minister's help to facilitate as a matter of urgency independently chaired roundtable discussions at which the market traders are treated as equals and genuinely listened to, so that a better future can be shaped for the site, with them at the heart of decisions on what happens next.

If Grainger's development is what goes ahead, at the very least it needs to make some serious compromises. First, given the housing crisis, it is outrageous that there is no provision for social housing. A new minimum quota of 10% should be introduced. Secondly, there must be a large increase in the number of spaces for independent traders. We cannot allow Wards Corner to become another clone high street. Thirdly, the five-year rent increase cap is not good enough. There is no point in preserving the Latin Village for half a decade only to let it collapse later. Let us introduce a review at the end of that period to decide whether to extend or change the cap.

It would be a great failure if Tottenham were to become just another story of gentrification, with locals pushed out as wealthy investors come in, and culture bulldozed and replaced by clone high streets—if it were to become another deprived community that is not invested in, but pushed further away. Let Wards Corner instead become an example of how we can do regeneration better: bottom-up, not top-down, and with investment for the community that is based there, not in spite of it. Let us have a new future for Tottenham that does not demolish the past.

The Leader of the Opposition, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), would have liked to be here this evening. He has met people in the Latin Village, and he too says that he stands with the Latin Village community to protect the market. It is a place of community identity that gives more than 60 independent traders a livelihood. Their struggle, he says, is his struggle, and I associate myself with his remarks. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

7.36 pm

The Minister for Housing (Esther McVey): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) on securing the debate. I know that this matter is of great importance to him and to those associated with Seven Sisters market.

Given the time limit, I may not be able to address every issue that has been raised. I should also make it clear that, for reasons that I will explain in more detail, I cannot comment freely on the regeneration of Wards Corner, and in particular the Secretary of State's decision to confirm the Wards Corner compulsory purchase order. I know that the right hon. Gentleman, as an experienced Member of the House, will understand that, as there is an application to the Court of Appeal in respect of the High Court ruling upholding the Secretary of State's decision to confirm the CPO, it is simply not possible for me to discuss the details and the application, as to do so might prejudice those judicial review proceedings.

[*Esther McVey*]

The matter was lodged with the Court of Appeal just before Christmas, and it may be a number of months before it is known whether permission will be given for it to be subject to those further proceedings. I therefore presume that the right hon. Gentleman considered it more important to put his concerns on the record than to hear anything that I might be able to say, and in that context I commend him for making those points. Let me emphasise, however, that the Government take the issue of regeneration and the role of planning extremely seriously. With that in mind, I will explain the background to and the Government's involvement in the Wards Comer CPO, leading up to the application to the Court of Appeal. I will then place that in the context of the Government's view on the use of CPO powers.

In September 2016, the London Borough of Haringey made the Wards Corner CPO to enable it to acquire 9 hectares compulsorily to facilitate the comprehensive regeneration of the land known as Wards Corner, for which it had previously granted planning permission for a mixed-use development. As the right hon. Gentleman will know, the council made a robust case to the inquiry that the scheme would act as a catalyst for the local community by bringing an injection of new investment, higher order retail activity, an improved Seven Sisters market, and more and higher quality jobs. The overall investment in terms of construction cost alone was estimated at about £60 million. It is forecast that during the construction phase the development will provide 190 full-time equivalent direct jobs, and that once it has been completed a further 95 direct jobs will deliver £4.8 million per year in gross value added. The scheme will also support further spin-off jobs indirectly.

The CPO was submitted to the Secretary of State for confirmation. Following the receipt of public objections to it, a public local inquiry was arranged in July 2017. The community and the market traders themselves played a full and active part in the CPO process and in the public inquiry. An independent inquiry inspector heard oral submissions on behalf of the market traders' group and other interested parties. The public inquiry inspector returned his findings and recommendation to the Secretary of State in January 2018, and just over a year ago the Secretary of State issued his decision to confirm the CPO.

That would normally end the Secretary of State's formal involvement, but as I am pretty sure the right hon. Gentleman is aware, the Secretary of State's decision was then challenged in the courts. The case was heard by the High Court in October 2019, and judgment was handed down in two days. The claim was dismissed and the judge refused leave to appeal the decision. I cannot interpret on the judgment, but I should say that, overall, the judge was not persuaded that a genuine doubt existed as to the approach adopted by the inspector and therefore the Secretary of State in his decision, on the issues of affordability and the public sector equality duty of concern to the claimants.

That was not the end of the matter, and litigation has continued. Following the High Court judgment, the claimant lodged an application to the Court of Appeal. As yet, there has been no word on whether the application has been accepted and it might be several months before it is known whether the fresh appeal will get

permission to be heard at that next tier of the judicial system. Therefore, while the Government welcomed the judgment made in the High Court, the council must again wait to see whether it can take forward the order that will enable the proposals on much-needed regeneration for the area to proceed.

I would now like to set out the wider purpose of the CPO process and its role in enabling and supporting the regeneration of communities such as those in Tottenham. Successive Governments have supported compulsory purchase as an important tool to assemble land into a single ownership to enable the delivery of a wide range of development projects. Used properly, compulsory purchase can enable the development of new communities, essential social infrastructure and commercial facilities, all of which can support economic growth, regeneration and improvements in quality of life. It enables the acquisition of land and property in the public interest without the agreement of the owner, subject to the payment of fair compensation. While land can be acquired by agreement between the parties concerned, such voluntary approaches are unlikely to be suitable for assembling all the land needed for major projects because some owners might not agree to sell their land, or might ask an unreasonably high price. Local authorities and others are empowered to use compulsory purchase powers to deliver a wide range of projects, from large-scale town centre regeneration schemes to the refurbishment of individual empty homes.

To use compulsory purchase powers, an acquiring authority must first make a CPO and submit it to the relevant Minister to decide whether to confirm it. The acquiring authority must notify all qualifying persons, including the relevant owners and occupiers. The CPO is advertised through newspapers and site notices to notify the general public. Remaining objectors to the CPO have the right to object and be heard at a public local inquiry. An inspector's task is to inquire into the CPO and to elicit all the information needed to enable the Minister to decide whether to confirm the CPO. I am sure the right hon. Gentleman will agree that the CPO process provides ample opportunity for all interested parties to be fully, properly and fairly involved in the process.

The inspector will then prepare and submit their report to the Minister, including their recommendation on whether the CPO should be confirmed. The Minister will then carefully consider the inspector's report and decide whether to confirm, modify or not confirm the CPO. In deciding whether to confirm the CPO, the Minister is acting in a quasi-judicial capacity. In exercising this function, it is incumbent upon the Minister to act and to be seen to act fairly and even-handedly. A CPO will be confirmed only when the Minister is satisfied that the order contributes to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of an area. The Minister must also be satisfied that there is a compelling case in the public interest to justify interfering with the human rights of those with an interest in the land affected by the CPO. In making the decision, the Minister must also have due regard to the public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010.

Mr Lammy: The Minister is setting out the rules that govern CPOs and I am grateful for that. However, would she be worried if a local authority and others

were engaging in evictions to get people out of the building while the CPO was still being challenged in the courts, or using false pretences regarding the state of the building to get the building vacated so that they could proceed as they desired?

Esther McVey: The right hon. Gentleman makes a compelling case, but any person aggrieved who wishes to dispute the validity of a CPO or any of its provisions has the right to legally challenge the confirmation of the CPO. Where a legal challenge is successful, the Court has the discretionary power to quash either the decision to confirm the CPO or the whole or any part of the CPO itself. A decision not to confirm a CPO may be challenged by way of a judicial review application made to the High Court and that was the case with the Wards Corner CPO.

I assure colleagues that the Government remain committed to the regeneration and revitalisation of communities most in need. We fully support Haringey

Council in its commitment to regeneration throughout the Tottenham area. Major developments are ongoing at Tottenham Hale and around the new Tottenham Hotspur stadium, with others planned. The intention is that the development will provide a catalyst for the regeneration of neighbouring areas such as Seven Sisters, which is the focus of the CPO that we are debating today.

As I said at the start, I must avoid prejudicing the legal process should the application to the Court of Appeal succeed. We must await the outcome from the Court of Appeal. I commend and thank the right hon. Gentleman for securing this debate and speaking so eloquently about the case.

Question put and agreed to.

7.47 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 29 January 2020

[SIR GEORGE HOWARTH *in the Chair*]

Planning System: Gypsies and Travellers

9.30 am

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Gypsies, Travellers and the planning system.

It is a huge pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir George. I thank Mr Speaker for granting this debate, and I welcome the Minister to his place. I also thank other hon. Members for being present today, including Members who have long spoken out on these issues such as my hon. Friends the Members for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) and for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois), the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), and others. I declare my interest as a member of Kettering Borough Council.

I have called this debate because it is my contention that the Government's planning policy with regard to Gypsies and Travellers is simply not working. I call on the Minister to ensure that during this five-year term of Conservative government, we finally get on top of this issue, because the policy is going in the wrong direction. Planning policy with regard to Travellers has as its aim

"to ensure fair and equal treatment for travellers in a way that facilitates their traditional and nomadic way of life while respecting the interests of the settled community."

What I want, and what I think most hon. Members want, is for everyone in the planning system to receive fair and equal treatment regardless of their background. The present policy regarding Travellers does not respect the interests of the settled community. The Government go on to say that in respect of Traveller sites, their aim is to reduce tensions between the settled and Traveller communities in plan-making and planning decisions. I say to the Minister that far from reducing tensions, the present planning system is inflaming them, because Travellers effectively have preferential treatment within the planning system.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that when we talk about the settled community, we do not just mean residents—although they can be deeply troubled by this issue—but people who are seeking to earn a living through their businesses in local communities? Within the past few days, a business has written to me to say that it is having repeated difficulties because of wrongful occupation of a business site in my constituency. I know that is not the only place where this is happening; it is a repeated occurrence.

Mr Hollobone: My hon. Friend makes a superb point in an excellent way, and I entirely concur. However, the settled community does not include only residents and businesses, but Travellers. During one of his excellent debates on this issue, my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire pointed out that we know

from the 2011 census that three quarters of Gypsies and Travellers live in houses, bungalows or flats. Only a quarter live in caravans or mobile homes, yet Gypsies and Travellers as a whole have an existing, separate planning law for themselves that only applies to a quarter of their population. That kind of special treatment within the planning system applies to no other ethnic group.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): Does the hon. Gentleman agree—perhaps he will not—that historically, planning laws have discriminated against Travellers who live a nomadic lifestyle, the percentage who are not in the bungalows he describes? Those laws have sealed up areas in which Travellers have traditionally stayed; have prevented Travellers from being able to move easily from site to site; and have created hostilities not because they have given preferential treatment to Travellers, but because they have given them discriminatory treatment. Is it not an indictment that five councils in this country have still not identified any Traveller sites, and very few have identified their full limit? That is the discrimination in the planning system, not the other way around, as the hon. Gentleman seems to suggest.

Mr Hollobone: I do not think anyone has any objection to Gypsies and Travellers who legitimately want to travel, so long as when they park up, they do so lawfully, on land that they either own or have permission to park up on. The problem is that the quarter of the Traveller community who do travel all too frequently park up on land that they do not own, and where they do not have permission to be.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. Regarding his last point, he will know that although the Government did not use this phrase, they effectively committed in the Conservative party manifesto to what is known as the Irish option, making acts of deliberate trespass a criminal, rather than civil, offence. However, he will also know that doing so will require primary legislation. I ask him to press the Minister to give us some timings for when that legislation will be introduced in the Commons, and to confirm which Department will be leading on it.

Mr Hollobone: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention. I will do so straight away: I put it to the Minister that this legislation needs to be brought forward as soon as possible, so that we can address this problem head on. Of course, this has been done in the Republic of Ireland, which in 2002 changed trespass from a civil offence to a criminal offence. That is actually inflaming the problem in this country, because many Irish Travellers are not in Ireland any more; they are here.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. He will know that in the Republic of Ireland, the criminalisation of trespass is part of a much wider, holistic package of equalities, rights and social programmes for Gypsies and Travellers that do not exist in this country. When pressing the Minister on the progress of this legislation, will he join me in pressing him on the flawed nature of

[Kate Green]

the Home Office consultation, which was conducted during Dissolution and with questions that were, at the very least, loaded?

Mr Hollobone: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. Like her, I do not regard the Government's consultation as satisfactory. I do not regard it as ambitious enough, and she is right to identify that there are issues with the Gypsy and Traveller community that we need to address outside the planning system. My hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire, in one of his excellent debates on this issue, highlighted the fact that Gypsies and Travellers have the lowest level of work of any ethnicity, at 47%. Some 60% of Gypsies and Travellers have no qualifications at all, whereas the figure for the rest of the population is just under 23%. He has said quite rightly that a compassionate case can be made for integrating Gypsies and Travellers into one whole assessment of their housing needs within a local area, rather than treating them as a separate group.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on introducing the debate. He is clearly trying to find a delicate balance between integration and making sure that councils do what they should be doing, and I appreciate that; it is the way I like to view this issue as well. Following on from the thoughts that he expressed in his last few words, does he agree that in order to build relationships with the Traveller community, there needs to be more encouragement for their children to attend local schools and clubs, and that we must ensure they are a valued and heard part of our community? Further, does he agree that this relationship, which is something that he and I both want to grow, will be solidified by mutual respect and a future in which the Traveller community is accepted within the wider community?

Mr Hollobone: I am grateful for that helpful intervention. I am so pleased that the hon. Gentleman has raised the issue of educational attainment in Gypsy and Traveller communities, because it is a national disgrace that so many Gypsy and Traveller children do not get the education that they deserve and are statutorily obliged to receive. That is the fault of local education authorities, but it is also the fault of the Gypsy and Traveller communities themselves, and we need to do far more to address that issue.

Another important thing in the hon. Gentleman's intervention was the two key words, "mutual respect". Mutual respect works both ways. Gypsies and Travellers demand respect from the settled community for their needs, but do not seem to respect the settled community when they park up on land illegally or build pitches without planning permission, often terrifying local communities with their presence. Of course, there are arguments on both sides of the debate, but the issue needs to be addressed. We are at the beginning of a five-year Parliament. By the end of the parliamentary Session, there will be no excuse for not dealing holistically with all the issues that Gypsies and Travellers pose for all of us.

It will be helpful to give some figures to identify the scale of the issue. The latest figures that I have are from July 2018; if the Minister has more up-to-date figures,

perhaps he can supply them. In July 2018, the number of Traveller caravans in the country was just under 23,000, up something like 30% from July 2008, of which 3,100 were on unauthorised sites. Of those 3,100, just over 2,100 were on land bought by Travellers. We are talking about 3,100 caravans on unauthorised sites, 2,100 of which were on land bought by Travellers and the remainder on land that they do not own.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing out that it is a small minority of Gypsies and Travellers who are on unauthorised encampments. As he said, three quarters are in bricks and mortar, even if they do not wish to be. Does he think that the failure of local authorities to provide sites, whether they are transit or permanent, and the lack of provision of social housing, is a factor in the necessity for Gypsies and Travellers to stop in unauthorised areas or on land without planning consent?

Mr Hollobone: There are two issues. We will probably disagree, but I struggle with the idea that local authorities should be obliged to provide such sites. I do not see why the public purse should purchase land for a particular group of people to live on. If Travellers were to purchase land and then apply for planning permission for a Traveller site—a suitable site in the right location—the local authority should give planning permission for that, but personally I do not see why the public purse should subsidise sites specifically for one ethnic group.

Mr Francois: I apologise for having a second bite at the cherry. It is true that the provision of sites varies around the country. Basildon Council has a number of sites, but part of the problem is that the Travellers often do not want to stay on them. They want to go where they like. Providing sites is not a panacea, if the people for whom they are theoretically provided ignore them.

Mr Hollobone: My right hon. Friend does not have to apologise for having a second bite at the cherry. He is welcome to intervene as often as he likes, because he is an expert on the issue. He makes an extremely good point in a thoroughly competent way.

I called for the debate because the activities of Gypsies and Travellers are a huge issue in the borough of Kettering. It is a combination of Gypsies and Travellers parking up on publicly or privately owned land without permission, and of their purchasing land in the countryside and immediately building plots without any intention of applying for planning permission. They clearly realise that the land is an unsuitable place for such a development, but they are cocking a snook at local authorities. There are therefore two issues. First, there is the trespass issue of parking up on land that they do not own. Secondly, there is the issue of purchasing land and developing Gypsy and Traveller sites with no intention of applying for planning permission.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: In local plans, councils must identify land that is acceptable for private housing and for business to meet the needs of the local community. If they do not identify suitable pieces of land, the local plan will be rejected. Why can councils fail to identify pieces of land suitable for being converted into sites for the Traveller community and have their local plans accepted?

Mr Hollobone: Kettering Borough Council has identified suitable sites for Gypsies and Travellers, but it is being abused by them. In the village of Broughton in my constituency, a Traveller encampment has permission for a limited number of plots, but the number of Gypsy and Traveller families living on that site far exceeds the permitted number of plots available, and is expanding all the time.

There is another case near the village of Loddington, where Gypsies and Travellers recently purchased land in open countryside. On a Friday, they moved in all the heavy building equipment, put in hard standing and started erecting plots without any kind of permission. The local borough council immediately served a temporary stop notice, which was ignored, and then a permanent stop notice, which was ignored. The development is there. Planning permission may or may not be sought. If anyone else were to dig up a field in open countryside and build a house, the local authority would intervene in the same way and the individual would stop the development, but that self-restraint does not seem to apply to Gypsies and Travellers.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that in its local plan, Kettering Borough Council identified a number of sites, sufficient for local need, that can be purchased and that, if purchased, will be given planning permission only for Traveller sites? If he is, there should not be overcrowding, because there would be other sites for Travellers to go to. Overcrowding is surely a sign that there is not enough provision. If there were too few houses, the local plan would be rejected, unless the council identified sites that could be converted only to housing. Has Kettering Borough Council identified more sites for conversion only to Traveller sites, and for which it will not allow any other planning use? If it has not, surely it has under-provided in its local plan.

Mr Hollobone: Yes, there are two additional sites for Gypsies and Travellers with up to 16 plots that are not occupied. The problem is that more Gypsy and Traveller families are arriving from other areas all the time and are overloading the existing sites. It is simply not fair on the local community in Kettering to have to provide ever more provision for Gypsies and Travellers from across the country. That is why we need the planning system to work effectively, and why we need Gypsies and Travellers to respect the law.

The Government should ensure—I would like the Minister's response to this—that someone in breach of an enforcement notice cannot apply for retrospective planning permission until that initial breach has been remedied. The Gypsies and Travellers who have moved into the site near Loddington, who have had a temporary and permanent stop notice served on them, should not be allowed to apply for retrospective planning permission until they have restored the field to its original state when they moved in on that Friday afternoon. That would be a real disincentive and would stop Gypsies and Travellers abusing the planning system in that way.

Andy Slaughter: Is it the hon. Gentleman's view that such a change in the law should apply to any planning situation? We hear examples all the time of illegal structures being put up, alterations being made to buildings and even new buildings being built, against which the

local authority takes enforcement action. Is he saying that the change should apply in all cases, not just to Gypsies and Travellers?

Mr Hollobone: Yes, I would like that to be the case. It seems to me that if someone is intentionally seeking to build an unauthorised development and is subject to a temporary or a permanent stop notice, they should do what that notice says—stop the work and restore the land to its original state. To my constituents, that would seem a sensible way forward.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): My hon. Friend is talking about the huge increase in retrospective planning applications. *The Times* ran an article quite recently showing that there were 39,200 retrospective applications over three years, and only one in eight of those was rejected. If somebody develops land without consent, there is a good chance that they will ultimately get consent. There is a huge incentive for Gypsy and Traveller encampments, because in most circumstances the land is acquired at agricultural value and once consent is achieved, it has a worth as developable land. There is a big incentive for people to try to abuse the system in that way.

Mr Hollobone: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. Local planning authorities should have the ability to enforce a requirement that people occupying sites without permission should not be permitted to remain on site while it is going through the planning process. That would stop the problem.

Where intentional unauthorised occupation has occurred, the requirement on the local planning authority in the decision-taking process to consider

“the availability (or lack) of alternative accommodation for the applicants”

should be removed. If a member of the settled community built a dwelling on land in the open countryside without first obtaining planning permission, the local planning authority would not, as part of the retrospective decision-taking process, consider the availability of alternative sites or be obliged to have to hand alternative sites to which the applicant could relocate. All I am asking for is equal treatment for everyone under the planning system, not preferential treatment for Gypsies and Travellers.

Often when Gypsies and Travellers find themselves in that situation, they say, “We’ve got nowhere else to go.” One of the problems for local planning authorities is that it is very difficult for them to check, when they are told that by Traveller families, whether those families own land elsewhere. We need a sensible arrangement with the Land Registry to help local authorities accurately check and verify an applicant's other land holdings. That is difficult for local planning authorities to do, and it is something I believe the Minister can tackle.

I know that the Minister is here representing the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and the Home Office will probably have the lead on the trespass issue—I would welcome his confirmation on that. When changing the rules on trespass, can we lower the number of vehicles needed to be involved in an illegal camp before the police can act? At the moment, I think it is six; it needs to be at least two, and I would go lower.

[Mr Hollobone]

The police need to be given powers to direct Travellers to sites in neighbouring local authorities, not necessarily just in the local authority where the trespass takes place. Officers should be allowed to remove trespassers from camping on or beside a road, not necessarily just on land, and the time in which Travellers are not allowed to return to a site from which they have been removed should be increased from three months to at least a year, and I would go further than that.

There are lots of distinguished Members seeking to contribute to this debate. I thank you, Sir George, for your indulgence. On behalf of my constituents in the borough of Kettering, I press the Minister and the Government to seize the initiative on this issue and get something done.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sir George Howarth (in the Chair): I am not going to impose a time limit at this point, but I would ask speakers to take into account the fact that there are seven people hoping to speak in this debate. If speakers exercise a little restraint in the length of speeches, we should be able to get everybody in with a reasonable amount of time left for them to speak. I call Andy Slaughter.

9.54 am

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this morning, Sir George. I congratulate the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) on securing the debate. As he said, we are often here to debate this subject. My view is that he looks at the issue down the wrong end of the telescope, but then he probably thinks the same about me.

The hon. Gentleman quotes statistics, and I will probably quote some of the same statistics, but he draws the opposite conclusion from the one that I draw. I do not think there is any dispute that Gypsies and Travellers are not just a deprived community in this country, but possibly the most deprived community. Some of the statistics that apply to Gypsy and Traveller communities are quite horrific. Only 3% to 4% of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller population aged 18 to 30 go into higher education, compared with 43% of the general population; 90% of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller population have experienced racism; life expectancy at minimum is 10 to 12 years shorter than that for the general population; and the suicide rate in the Traveller community is six times higher than in the general population. Those are really shocking statistics.

The hon. Gentleman said that there are different people on whom the blame could be placed, or to whom the explanation could be ascribed, but that Gypsies and Travellers would need to bear some responsibility themselves. He said that planning policy or planning law discriminates in favour of Gypsies and Travellers, and he called for harsher remedies, including the implementation of the current consultation, which would criminalise trespass. I think that is the wrong analysis. Both the history of the planning process and the current situation suggest that the opposite is true: that there is discrimination against Gypsies and Travellers in the planning process; that it is more likely that applications

from Gypsies and Travellers will be refused than from the general population; and that there is a large level of discrimination and hostility, which goes into the statutory sector as well. That is what needs to be challenged, first of all. Then, perhaps, we can come back to whether there is a continuing issue.

It is right that three quarters of Gypsies and Travellers are in bricks-and-mortar accommodation. A lot of those, even if not necessarily all, would like to continue with a nomadic lifestyle but do not have the opportunity. One reason why that has become institutionalised is a relatively recent change in definition, which effectively says—it is a Catch-22—that even if someone's ethnicity is Gypsy or Traveller, if they stop travelling and end up, against their better wishes, in bricks-and-mortar accommodation, perhaps for reasons of health, perhaps because they need to settle in an area for education for a while, or perhaps just because of a lack of pitches or stopping sites, they are no longer counted for that purpose. Suddenly the assessed needs in any local authority area go down, because of that statistical change—perhaps by 60%, 70% or 80%. The issue is suddenly no longer there. It reminds me of how my local authority, when it was Conservative controlled, solved the housing issue by abolishing the waiting list. It is not a long-term solution; it simply hides a continuing problem.

We do not have time to go over the whole history of the provision of sites and the different policies adopted by different Governments over the past 50 years, which go back to the Caravan Sites Act 1968, but the change that was introduced in 1994, which for the first time removed a requirement for local authorities to provide sites, was a game changer. Without any national requirement, and now with the encouragement of national Government not to provide permanent or transit sites, local authorities simply do not provide those sites. There is a shortage. Whatever the hon. Gentleman may say, there is a lack of such provision. Until that is remedied in some way, stopping at sites that are not authorised will continue.

I have never met members of the Gypsy and Traveller community who want to stop on unauthorised sites where facilities are not provided, and who would not prefer negotiated stopping, transit sites or the ability to use permanent sites. It seems to be commonplace to say that that must be the case. Local authorities that take their responsibilities seriously and have tried to provide a remedy—most local authorities try to escape their obligations—have found that they have either no problem or a much reduced problem with that kind of stopping.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Let me give a pointed example. Since Brighton opened a transit site and expanded the permanent site, the number of encampments in unauthorised locations has reduced by almost half. Where they do happen, a negotiated move is often done within a day. That is an example of how we can solve the issue with a carrot rather than a stick.

Andy Slaughter: I could give a number of examples, but I am conscious of time.

The long debate, which is wearisome for everyone but particularly for Gypsy and Traveller communities, is about how we solve what is not a huge problem once it has been broken down by local authority area. The need for additional pitches and sites in this country will no

doubt continue until we have a Government who can grasp that nettle. I am concerned that, while that rather sterile debate is going on, there is an increased attempt to vilify and criminalise the actions of Gypsies and Travellers. We saw that in the cross-borough injunctions that the Court of Appeal found to be unlawful, in a landmark judgment only last week—that was the Bromley case. It was no longer possible to stop anywhere in entire boroughs, some of which are very large. That was effectively a blanket ban that would have extended across parts of the country.

The attempt by the Government, through their consultation, to criminalise trespass in a way that goes far beyond what happens in Ireland, and without the compensatory duties to provide sites, is a regressive and intimidatory step. We need a change in approach, and we need to be constructive and positive. The last thing we need to be doing is further victimising Gypsy and Traveller communities.

10.2 am

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): It is a delight to have your eagle eye on us, Sir George, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) on securing the debate. I will heed your advice to be short and will focus on one tiny point—as I look around the Chamber, there is a sigh of relief that I will be sitting down soon.

Mole Valley is an interesting and beautiful area covered with green belt, areas of special scientific interest and so forth. Anyone who applies for permission to build on land there has extreme difficulty, unless they are applying for land within the limited amount that is available for normal building. That applies to the settled community and to the Traveller community. Most Travellers in our area are on settled sites and are part of the community, and most of the kids go to school. The situation works normally and is accepted by the settled community.

However, we must recognise that any constituent who builds on land in Mole Valley, especially green-belt land, without permission can expect a heavy hand to apply to them. We have had a few such cases, and the properties have been completely demolished. However, some of the Traveller community—I emphasise that it is some—do not seem to believe that the laws apply to them, or they just ignore them. I will give just one example of many. It is on a green-belt pasture land site in Leatherhead. In 2003, Travellers with a distinct Irish accent arrived out of the blue and squatted on the site. They said they owned it, and they may have—I am not absolutely sure. They fenced it and put in a fast-growing hedge and a series of caravans. They put up buildings of a more permanent design than caravans. To my amusement, they put in two high, wrought-iron, electrically operated gates of the sort that one might expect to see at a manor house. It really is quite extraordinary.

Over the years, the usual series of planning applications have been made and rejected. They have been appealed, and the appeals have been rejected. Deadlines that have been set for departure from the site have come and gone. Just as a deadline approaches, new and slightly different planning applications are delivered to the local authority, sometimes hours or minutes before the deadline. The Travellers are still on the site—they have been there since 2003. The newly Liberal Mole Valley Council that

was elected last May has just published its draft local plan. To the absolute dismay of the law-abiding settled community, and despite local resistance at every stage, the council has decided to designate the green-belt site as a Traveller site, in addition to the other Traveller sites that are being created.

In other words, if the Liberals have their way, 17 years of blatant abuse of the planning laws will have paid off for those Travellers, who do not travel. A proportion of the green-belt pasture land will be gone, and the series of rejections, repeals and so forth will be set aside and ignored. From what I have seen, this is the sort of behaviour that one expects of the Sicilian Mafia. One might ask why those Travellers act in such a way. The answer, of course, is because they frequently can. Nobody, including the courts, the police, the local authority and various Government Departments, seem capable of stopping them.

The Minister and his Department are running a review, which has been mentioned. It has been running for years and the time has come for some action. My hon. Friend the Member for Kettering said that it will be completed within five years, but we do not want to wait that long. We are making local plans, and we need something in short order. We need the Minister to consider tightening up the legal definition of Travellers, which is too loose at the moment—many of those who squat have no intention of travelling. Extraordinarily, the claim to “need” to live in caravans frequently overcomes the normal and understandable offer of bricks-and-mortar accommodation, especially where the local authority is required to house Traveller families. That is particularly relevant where children and infants would, by normal standards, be accommodated in a better, healthier environment than a caravan or some of the out-of-the-way sites in the middle of the green belt.

Local planning authorities should be in a situation where they can force vacation of the land prior to approval or rejection of a planning application. If a house builder started building on a site without permission, a stop notice would be applied. The change should be applicable to, and enforceable on, Gypsies or Travellers—I had better change that to Travellers, because I know many Gypsies who are the most pleasant, law-abiding people I have come across. It is time we did something, because the law-abiding population—the settled community—would not test the system as they know they would be rejected, but the Traveller community abuse it.

10.8 am

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to participate in this debate and to serve under your chairmanship, Sir George. I thank the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) for securing the debate, and I appreciate the tone in which it has been conducted; we have not always had the restrained and thoughtful language that we have heard this morning.

I want to make just two or three points. I think hon. Members of different parties recognise that this is a matter of balancing rights and responsibilities, but I cannot agree with the hon. Member for Kettering that the balance is currently in favour of the Traveller community. As has been noted, the travelling community has a right to enjoy a nomadic lifestyle, but law and practice are restricting—and indeed in some cases preventing—its

[Kate Green]

exercise. My hon. Friends the Members for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) and for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) talked about how planning policy changes over the years have reduced the supply of sites. We have heard, for example, that the removal in 1994 of the requirement for local authorities to provide sites, and the national planning policy framework provisions more recently, have meant that local authorities are, in many cases, either not assessing need properly or not bothering to assess it at all.

In practice, although the Government have made shared ownership and affordable homes funding available for the provision of more pitches, not a single local authority has taken up access to that funding, as was revealed in a written answer from Lord Bourne to Baroness Whitaker in the House of Lords on 23 January 2019. It is clear that, whatever the law may suggest, in practice local authorities are again and again failing to make any provision or plan for Travellers in their local plans. The Government are toothless, unwilling, or both, as they are not preventing that indolent neglect of local authorities' responsibilities.

At the same time, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith said, local authorities suggesting in their plans that there is no need have also been seeking wide injunctions to prevent Travellers from occupying land in their boroughs. The two cannot both be true. If there is need, they need to provide for it. They cannot say there is no need and fail to plan for it, and then seek an injunction to prevent it anyway. Both those things cannot sit side by side.

I am sorry to say that I very much disagree with the hon. Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) on the definition of "Traveller". It has been tightened, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith said, which has exacerbated, not reduced, problems, because it means that there is no requirement on local authorities to plan for the need of people who do not travel all the time. That *de facto* has obliterated the right to travel, because it means that Travellers are no longer recognised as enjoying that right. They are not counted or covered by the provisions of the definition of "Traveller". That has suppressed the culture, rather than protecting its rights.

I appreciate that the Home Office consultation and plans on unauthorised trespass are not the Minister's direct responsibility, but I am sure he will speak to his colleagues in the Home Office about our concerns. The proposals are for the criminalisation of unauthorised trespass, and for that to apply in the situation of very few caravans appearing on unauthorised land. As my hon. Friends said, of course people will have to use unauthorised sites if there is a lack of authorised ones. Even when they are on unauthorised sites, the powers already available to the police and local authorities are sufficient to take suitable action—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn) is shaking his head, but the police themselves in their submission to the Home Office consultation said that they did not want additional powers. They believe that the powers are sufficient. I refer him to the freedom of information request submitted by Friends, Families and Travellers, which elicited that information from a number of police forces.

Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con): Does the hon. Lady not agree that, in many instances, the police are not using the powers available to them? That is part of the problem with the system. The statement that there are sufficient powers at the moment does not seem to be reflected in the action that gets taken. When unauthorised encampments turn up, the police are sometimes too afraid to take any action.

Kate Green: It would be unfair of me to draw attention to the massive reduction in police numbers over the past 10 years, which may be contributing to that problem, but that is not what the National Police Chiefs' Council told the all-party parliamentary group on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma. It said that it believes that negotiation and communication with the community is more effective than enforcement, and that is what it tries to do. No police officer has ever told me that he or she has been afraid to engage with Travellers on unauthorised encampments. It is important that we do not make policy by anecdote.

It is really useful to have this debate. It is right, as the hon. Member for Kettering said, that we look at the responsibilities, obligations and rights of the public as a whole—the settled community and the travelling community. We must get the right balance between them. I do not believe that the balance is currently weighted in favour of the travelling community. Quite the opposite: too many of them are living in disadvantaged, marginalised situations on unsuitable—sometimes authorised and unsuitable—sites. We need a proper national planning framework that is properly managed to balance the interests of the settled community and the travelling community. I invite the Minister to think broadly about how that can best be achieved.

10.15 am

Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir George. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) on securing this debate. I declare an interest: I am a member of Sutton London Borough Council.

I certainly agree with my hon. Friend that there needs to be a change. We have heard about the difficulties that the current state of affairs causes for the travelling community, especially in terms of work, health and schooling. In the previous Parliament, my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) introduced an excellent Bill that would have addressed those concerns. It was incredibly well-balanced, and I would have thought that it would have had immense support in this place. I am incredibly sorry that it did not make it.

The current policy on Travellers puts an obligation on local authorities to come up with their own assessment of need, but I want to give an example from my constituency to illustrate why I think it does not work. My constituency of Carshalton and Wallington also lies in the London Borough of Sutton. It is another Lib Dem council—my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) is laughing; I think he knows what is about to come. It conducted its assessment of need when it was coming up with its draft local plan in 2016. The Roundshaw Downs site at the end of Hannibal Way in Beddington was considered for a new permanent site.

After an assessment of need, the council came to the conclusion that it needed another site, despite the fact that there was room to expand an existing site down in Woodmansterne—also in my constituency.

After massive public objection and a botched public consultation, the council eventually withdrew the Roundshaw site and agreed to extend the existing site in Woodmansterne, but because of the poor way it had conducted its consultation and assessment, the planning inspectorate has not accepted that that is sufficient to see it through to the term of the local plan. Therefore, the Lib Dem council now has to come up with a further Gypsy and Traveller site plan by 2023.

As a councillor, I have on several occasions asked for assurances that the Roundshaw site, and indeed the other site being considered at the time—next to Sutton cemetery in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully)—will not be revisited because they were identified as inappropriate. However, the Lib Dems have failed to provide that reassurance. That is perhaps not surprising, given the way they have handled encampments in the London Borough of Sutton in the past.

Only a few short years ago, our borough was subject to an entire summer of illegal encampments arriving on parks across my constituency and that of my hon. Friend. As hon. Members know, that was immediately followed by rising tensions in the constituency—sometimes violent flare-ups, unfortunately—and things such as fly-tipping. In one instance, unfortunately, smashed glass was left behind on purpose in a park, which caused injuries to children and pets. Many right hon. and hon. Members will have experienced such a difficulty when encampments happen in their patches. Because of that, the unwillingness of the local police to do anything about it, and the local authority's slow progress in beginning the process of evicting people from the sites, I believe that a change in the law needs to be made.

The first subject I want to touch on is welfare checks, which are rightly conducted to ensure that people arriving on encampments, especially children, are in good health and get access to the support they need—unfortunately, as we have heard, more often they do not, which is a shame. However, those who know the planning system and how to work their way around it also know that if there is a change in the make-up of the site—if someone new arrives—the process starts again, which causes a delay.

High Court proceedings are not exactly fast and, although faster options may be available to local police forces or local authorities, they seem unwilling or unable to use them. Once an encampment is finally moved on, it will often move to another park later that day—as we found a couple of years ago in Sutton, despite the existing site in Woodmansterne. That is clearly not sustainable and a change needs to be made. I reiterate my support for the Bill introduced in the last Parliament by my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire. I suggest that the Government should consider that as a potential starting point for looking at the issue in this Parliament.

I hope that the Minister will provide some reassurance that, as we try to address the problems, work on community cohesion and address the scandals of housing, work and schooling in travelling communities, we can update support and guidance for local authorities, improve

enforcement and, perhaps, replace the requirement to provide permanent sites with a requirement to provide transitory sites, to which deposits and rent can be paid to cover the cost.

The current state of affairs does absolutely nothing for either the settled or the travelling communities. We need a balanced approach to ensure that both sets of communities feel comfortable living alongside one another.

10.21 am

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir George. I am a new Member and this is my first Westminster Hall debate, so I came this morning with a little trepidation.

I have listened with alarm at what the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) and other Conservative Members have said. Gypsies and Traveller communities are not a “problem” that needs to be “tackled”, nor should legislation “crack down” on them. They are citizens entitled to equal treatment and the protection of their way of life. The dehumanising language we have heard should have no place in society or in the halls of power.

I appreciate that this debate is about planning law and relates to the Gypsy and Traveller communities, but that topic cannot be understood outside the context of the prejudice that they face. All too often, they are othered as outsiders unworthy of equal rights. As with all types of bigotry, it comes from the top down—including, I am sad to say, from Members of this House, who have in the past compared Gypsies and Travellers to a “disease” and a “plague”. Such scapegoating catches on.

A report by the Traveller Movement found that 91% of people in the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities had experienced racism because of their ethnicity. Some 70% had experienced discrimination in education; 49% had faced discrimination in employment; and 30% in access to health. More than three quarters said that because of this prejudice, they have hidden their ethnicity to avoid discrimination.

Such bigotry—like all bigotries—has consequences: 77% of Gypsy, Roma and Travellers report having experienced hate speech or hate crime. Racist attacks are common, such as the burning of three caravans in Somerset at the end of last year and the killing of Johnny Delaney, a teenager kicked to death in 2003—his assailants reportedly shouting that he was only an “effing Gypsy”.

This prejudice has a long history: from 16th-century laws that threatened nomadic peoples with exile or death, to the Thatcherite Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which repealed the duty of local authorities to provide sites for Roma and Travellers. Since then, there have only been further reductions in stopping places and authorised sites, which has left many with the choice either to use unauthorised sites or to abandon their identity. The inadequate provision for Gypsy and Traveller communities is the principal cause of the problems that hon. Members have mentioned. It is hardly surprising that a mess is made when adequate sites are not provided for them. The advocacy group Friends, Families and Travellers argued that the main cause of unauthorised camps was

“the abject failure of the government to identify land for sites and stopping places.”

[Zarah Sultana]

It is a mistake to blame the effect, when the underlying cause of inadequate provision is at fault. That is why the Government's consultation document, released early last year, as well as Tory manifesto commitments, are of great concern to me. The sweeping new police powers would be unnecessary and authoritarian. Existing powers are already more than enough, as shown by the fact that the majority of police who responded to the Government's initial consultation opposed increased eviction powers. The powers are also authoritarian. One traveller said:

"The police will have the power to kick my door in, take my home, arrest me and take the children into care. We won't get them back because we won't have a home."

That is the fear that those proposals cause in the Gypsy and Traveller community.

Sir Paul Beresford: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Zarah Sultana: Sorry, I will not.

The proposals do not solve a problem; they further oppress a marginalised group.

What, then, are they really about? Why was this bigotry so prevalent throughout the Conservatives' election campaign? Was it because this is a major issue faced by working people of this country? Of course not. It is because, in the words of the chair of the Gypsy Council, the Tories are trying to

"criminalise Gypsies to hide their own failures".

I know what it is like to be part of a scapegoated community. According to research from the Equality and Human Rights Commission, 22% of people openly express negative feelings towards Muslims, while 44% openly express negative feelings towards Gypsies. We are both scapegoated communities blamed for problems not of our making. I note that the hon. Member for Kettering, who calls for oppressive measures on the Gypsy and Traveller communities, has also demanded that the burqa be banned.

Some people—often children born to wealthy families, sent to expensive private schools and educated at prestigious universities—are intent on blaming people they deem to be outsiders. I know where the real blame lies: not with Gypsies or Travellers, migrants or refugees, Jewish people or Muslims, but with a class of people born into privilege who dominate society and use their power and privilege to deflect the blame for a failing economy away from themselves. Instead, they scapegoat others.

At a time when there is rising racism against Muslims, Jewish people and the Gypsy and Traveller community, we must all stand up to bigotry wherever we see it and recognise that our struggles are one and the same. There is safety in solidarity, which is more powerful and more beautiful than anyone's hate.

10.27 am

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I want to consider the policy intentions on this matter and what good outcomes look like, both for the Government and for everyone else. I hope that we agree across the House that we want to see really well-integrated, cohesive communities and to have good outcomes for all citizens—Travellers and settled alike. Critically, that depends on giving everyone, particularly children, good

life chances so that they can get those good outcomes. As we know from the race disparity audit, introduced by the last Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), Traveller children have some of the worst educational, employment and health outcomes in the country.

For many of my settled residents who live close to large numbers of Traveller sites, the current situation is not a happy one. I am sent here to speak truthfully and to speak up for all my constituents, Travellers and settled alike. I receive quite a large number of emails from constituents telling me that they do not feel safe in my constituency any more, and are looking to leave if they can afford to. A large number of businesses that regularly suffer theft, and whose staff are threatened, are very concerned. Businesspeople have recently come to tell me that they will not invest in my area.

I choose my words very carefully. There are good and bad in every community and many, many law-abiding Travellers absolutely respect the law, but I have to speak as I find and as my constituents tell me as individuals and as businesspeople in large and small businesses. It is not a happy situation for many of my settled residents, and many do not feel safe as a result.

My contention is that, unfortunately, and not because any Government wanted this to be the case, the current set of policies completely fails Traveller children, who have terrible outcomes, and causes great unhappiness and even suffering among many settled residents. What we have is not working for anyone at all. At the heart of Gypsy and Traveller policy is a fundamental muddle.

Planning policy for Traveller sites talks about "fair and equal treatment" for Travellers—absolutely: we all sign up to that—and about facilitating

"the traditional and nomadic way of life".

The assumption seems to be that a Traveller site is needed to facilitate travelling. Why is that the case? Many of my settled constituents travel regularly. Many are caravaners, perhaps with a caravan they keep in their front garden. Indeed, many travel a lot more than my Traveller constituents do.

The situation is a muddle. To facilitate a traditional and nomadic way of life, we might need somewhere to keep caravans or somewhere safe for horses to be kept—unfortunately, a number of members of the British Horse Society have reported to me some pretty horrible incidents of cruelty to horses locally, so we need to look at that issue as well. There is a muddle because we do not need a Traveller site to enable people to travel. If we were honest, we would realise that we are prioritising the provision of sites and allowing the nomadic way of life over and above the right of Traveller children to have a good education.

I was so concerned that I asked the Children's Commissioner for England to come to my constituency to visit one of the main village primary schools—lower schools. It has a lot of Traveller children. She went and reported back to me, in writing, that most Traveller children are not in school at all over the summer, when exams are taken, and that most stop their education in schools altogether around the age of 15. How can we expect Traveller children to be the engineers, lawyers, accountants and scientists of the future when the result of our current policy is that we do not value their education?

I have some of the best education and welfare officers in the business—I name Andrew Copperwheat in particular, from Central Bedfordshire Council—who try their very best to ensure that Traveller children go to school, but it is a losing game again and again. My constituents who volunteer in food banks tell me that it is common for adult Travellers who come to ask for food to say, “I can’t read and I can’t write”. We may think that Traveller children might get home education, but how will that happen if the parents are illiterate, through no fault of their own?

We need a little honesty. The people who speak for Travellers are the adults, but I am concerned about the outcomes for Traveller children—beautiful, wonderful children, who deserve the same chances as all of our children. When I went around six or seven Traveller sites a couple of weeks ago, I saw those children and my heart felt for them, because I could see their trajectory. Let us have a little more honesty about what “good” looks like, and let us think about what we are prioritising, whether it is right and whether we can do it better.

To cheer Members up—this has been a bit of a gloomy debate in some ways—let me say that there have been some great outcomes when my council has managed to get Traveller families into local authority housing in my constituency. The children go to school regularly, the parents have regular work and they are all making friends in the local community—people are being integrated. My constituency has proudly integrated wave after wave of Italian, Polish and Irish people happily and well over recent decades. We all pull together, get on and make a great contribution, and I want that for Travellers as well.

If Travellers are here legally, they should be part of our communities and be contributing and paying taxes; their children should be in our schools and having the amazing opportunities that all our children should have. But that is not happening at the moment. When I go around some of our Traveller sites, I see terrible housing conditions, green mould in water tanks, hot water coming out of toilets and conditions that, frankly, we would not keep animals in. That is not good enough. The legislation is not fit for purpose. Environmentally, we have sewage going into ditches, and a lot of the time the situation is not healthy. There is also a lot of sub-letting, often with violence. There are no tenancy contracts—this is sub-letting to non-Travellers on Traveller sites, enforced with vigilante violence, by quite wealthy Traveller landlords who have a lot of cash. That is not a good situation.

At the start of a five-year Parliament, I tell the Minister, who is a decent, humane and reasonable man: act with compassion. He should be progressive, do something good in this space, create brilliant outcomes for Traveller children and dial down the antipathy, the anger and the hatred between our communities. Do something that we can all be proud of in this space.

Sir George Howarth (in the Chair): I will start to call the Front Benchers at 10.40 am.

10.35 am

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): I will be mindful of your remark, Sir George. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) on bringing this important issue before us, and on standing up for the concerns of his constituents, as he has done for many years. He drew attention to the failures of the planning system, which also affect constituents in the north-western part of my constituency, around the larger village of Bulkington in Nuneaton and Bedworth and the nearby villages of Ansty, Shilton and Barnacle, which fall under Rugby Borough Council. The fact that some of the issues occur on a local authority boundary adds to the complexity.

Understanding why the Gypsy and Traveller community find that part of the country a good place to be located is important. It is a little to do with how the Traveller community earn their living. Many of them have businesses that revolve around construction and property maintenance, and the big urban area where many of their customers are is Coventry, which is immediately adjacent to those villages. What adds to the complexity in the choice of location is the fact that it is in the urban edge around Coventry, where there is green belt and therefore a presumption against development. The fact that the Gypsy and Traveller community have been able to secure consents, or have developed without consent, has over time contributed to a feeling in the settled community that in some instances an advantage is being provided to that community.

All the sites in my constituency are in the green belt. The pattern of their development was described by my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering. A development often takes place on a paddock, on agricultural land, frequently starting on the Friday of a bank holiday weekend, which means a delay before local planning authorities can get to the site to start enforcement action, by which time some pretty substantial works have taken place. The procedure then is that the local enforcement officer goes out and invites the applicant to submit a retrospective application—we have spoken about this issue, and I am very supportive of my hon. Friend’s comments on looking at how this ought to be changed.

Eventually, that application reaches the local planning committee, which turns it down because the development is considered to be inappropriate in the green belt. More time passes and the applicant decides to lodge an appeal. The appeal is dealt with by the Planning Inspectorate, whose decision overrides that of the elected members of the planning committee. Often, a planning inspector will grant a consent, perhaps highlighting the issue that has been covered in this debate, which is the lack of authorised pitches and concerns about where else applicant families would go. On occasion, those consents are granted as temporary consents.

I will deal a little more with the issue of retrospective applications, and with the issue of temporary consents within the planning system. I expressed concern about the nature of retrospective applications to my local planning officers, who told me that the issue is often the failure to understand on the part of the Gypsy and Traveller community.

My hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) spoke about the literacy challenges in that community, but they seem on occasion to be able to afford to engage the best planning lawyers, often as a consequence of the substantial increase in value that occurs.

[Mark Pawsey]

The issue of temporary consents affects Top Road in Barnacle, which has a complex planning history. With each subsequent application, the temporary consent gets closer to being permanent, which is a matter of great concern for residents in Bulkington.

10.40 am

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) on securing the debate. We may have had some idea about the nature of the debate. Unfortunately, when it comes to the Gypsy and Traveller community, the prejudices that we have heard are all too common, and they are as old as time itself. I would have expected, though, that in the Parliament that makes the laws of the land, the debate would be based far more on fact and evidence, and far less on anecdote and local constituency casework. I fully accept that there is always a need to provide balance in debates and to be honest about some of the pressures.

I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) and for Coventry South (Zarah Sultana) on their contributions to rebalance the nature of the debate. I felt that I was in a different debate when we talked about a community that expects special treatment, that takes out but does not want to pay in, and that is ruining our country. It could have been a debate on Amazon or Facebook, but it was not; it was a debate about people—human beings; members of our community who deserve respect and empathy.

What is it like to be a member of the travelling community, travelling around to secure work, providing for their family and living a lifestyle that they choose for themselves? Some people do not believe that the lifestyle is legitimate. We have heard before, “Why live in a caravan if you can live in bricks and mortar?” It is as if the way we choose to live our lives is the way that everybody ought to live their lives, because our way is perfect and others’ are de facto imperfect.

There are legitimate issues that we should be honest about and debate, but those issues come from injustice, not a community that is not willing to play its part. That is where we should start. Let us have the debate about educational attainment, but let us talk about how an education system should reflect a lifestyle that requires more flexible education that follows and supports the child throughout their educational life. Let us talk about housing and provision.

Andrew Selous: I am intrigued about how flexible education could follow a Traveller child around the country. Could the hon. Member expand a bit on how that might work?

Jim McMahon: We are not here to design an education system, but there could be a system similar to an education passport, in which the child’s curriculum follows them throughout the journeys they take around the country. That would at least be a start. Part of the issue is that education authorities do not talk to one another when children move from one school to another. The education experience that child might have had in one primary or secondary school is not necessarily carried on to the next. That is a big gap.

On land supply, when we talk about illegal sites, nobody supports breaches of planning law. The planning law is there for a reason, but we have to address the underlying causes. If I look at the terraced houses in Oldham and I see overcrowding, I do not blame the tenants; I look at housing supply and affordability. I see people being ripped off, paying massive amounts in private rent, but who want a decent social house that is affordable, safe and clean for their children. It is the same for the Traveller community. They want clean, safe and well-maintained sites, but all too often local authorities do not step up to their responsibilities. I say that as an advocate for local government and a standard bearer.

Too many authorities do not take responsibility. The nature of that presents in different ways, with a very different impact in a mainly urban area from in a rural area. Unfortunately, many urban authorities view the Traveller community as a problem that must be tolerated, rather than a legitimate community that should be supported. All too often the sites chosen as Traveller sites will be near the waste transfer site or the industrial estate, in the back of nowhere that we can ignore, hoping that the settled community does not kick up an objection. That is no way to treat people. What other community would we treat in that way?

We can call out bad behaviour. I get as frustrated as anybody else when a Traveller community comes in and commercial waste is left behind, but I can drive down a road in Oldham and see exactly the same from a tradesperson who does not want to pay the charges at the local tip, and who therefore leaves waste at the end of a lane or at the edge of a playing field. I do not say that the whole community of that person should be evicted as a result of the actions of an individual. That is where this debate goes wrong. We talk about anecdotes and the worst excesses of an individual member of a community, as if somehow that is the reputation of the whole. I might expect that on Facebook or an internet site, where people get angry and wind each other up, but I would not expect it in Parliament. We are here to make laws that are meant to be about rights, responsibility, balance and evidence.

Whatever we do, we need a proper joined-up strategy that covers health and wellbeing, housing, education, employment and the very real issue of the gap in life expectancy and the unacceptable levels of male suicide.

Andrew Selous: I tried to be as fair and balanced as I could in my contribution. If the hon. Member came to my constituency, he would meet many decent, tolerant constituents who would have harrowing tales to tell him about what they have experienced. That is not anecdote; it is fact, and it has gone on for well over a decade. That has to be reflected in this debate as well.

Jim McMahon: It is for the Government and local councils to be supportive and to facilitate good community relations. They do not do that when the planning, education and housing systems are stacked up to make the people we are talking about part of the problem, not the solution. The reason there are illegal encampments is that often not enough authorised sites are provided. Even so, 88% of the travelling community are on authorised sites, whether local authority or privately owned. We do

not talk about that; we talk about the unauthorised ones, as if that is somehow representative of a whole community. It is not.

Those in positions of power and leadership have a responsibility to build bridges, not walls, and to bring people together. They must use the levers of government, whether about regulation, tax or spend, to make sure that we create a long-term solution. We will be having this debate in another 10 years. If the Government put in place even harsher laws, which the police will not even implement because they recognise the reality on the ground, that will not solve the problem at all. We need positive solutions, looking at communities as human beings and recognising that people have the right to live the life they ought to lead, whether as a Traveller or in a settled community.

Perhaps some cross-party support is needed. If the Government want to look at the issue from a human being's perspective, I am sure that they will find useful participants in that conversation on this side of the House. If the Government do not want to do that, but instead build walls and further the division, they can expect very firm opposition.

Sir George Howarth (in the Chair): Before I call the Minister, may I remind him that he should leave a little time for Mr Hollobone to make his final remarks?

10.48 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Luke Hall): Thank you, Sir George. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) on securing this thought-provoking debate. I will begin by touching on the comment by the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) about cross-party work. It is a hugely important point; it is crucial that we work on a cross-party basis and I am happy to meet him at any time to talk about these issues.

Fairness in the planning system is a matter that we take incredibly seriously. The issues raised today are not all new challenges; I have heard them raised by colleagues in past debates, and they affect my own constituency. Let me reassure colleagues that the Government are working to implement the measures we have promised in order to address unauthorised development—an issue we have talked about a lot. We have consulted on powers for dealing with unauthorised development and encampments. Some issues raised in the debate have reflected the consultation responses: concerns over fairness in the planning system; unauthorised encampments and intentional unauthorised development, particularly in the green belt; issues with planning enforcement; and, of course, the outcomes for travelling communities that we have heard so much about.

Under national planning law, national planning policies and local planning policies to guard against unacceptable development apply equally to all applicants who wish to develop. It is right to recognise that certain groups have protections in law, such as disabled people, the elderly and ethnic groups, including Travellers. Planners may also take into account the specific needs of individual groups when making decisions on development, which will be taken on their own merits. As is the case for all

planning applications, planning applications for Traveller sites must be determined in accordance with the local authority's statutory development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

In 2015, we amended the definition of Gypsies and Travellers for planning purposes to remove those who have ceased to travel permanently. That was to ensure fairness and transparency in the planning system for the whole community, and to avoid any misunderstanding. Those who have ceased travelling permanently will have their needs assessed, as with any valued group in our society, and a decision will be taken on whether a site can be made available.

We have taken into consideration the responses that we received to our consultation on unauthorised development and encampments. Those responses made it clear that, in certain areas, unauthorised encampments are causing significant disruption for local residents. We have made it clear that that must be addressed. In our response, we committed to introducing a package of measures to address those issues, including proposals for stronger police powers to respond to unauthorised encampments, practical and financial support for local authorities to deal with unauthorised development, support for Traveller site provision, and support for the travelling community to improve their life chances. My Department has been working closely with the Home Office on this issue to ensure that we take a rounded approach that provides positive results for both the settled and travelling communities.

Let me address some of the concerns that were raised about intentional unauthorised development, and in particular how that is taken into account when planning permission is sought retrospectively. Planning permission should not be granted retrospectively simply because the development has already taken place. We propose to strengthen the power of local authorities to stop that happening, and we will consult shortly on a range of options for strengthening our policy on intentional unauthorised development so local authorities have stronger tools and levers to address the effects of that type of development.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I am sorry that I was not able to join the debate earlier. Does the Minister accept that this issue costs many local authorities, such as Warwick District Council, as well as businesses and the community, huge sums? Surely, a good use of funds would be to support councils to use compulsory purchase powers to buy land to set up permanent sites.

Luke Hall: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that point and sharing his local authority's experience. I am happy to touch on that shortly, but let me turn first to the green belt, which was raised by a number of Members, including my hon. Friends the Members for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) and for Rugby (Mark Pawsey). Our commitment to protecting the green belt is as strong as it has ever been. Changes to the green belt should happen only in exceptional circumstances, and should be fully evidenced and justified through plan-making. The policy is clear that once green belts are defined, local authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as by looking for improvements to access and environmental quality.

[*Luke Hall*]

We have provided £1.79 million of funding across 37 local authorities to improve their capacity to respond to enforcement issues facing their area, and we are working with the Royal Town Planning Institute to overhaul the national enforcement handbook to provide the latest best practice and expertise on shutting down illegal building while ensuring that developers obtain full planning permission before a shovel hits the ground.

Mark Pawsey: My hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) mentioned powers to require an inappropriate development to be taken down and the site restored. Does the Minister agree those powers are used far too rarely and, whether we are talking about a development by the Gypsy and Traveller community or by anybody else, there is a sense that if someone builds something, the chances of their being required to reinstate the site are pretty slender, so it is often a chance worth taking?

Luke Hall: I thank my hon. Friend for putting that point on the record. It is something I am very happy to talk about further.

Let me touch a little more on site provision. Last February, the Government reminded local planning authorities of their planning obligations to assess the need for sites and to make transit sites available, and, crucially, about the need for joint working between authorities on the setting of pitch and plot targets. It should be emphasised that enforcement becomes much easier once an alternative authorised site exists. Making adequate site provision in plans should reduce the number of unauthorised developments and encampments, and subsequently reduce the disruption they can cause to the wider community.

As such, we have committed to finalising the 2016 draft guidance on assessing housing need for those residing in caravans. That guidance will help local authorities to assess housing need for caravans, but it is not just about ensuring provision; it is about ensuring appropriate provision. Our policy makes it clear that, when assessing the suitability of sites in rural or semi-rural settings, local planning authorities should ensure that a site's scale is not such that it dominates the nearest settled community.

Mr Hollobone: I welcome the Minister's remarks. Before he finalises the guidance, will he be kind enough to visit Kettering Borough Council? We do not have green-belt protection; we just have open countryside. Kettering is in the middle of England. It is experiencing all these problems. I think he would find such a visit extremely informative.

Luke Hall: I would be absolutely delighted to do so.

In our response to the consultation, we committed to introducing guidance making it clear that the Secretary of State is prepared to review cases where concerns are raised that there are too many authorised Traveller sites for the local community to support effectively. The guidance will also assist local authorities in making better decisions about whether to approve Traveller site

applications, and sets out a range of circumstances for planning authorities to consider when determining such applications.

Let me touch a little on enforcement in respect of unauthorised encampments. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn) has particular concerns about this issue, and I thank him for putting his points on the record. On trespass, we are absolutely aware of concerns about the effectiveness of powers available to tackle unauthorised encampments. Local authorities can of course use temporary stop notices when they are concerned that unauthorised development has taken place. Those require that any activity in breach of planning control must be ceased for 28 days. However, we want to go further, so we are minded, following consultation, to extend the 28-day temporary stop notice period.

Furthermore, on 5 November, the Home Office launched a consultation seeking views on criminalising the act of trespass when setting up an unauthorised encampment. I know that hon. Members had questions about some of the proposed amendments, which include increasing from 3 months to 12 months the period for which trespassers directed from land are unable to return, lowering from six to "two or more" the number of vehicles that need to be involved in an unauthorised encampment before police powers can be exercised, and enabling the police to remove trespassers from land that forms part of the highway. That follows the Home Office's commitment to consult on a specific set of measures to enhance the powers police have to direct trespassers to leave unauthorised encampments. That consultation closes on 5 March 2020. A couple of colleagues asked who will have responsibility for leading that work. I can confirm that the Home Office will lead, and the Government will respond to the consultation in the autumn.

A number of Members touched on the importance of improving outcomes, so let me update the House on the work we are doing to improve outcomes for the travelling community. We are working to address the disparities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities to ensure that they have the same life chances as other members of the community. As we heard, on almost every measure, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are significantly worse off than the general population. We have been working on that, and we recognise that we need to go further. We are committed to developing a cross-Government strategy to tackle inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities across a range of outcomes highlighted by the race disparity audit, including housing, education and health.

Andy Slaughter: Will the Minister give way?

Luke Hall: I am afraid I cannot, because of the time.

We are in the early stages of developing that strategy and will engage extensively with policy makers, practitioners and, of course, the communities themselves as we take the work forward. We will provide regular updates on progress in the coming months.

I thank hon. Members again for their contributions. I understand the importance of some of the issues that were raised. I am happy to work on a cross-party basis

with colleagues across the House as we take this work forward, and I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss it.

10.58 am

Mr Hollobone: Thank you, Sir George, for your wise chairmanship. I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who took part in this extremely informative and engaging debate, in which we heard quite a wide range of views. I thank the Minister both for his thoughtful response and for his pledge to visit us at Kettering Borough Council so that he can see at first hand the difficulties that the local authority faces in tackling these issues. I agree with the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), that we need a proper, joined-up strategy to tackle all the issues involving Gypsies and Travellers, but the top priority for my constituents in the borough of Kettering is sorting out the relationship between Gypsies and Travellers, the planning system, and the settled community.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Gypsies, Travellers and the planning system.

British Overseas Passport Holders in Hong Kong

11 am

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the rights of British overseas passport holders in Hong Kong.

It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Sir George. I am motivated to raise this issue because, like many in the House and across the country, I have heard expressions of concern about the situation in Hong Kong and because of what we saw in the protests last year. Like many of my colleagues, I have been contacted by a number of constituents who have views on the subject but also have relatives in Hong Kong. We in this country believe that the right to peaceful protest is a fundamental political right, and it should be defended anywhere in the world. It is therefore not surprising that a number of colleagues and I have expressed shock about examples of aggression towards peaceful protesters.

I am pleased that the Foreign Secretary spoke in defence of the right to lawful and peaceful protest in Hong Kong and that that has been raised with both the Chinese and Hong Kong Governments. I am also pleased that the Government are intent on defending the principle of one country, two systems, as set out in the Sino-British declaration. That is a live international treaty, which is binding in international law; it is not a mere historic document, as some have tried to suggest. As a party to that treaty, it is a responsibility for Members of this House and for the Government to speak out when we see it at risk of being eroded. It is not just that treaty that binds the UK to Hong Kong; it is hundreds of years of shared history and ongoing cultural, economic and political links that make us stakeholders in its freedom and prosperity.

There are more than 300,000 full British citizens in Hong Kong. About 120 British companies have their regional headquarters there, and another 200 have regional offices. Hong Kong ranks consistently as one of our top export markets, helped by its ranking as one of the world's freest economies in the index of economic freedom. Finally, many of our top judges sit or have sat on the Hong Kong court of final appeal, strengthening the rule of law.

It is not, and should not be, just about history. I was fortunate enough to lead a parliamentary visit to Hong Kong some two years ago, where we were all struck by the vibrancy and potential of the economy. In the context of global Britain, it is hugely important to ensure that Hong Kong remains one of the freest economies so we can have ongoing economic and cultural links.

We must speak up in this House when the rights and freedoms of people in Hong Kong are under threat. That duty is surely strongest towards the nearly 250,000 people who have British national overseas passports—BNO passports, as they are commonly known—as they chose to continue their links to our country after 1997. The status was created in the run-up to the handover of Hong Kong from British to Chinese rule. Individuals with that nationality are British nationals and Commonwealth citizens, but they are not British citizens, so they do not have the right of abode in the UK or the same rights accorded to UK citizens. They enjoy visa-free

[Stephen Hammond]

travel to the United Kingdom as a visitor, with a maximum of six months' leave to enter. Should a BNO passport holder wish to live and work in the UK more permanently, they would be subject to the same immigration rules as any normal applicant.

The limited power of the BNO passport, coupled with the recent situation in Hong Kong, has led to vocal calls from some colleagues in the House, and in Hong Kong, for the rights of BNO passport holders to be strengthened and revisited.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. As he may be aware, in the last Parliament I presented a petition signed by several hundred BNO passport holders from Hong Kong calling for a review of their rights under the BNO scheme and for them to be granted consular access to gain the support they need in Hong Kong in the current situation. Does he agree that we should look again at the support we are providing through the consulate to BNO passport holders?

Stephen Hammond: My hon. Friend makes two important points. First, he strengthens the point I was beginning to make: in the last Parliament a number of colleagues raised real concerns about the rights of BNO passport holders and called for those rights to be strengthened. He also talks about consular access, which I intend to raise later in my speech—the Minister will not be surprised about that.

As I was saying, there has been a call for BNO passport holders' rights to be strengthened. There are two strands to that argument. First, as the Foreign Affairs Committee pointed out in November, there is a fear that BNO passport holders may become more vulnerable to arrest by authorities in the context of the well-documented arrests of pro-democracy demonstrators. Secondly, there are concerns about fairness. While I understand the unique nature of the colonial administration in Hong Kong and the handover to China, comparisons are drawn with the status of citizens of other former colonies. There are also concerns about those who have served in the British Army having no right to retain British citizenship or at least to reside in the United Kingdom.

I recognise, as do many people who have raised this issue with the Foreign Secretary, the Minister and indeed the Prime Minister, that this is an extremely delicate area where the rights of individuals, historical and cultural links, live protests and ongoing diplomacy must be balanced. Therefore, I wish to air with the Minister some of the concerns raised, which she should be familiar with, and to try to get from her a view on some of those issues and on how the Government see the way forward.

The Foreign Affairs Committee recommended that

“the Government extends the right of abode to Hong Kong residents who are British National (Overseas) passport holders as a means of reassurance that the UK cares about its nationals.”

Of course, that could be achieved through a change to the immigration rules, which could allow for factoring in and adjustment of the financial and work requirements. It could also lay down provisions for family members of primary applicants. If the Foreign Office and the Government believe that full residency rights are not

appropriate, perhaps a more flexible means of consideration or category of immigration entry for BNO passport holders could be considered. That could mirror the provisions for EEA nationals or set out shorter residency periods before BNO holders can obtain indefinite leave to remain. I understand that the Government are concerned that that may breach obligations under the joint declaration, but, as the Minister will know, many take a different view, arguing that such amendments do not grant a full right of abode. I would welcome the Minister's view on that.

Alternatively, the Government could seek a more humanitarian approach—a differing, graduated or nuanced humanitarian approach—to the issue. Professor Guild of Queen Mary University of London suggested that any BNO holders in the UK who might be at risk, be considered at risk or perceive themselves to be at risk on return to the territory could be granted an extension of stay by the Home Office. There is potential for the Home Office to use graduated definitions and criteria of asylum for BNO passport holders should the protests or aggression be seen to recommence.

Finally, I hope that the Minister will provide some clarity about the point raised by my hon. Friend. While BNO passport holders are British nationals and Commonwealth citizens, as they are not British citizens the right of consular access is usually granted only in exceptional circumstances. I—and, I think, many colleagues—would like her view on what the Government's policy might be on granting consular access to those with BNO passports.

In the aftermath of the immediate situation, some argue that there should be a conversion to full British citizenship. I am not sure that I regard that as a practical solution to the current situation, or in the long term. It would require a lengthy legislative process, raise some consequential questions for people holding British overseas territories citizenship and potentially breach the spirit of the UK's obligations under the joint declaration. I recognise the problems with that route.

I hope that the Minister will set out her thoughts on the other issues I have raised, in the context of colleagues' concerns that these are British nationals. While we speak up for the right to protest for anyone around the world, we have a special obligation towards these individuals.

11.10 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mrs Heather Wheeler): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir George, and I apologise for being 10 seconds late. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) for securing this important debate. I am also grateful for the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double). I will try to respond to all the points raised.

Before I address the current situation in Hong Kong, and the implications for those with British national overseas status, it is important to set out the obligations of the UK Government towards Hong Kong citizens with British national overseas status, and where those obligations derive from. BNO status was created in 1985 for people in Hong Kong who would lose their British dependent territory citizenship in 1997, when sovereignty passed from Britain back to China. This

status had to be acquired before 30 June 1997, so it is not possible to gain BNO status now. The BNO passport replaced the British dependent territories citizens' passport. Provisions relating to the creation of BNO status were part of the package of agreements made at the same time as the joint declaration. The status entitled Hong Kong citizens to continue to use passports issued by the UK Government. BNO status does not pass to the holders' children.

As of October 2019, there were just over 250,000 BNO passport holders, out of an estimated 2.9 million people with BNO status. Individuals with BNO status are entitled to British consular assistance in third countries, but not in Hong Kong, mainland China or Macau. BNO status holders are also entitled to visa-free access to the UK for up to six months as a visitor. However, they do not automatically have a right to remain in the UK beyond that period, and nor do they have access to public funds. Those with BNO status require entry clearance when coming to work, study or live in the UK.

Regarding former members of the Hong Kong armed services who have not received an offer of a British passport, the Government are extremely grateful to those who served in the Hong Kong military service corps. They carried out their duties with the same sense of pride and professionalism as any other British Army regular unit. They are rightly invited to take part in the Cenotaph parade for Remembrance Sunday every year. Under the British nationalities selection scheme, which was introduced in 1990 and ran until 1 July 1997, a limited number of Hong Kong military service core personnel who were settled in Hong Kong could apply to register as British citizens. The Home Office is listening to representations made on behalf of former Hong Kong military service core personnel who were unable to obtain citizenship through the selection scheme.

While BNO status is not contained within the joint declaration itself, it was established as part of the delicate balance in the negotiations that led to the Sino-British joint declaration. Full and continued respect for the provisions in the joint declaration are crucial to the future stability and prosperity of Hong Kong, and to the rights, freedoms and autonomy of its people. It is a legally binding treaty, registered at the UN. It remains in force. As a co-signatory, we have a legal interest in ensuring that China stands by its obligations. The UK Government will continue to monitor its implementation closely.

We want to see the joint declaration upheld in its entirety. We are not therefore seeking to change any one part of the package. We expect China to live up to its obligations under the joint declaration and, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, to its wider international human rights law obligations.

Hon. Members have discussed whether the rights of those with BNO status should be altered following the recent protests in Hong Kong. Our position is clear: we believe that the best outcome for people with BNO status is for them to be able to enjoy the high degree of autonomy, rights and freedoms enshrined for Hong Kong in the joint declaration. BNO status was part of the delicate balance and negotiations that were conducted, which were concluded at the time of the joint declaration. The delicate balance reflected in that package needs to

be respected. That is why we believe it would not be right to change the legal status of those with BNO status at this time, but they will have our full support in exercising the rights they have as part of their status.

The UK Government continue to take their moral and political obligations towards Hong Kong very seriously. The political situation and protests in Hong Kong are a matter of serious concern to us all. We are absolutely clear that a political solution can only come from within Hong Kong. That requires two urgent steps to be taken: first, a full and credible independent inquiry into the events of the last several months; and secondly, a process of meaningful political dialogue in which all sides engage in good faith.

We have worked intensively over recent months to support a positive resolution to the protests, and to uphold the joint declaration. We continue to engage with the Chinese and Hong Kong authorities. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has raised these matters directly with the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, Carrie Lam, and with the Chinese Foreign Minister and State Councillor, Wang Yi. He also summoned the Chinese ambassador in November.

Senior officials have reiterated our messages during regular engagement with their counterparts in Hong Kong, Beijing and London. Ministers and officials also continue to raise our concerns internationally, including at the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

Stephen Hammond: I understood the Minister's point about the delicate balance and that this is not the time to change any aspect of the joint declaration. However, she said that the UK Government are determined to protect the rights of BNO status holders under the joint declaration. Could she set out now—or she could write to me—how exactly the Government intend to do that in a practical way?

Mrs Wheeler: I will get to the end of my speech and if the answer is not there I will write to my hon. Friend with pleasure.

The Government will continue to listen to the concerns of BNO status holders. It is crucial that their rights and freedoms, as well as those of other Hong Kong residents, are upheld. We remain seriously concerned about the situation in Hong Kong, and we remain committed to seeing the joint declaration upheld. It contains the commitment that Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy, rights and freedoms must remain unchanged for at least 50 years.

We will continue to work with international partners to ensure that China stands by these obligations. The undertakings made by China to uphold free speech and an independent judiciary are essential to Hong Kong's prosperity and way of life. They are the best way of guaranteeing Hong Kong's future success and stability, for all the people of Hong Kong, including BNO status holders, and that is something we all want to see.

Question put and agreed to.

11.18 am

Sitting suspended.

Special Educational Needs and Disability Funding

[MARK PRITCHARD *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered special educational needs and disability funding.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I am delighted to be leading my first debate in Westminster Hall as a new Member on this extremely important topic, which impacts some 1.3 million children up and down the country. They are often the most vulnerable and needy children in our education system.

My predecessor, Sir Vince Cable, led a debate in this Chamber on this very topic less than a year ago. The fact that I am leading a similar debate today underlines just how urgent and important an issue it continues to be, not least in Twickenham, despite funding announcements from the Government since the previous debate. Since the Children and Families Act became law in 2014, the number of children and young people with statements or education, health and care plans has increased across the country by almost 50%. The increase in my own borough of Richmond upon Thames is in fact more than 50%—the number of EHCPs there has risen from 941 in 2014 to almost 1,500 now.

That legislation was designed to put young people at the heart of the system but, as the Select Committee on Education recognised last October in a report, that ambition has yet to be realised and has been hampered by both poor administration and a challenging funding environment. We are here today to debate the latter challenge, but on the Committee's other key point, regarding poor administration, I must acknowledge the local government and social care ombudsman's report, published earlier this month, which strongly criticised Richmond Council's children's services provider, Achieving for Children, for not effectively supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities. I was horrified to read about the three cases highlighted in the report of young people missing out on support and education between 2016 and 2018 because of failures by the provider, for which of course Richmond Council is ultimately responsible.

I am pleased that the council has accepted the ombudsman's recommendations in full—both to compensate the families impacted and to conduct a thorough audit in respect of all the children for whom Achieving for Children is responsible for providing SEND support. I will personally be keeping a close eye on the results of that audit, meeting with local SEND groups as well as senior councillors and council officers, to ensure that any issues arising are urgently addressed and that Achieving for Children is held properly accountable.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate, and I declare an interest as the father of a child with special needs and an EHCP being administered by Achieving for Children. Does my hon. Friend agree that not only does that company have to improve, but the accumulated debt on Kingston Council's balance sheet, on Richmond's balance sheet, and indeed on those of

local authorities across the country, creates a huge crisis in funding not just for SEND but for schools and local authority services across the board? It is time that the Government got a grip of this, either by shifting that accumulated debt on to central Government balance sheets or by special funding relief, because this crisis could blow up in councils across the country if they do not act.

Munira Wilson: Absolutely. My right hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I was going to touch on deficits later, because Richmond's finances are in a parlous situation for that very reason.

To return to the main topic of SEND funding, many children are missing out on the support that they require and deserve, because of the enormous funding pressures on local councils and schools throughout the country. The SEND funding landscape is complicated by the fact that there are two separate funding pots. There is the high needs block for EHCPs, special schools and alternative provision; and children with moderate SEND, requiring in-school support, are funded out of core school budgets. Simultaneous demands on both have created the perfect storm. School cuts since 2015 mean that support staff have been the first to be cut. That in turn has led to increased demand on EHCPs, causing delays.

As a parent of two young children, I know that if either of them needed additional support, I and my husband would explore every single avenue open to us to apply maximum pressure on decision makers to ensure that those needs were met fully. However, many parents do not have the time, resources or confidence to navigate the complex system of appeals, ombudsmen and tribunals—even with the support of SEND advocacy groups such as the excellent Skylarks charity in my constituency. The result is that the most disadvantaged families often lose out.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I commend the hon. Lady for bringing such an important issue to the House today. I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Does she agree that part of the funding issue is that there is now a lack of educational psychologists who are able to assess children at an early stage, particularly in relation to disability, learning disability and autism, and that means that a much greater burden is placed on teachers? That cannot go on, because we are failing the children we really need to be supporting.

Munira Wilson: Absolutely. The hon. Lady makes an excellent point, which feeds into all the wider workforce debates that we are having in relation to both health and social care and the education sector.

With both schools and councils under serious financial strain, perverse incentives in our SEND funding system start to emerge. Councils expect schools to cough up £6,000 before they will consider a pupil for an EHCP, so headteachers are often more reluctant to send children for a diagnosis. When councils, schools and health services are all cash-strapped, is it any wonder that EHCPs might be bland and vague, failing to guarantee the support to which a child is entitled? That in turn may lead to further delay or indecision. And what is the result? Many children are missing out, and local authorities find themselves in dire financial straits.

One report estimates a national high needs spending deficit of between £1.2 billion and £1.6 billion by 2021. Many authorities are relying on reserves to make up the shortfall. In Richmond this year alone the SEND funding gap is £4.9 million in year. The cumulative figure will be a staggering £15.85 million by the end of this financial year. That is despite tight financial management across the wider schools' budget to keep the high needs deficit down. Such a significant and growing deficit is unsustainable and could result in other, non-statutory council services being cut. That is merely robbing Peter to pay Paul, and we are all too aware that local authorities have absolutely no fat left to cut.

The recent Government announcement about putting £780 million into SEND funding was of course very welcome, but that does not even begin to scratch the surface. Not only was it a single-year announcement but money was not targeted at those authorities where the SEND need was greatest, because of the way the funding formula operates. That meant that some local authorities with no SEND deficits received significant additional funding, whereas others, such as Richmond, received the minimum, barely 50% of the current year shortfall, so we have half a sticking-plaster solution.

The Department has previously advised Richmond Council to ring-fence the dedicated schools grant deficit, but auditors, the Treasury and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government refuse to accept that approach. I hope that the Minister can provide further cross-departmental guidance on that point. Indeed, I would like to request that the Secretary of State for Education meets me, my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney), and senior Richmond councillors and officers to find a solution to the incredibly challenging situation in which the borough finds itself.

I have spoken extensively about the impact on council finances, but we must not forget that at the centre of every tough and contested decision is a child in need of support in order to learn, develop and flourish to their full potential, and a family experiencing stress, anxiety and often financial hardship to ensure that their child has the appropriate support in place. Richmond SEND Crisis tells me that some families spend £30,000 on tribunals, sometimes remortgaging their homes to do so, and we know that many people cannot afford to do that.

Last year, four in 10 EHCPs were not finalised before the statutory 20-week deadline, according to freedom of information requests via the BBC. Many parents are resorting to home schooling because they have given up waiting for a placement in an education setting.

What are the solutions? As well as a significant cash injection, we need to remove the perverse incentives. For example, at the election the Liberal Democrats proposed reducing the £6,000 that schools are expected to pay for each child with SEND. We should not punish schools for doing the right thing. Councils need to get the basics rights on EHCPs, and they need adequate staff and resources to do so.

Finally, a national SEND strategy from the Government would encourage councils to share specialist SEND services where relevant, such as provision for deaf children. A national strategy should also set out steps to ensure that central Government, local government, schools and, critically, health and social services—which have not always stepped up to the plate on EHCPs—work together more effectively.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing her first Westminster Hall debate on this very important topic, and on her speech, in which she is making powerful points. We have all experienced the difficulties of dealing with parents and their children who have been tragically let down. On the strategy, does she recognise the need for better resourcing, and for greater understanding of all the conditions that people present with? For example, pathological demand avoidance, on the autistic spectrum, is recognised in some areas as a specific condition requiring resource and targeted support, but not in others. It would be helpful if the national strategy ensures that we are consistent across the country in identifying the range of needs and responding to them appropriately.

Munira Wilson: Absolutely. A national strategy would address this point about variability and joining up all the services required.

To conclude, every child deserves the best possible start in life. The life chances of children with SEND depend upon appropriate and adequate support, and intervention at the right time. We must realise the ambition of the Children and Families Act 2014 to put young people at the heart of SEND provision. We cannot keep cutting corners and expecting hard-pressed local authorities to pick up the pieces. It is time for the Government to step up, and to provide the necessary funding and a joined-up strategy.

2.42 pm

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I thank the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) for securing this important debate and continuing in the footsteps of her predecessor, who held a similar debate last year—he was very passionate about this topic.

Special educational needs and disability funding is close to my heart. I have seen at first hand the powerful impact that the right school and support can have. My nephew, Joseph Gibson, has Down's syndrome, and he absolutely loves his school and his friends at St John's RC School in Chingford. His progress has been remarkable, as he has blossomed into a confident, funny and bright teenager. As MPs, we will all have met families struggling to get the best education for their children. There is nothing any parent wants more than for their children to be happy, safe and confident at school, and for them to make friends.

The percentage of children with special needs in West Sussex is higher than average. The system is under increasing pressure, made more challenging by the complexity of needs, which grows as we get better at diagnosing development needs and doing something to help children develop their potential.

I recently visited Fordwater School, a special needs school in my constituency that does a fantastic job supporting the most vulnerable children and young adults in my community. Sadly, the school is under huge pressures driven by increased demand and insufficient funding. It currently spends 93% of its budget on staffing, which is necessary to ensure that the children in its care are kept safe. Consequently, budgets are super tight, and parts of the school are not fit for purpose. When I visited Fordwater, three classes were under enforced closure due to water leaks. Fortunately, the school secured extra funding to fix the roof, although

[Gillian Keegan]

not to address the underlying issue. More money is needed in the capital budget to maintain the buildings correctly. The school cares for and educates some of the most vulnerable in society, yet the facilities are simply inadequate. Their primary block is comprised of dated pre-fab buildings described as “condemnable” by the headteacher, Sophie Clarke.

This Friday, I will visit St Anthony’s School in Chichester, which is oversubscribed by two classes, putting extra pressure on resources. Despite that, it is receiving more and more admission requests. Fordwater School is in the same boat, with applications that could fill the school by half again. That overfilling is particularly challenging as many of the pupils need sensory spaces and quiet places to handle behavioural issues. Sometimes that becomes increasingly difficult as the numbers rise.

St Anthony’s School is rated outstanding by Ofsted, and has been for the past nine years, so it is increasingly popular. Headteacher Helen Ball told me:

“it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the provision we want with inadequate accommodation and funding.”

That is despite a recent increase in the top-up funding from £3,920 to £4,100 per pupil, as the costs that the school incurs far outweigh that increase.

My local authority, West Sussex County Council, is receiving £8.3 million more in its designated schools grant—an increase of 10.4%, which is very welcome—yet there is a spending gap of £2.4 million. The council has appealed to the Secretary of State to plug that gap, and I hope the Minister will support that. Our local need is growing, as I am sure it is in many areas. We have more and more children on education, health and care plans; the figure is up by 66% since 2015.

One example of rising costs is the home-to-school travel costs, paid by the council—they have increased by over 20% in the past two years. I have heard from several parents who are fighting hard to get an education, health and care plan assessment for their child. Many receive insufficient support through the application process, which is overly complex. We should simplify this process, to make assessment more straightforward.

To cope with the ever-increasing demand, Chichester needs capital investment to expand. We simply need more places and, in some cases, to make safe the special educational needs provision. We need to ensure that we are providing brilliant care, not just adequate care. We need more investment to do that. In the long term, that will save money. Many children travel significant distances to access the specialist support they need, due to overstretched services. One child about to start at Fordwater School will commute 40 minutes each day to attend the school’s autism centre for 16 to 19-year-olds.

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady for securing this debate. This issue is dear to my heart and I want to see change in my constituency of Upper Bann, and Northern Ireland. Does she agree that we need to create the best school environment? She mentioned the distance that people must travel. A colleague of mine in the Northern Ireland Assembly is bringing forward mandatory training on autism for teaching staff and classroom assistants. Does she agree we should implement that throughout the United Kingdom?

Gillian Keegan: I agree—that is a good point. For new Members who might not know, I should say that autism awareness training is available to all Members and our staff here. We have done it, and it is also useful for surgeries to ensure our staff are trained. The more that we can help, the better. Talking about autism and understanding how to make places more autism-friendly is vital.

Having to place children outside an area because no provision is available also drives up expenditure: on average, that costs £45,000 per child, compared to £19,000 to place them in a local special school. Last December, nearly 500 children were funded out of the county. That is a massive cost, so there is a pressing business case for strategic investment in the county, rather than endless reactionary spending.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): Does the hon. Lady share my concern not only about children being placed outside their area, but about the fact that many of those children are placed in unfit settings—not registered as official educational settings and, therefore, not inspected by Ofsted? Local authorities get over that through a code of conduct. Does she agree that all alternative provision settings should be registered and properly monitored, so that those children get the help they need and the education they deserve?

Gillian Keegan: Yes; that sounds like a sensible suggestion, although I have not come across that problem myself. Most of the facilities the children are sent to are amazing: we do not have equivalent facilities in West Sussex. Many of them are private, which is why they are so expensive.

Our local special needs schools are clearly stretched to the limit, and that also has implications for staff. Understandably, children with certain behavioural challenges often need extra support. I would be grateful if the Minister outlined in her response any steps being taken to ensure that mental health support is available for staff, who endure much more emotional stress in the workplace than staff in many other school settings.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Understandably, the hon. Member has focused on complex needs. However, does she accept that about 10% of all pupils have speech and language difficulties, and that speech and language—oral communication—is the basis of all learning, whether in mathematics, reading or any academic subject? Yet the money given per child varies from about £30 to £300; there is very much a postcode lottery.

I chair the all-party parliamentary group on speech and language difficulties. Does the hon. Member agree that we should have a more consistent approach, focusing on the basic skills of speech and language—problems with those can manifest themselves in mental health and other issues—as well as on the more complex needs?

Gillian Keegan: Yes, I absolutely agree. Such education is a life-changer. I go back to my nephew, who has Down’s syndrome: his speech is amazing now because of that type of support. As the hon. Gentleman said, frustration, behavioural issues and mental health issues can occur if someone cannot communicate to the best of their ability, so such education is absolutely vital. It is one of those things that is a business case all in itself, in

enabling a young person to develop and to be the best that they can be, and in preventing other issues from developing. I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman that such education is vital.

I am focusing on complex needs, but I am sure that the whole range of different needs will be covered in the debate. As they grow up, children with special needs may need additional support, including with things that most of us do not think about, such as getting on a bus, cooking dinner or being safe on the street. They may need additional support with all those things. It also seems that there is less support available as children enter their late teens or early twenties.

Chichester College has paired up with a fantastic local charity, the Aldingbourne Trust. Together they run a purpose-built shared accommodation centre called York Road, which supports students with special needs. At Chichester College, these students are learning all the skills they need in life, including healthy living, employability, cooking, budgeting and e-safety; those lessons are then reinforced by the live-in staff at their home in York Road.

The programme is remarkably successful. On their arrival at the beginning of the year, none of the students could travel independently; they relied on their parents or the local authority. However, after just two months, all of them now ride the local bus back and forth, and they have gained independence and confidence. That is transforming their lives. Relationship-building is also valuable, as many of these young adults are at very high risk of social isolation. What is brilliant is that they have all developed strong friendships with their flatmates and the staff who support them.

This intensive method of rehearsal, reinforcement and reflection works. Furthermore, it is totally in line with the Department of Education's preparing for adulthood agenda. I urge the Minister to examine the success of the programme and consider whether such partnerships could be replicated and expanded in all other areas, because parents worry about what will happen to children who have complex special needs as they get older.

The project is fantastic, but the next step into the working world is fraught with difficulty and I hope the Government will pay more attention to that issue. Young adults with special educational needs require additional support to get into the workplace, and I would welcome greater collaboration with learning providers and employers to bridge the transition from school to work, including providing incentives for businesses to offer employment opportunities that are also social opportunities, to support that transition.

Proper support for children and young people with special needs is crucial both for the children and young people themselves and their families, and it can totally transform their life experience; in addition, offering children positive and well-rounded support reduces dependency later on in life. I urge the Government to continue to invest in these young people. That will benefit everybody.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Order. There is much interest in this debate, so I reluctantly impose a time limit of six minutes. That might change to five minutes later on; we will have to wait and see. For the benefit of

all Members, particularly new Members, I point out that every intervention will add one minute, up to a maximum of two interventions per speech. We want to encourage debate, but bear that in mind should you wish to speak as well as intervene.

2.54 pm

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard, and to follow the hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan), who made a passionate speech.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) on securing this really important debate. Special educational needs and disability funding is an issue of deep concern for many of my constituents. As a former teacher, I have seen at first hand the value of specialist support for children and young people who have special educational needs, and as an MP, I have heard countless stories of frustration and disappointment from parents who only want the best for their children.

Today, I will talk about how children with special educational needs and disabilities are being let down, excluded and denied educational opportunities because of a lack of funding. Right now, parents and pupils must navigate a fragmented and overstretched system to get the special educational needs provision that they deserve and desperately need.

Too many children are being left behind without support, due to delayed and out-of-date education, health and care plans. In Barnsley, some children have had to wait more than 33 weeks. Although that may not be the norm and the borough performs above average in that respect, far too many families face long and trying delays.

That obviously has a knock-on and life-changing effect. Recently, a parent told me that their child was denied a place at a specialist school due to their having an out-of-date plan, despite the fact that over a three-year period that parent had made multiple requests to have the plan updated. Another constituent's 10-year-old child was excluded for bad behaviour at school while they were waiting for the EHC assessment that would identify them as requiring additional support.

In addition, those pupils who attend school can struggle to get through the day. I have heard distressing stories of children being left bruised and scratched after being forcibly restrained. Inappropriate use of restraint is never a solution.

There is also off-rolling, which is the disgraceful practice of removing students from the school roll, and not because of legitimate concerns about their behaviour. Instead, such students are removed from school because it is thought likely that they will perform poorly in exams, which would impact on school performance figures. I know of an academy that temporarily excluded nearly a quarter of its pupils in the 2017-18 academic year. The competitive system of schooling, including the Ofsted framework, has led to a culture whereby difficult pupils are being excluded rather than being managed.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for raising the issue of exclusions, which is particularly important when it comes to academies. In Luton, school exclusions have—shockingly—tripled in the last five years, and many of the excluded children are children with special educational needs, which risks

[Sarah Owen]

some of the most vulnerable children in society being further exposed to isolation or criminal elements. Does she agree that exclusion should only ever be the last resort, and not a tool to manage overall performance of a school or the result of a lack of funding?

Stephanie Peacock: I thank my hon. Friend for making that important point. She is absolutely right—it is completely clear that something needs to be done to keep children in supportive and safe learning environments.

It is also clear that the number of pupils being excluded is simply far too high; we have seen that in my local area. However, having met officials from Barnsley Council—I have an ongoing dialogue with the council—I can say that it seems very genuine in its attempts to deal with the situation, and I welcome the Barnsley Alliance for Schools and the education improvement strategy.

The efforts of local councils across the country, however, are limited by overstretched budgets and chronic underfunding. Many of the challenges in the SEN system cannot be met within the current allocation of high needs funding. Sadly, a significant proportion of councils' high needs budgets is being spent on sending children and young people to out-of-borough referral units or schools. Vulnerable children are being forced to leave their school friends and travel further afield to access the support they need. Across the country, children are out of school for months, and sometimes years, because of the lack of local SEN provision and specialist school places. That is a direct consequence of councils not having the funds to provide SEN support locally.

The massive commitment of local authority resources has left SEN teams short-staffed, which in turn has left families waiting for months, if not years, to have their children's needs assessed and a support plan agreed upon. It is an indictment of the whole system that vulnerable children are being neglected, excluded and left without the assistance they need to succeed in life.

With rising demand for SEN and disability support, councils across the country face a shortfall of more than £1 billion by 2021. In areas such as Barnsley, funding for SEN has simply not kept pace with the increase in demand and the increased expectations about provision. The current and proposed high needs funding allocations are simply not sufficient.

Schools and local authorities need resources to ensure that vulnerable children are given the best start in life. It is clear that everyone's best interests would be served by increasing funding to support SEN provision locally, and by having a more accountable and less bureaucratic system. Right now, children with special educational needs and their parents are being left behind, without the funding or support they deserve. We urgently need action.

2.59 pm

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) on her powerful and forceful contribution on such an important issue. She has the thanks of the House for raising this issue.

I start by setting out the position in Cheltenham, where we are particularly well served, with Battledown Centre, which assesses children between the ages of two and six; Belmont School, which is for children with

moderate learning difficulties; Bettridge School for children with severe learning difficulties; and the Ridge Academy for children with emotional and behavioural problems.

As the hon. Member for Twickenham said, it is hard to overstate the extent to which demand has rocketed; it is not just demand in terms of the numbers, but in terms of complexity as well. To put a little flesh on those bones, the 2019 National Audit Office report—recent data—indicated that the number of pupils attending special schools had risen between January 2014 and January 2018 by 20.2%. Furthermore, in terms of complexity, the proportion of pupils with the greatest needs had risen between 2014 and 2019 from 2.8% to 3.1%. That might not sound like a great deal, but given the extent to which they require significant resources, it is a telling point. I have picked up that point when speaking to teachers in my constituency. One told me that he had worked in a special school for something like 25 years. When he started in the 1990s, a normal pupil-teacher ratio was in the order of 16:1, but the idea of a 16:1 ratio now in a school with moderate learning difficulties is completely fanciful, because the level of complexity is much more significant.

In practice, what that means is that those schools that are supposed to be dealing with children with moderate learning difficulties are, in fact, dealing with children with severe learning difficulties, and those schools that are meant to be dealing with children with severe learning difficulties very often find it difficult to cope. What then happens? Those children end up in independent provision. Quite apart from whether that is the best place for them to be, it is incredibly expensive and ends up taking resources away from the pot.

We spend a lot of time praising public servants in this place—that is absolutely as it should be—but we should have a special regard and respect for those people who work in our special schools. They are dealing with an extraordinary surge in complexity with an extraordinary sense of professionalism, devotion and care. They have my sincere gratitude, and I dare say that of everyone here.

We have got to have a better understanding of why this surge is happening. The Government announced a review in September 2019, and that work has to include action on the specific health conditions that are driving the demand. As a society, we have to face up to an issue, which is positive, but which is sometimes uncomfortable for us to grapple with. The reality is that there are a lot of children surviving in childbirth who might never have survived before. Thank goodness that is happening, but it does mean that we as a society have to recognise that there may be knock-on consequences, which we have to resource properly.

Layla Moran: I am pleased that the hon. Member is raising the work of the NAO. I helped to lead that inquiry for the Public Accounts Committee, and it is good work. We need to be very careful. Although there is potentially a correlation, it is anecdotal that there is a relationship between the two. It is not necessarily borne out in the data. I would be wary of making that link without the data.

Alex Chalk: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to tread carefully. The central point is that we need the data. It is critical that we make these important public policy decisions on the basis of the strongest evidence. We have to go where the evidence takes us, even if it is not always comfortable to do so.

I pay tribute to the Government for the additional funding. Of course, we all want more, but it is important to recognise how significant that additional sum has been. It is something in the order of £700 million. Taken in isolation, such figures are meaningless. We have to look at the context of the overall high needs pot of around £6 billion. The Government investment is a significant sum of money set against that. In Gloucestershire, that means that the budget has gone from about £60 million up to £66 million. I take on board the points made by the hon. Member for Twickenham about ongoing needs and the fact that some local authorities have found themselves overspending and viring money from the mainstream block to fund the shortfall, but we should not lose sight of the fact that is none the less a significant sum of money.

Of course, although it is a critical factor, it is not all about money. I pay tribute to the headteachers in Cheltenham, and Gloucestershire more widely, who have addressed the point made by the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) about off-rolling. We did have a big problem with off-rolling in Gloucestershire, but the headteachers have worked closely together and they have reduced the number of exclusions by 19% in 2018 and 42% since September 2019. That is a fantastic piece of work because, at the risk of stating the obvious, if they do not do that schools decline to manage children with SEND in mainstream education, who might then go to schools with moderate learning difficulties; those schools cannot cope, and they then shunt people on to schools with severe learning difficulties, and as I indicated earlier, they often end up in independent provision. We have to break the cycle and break that domino effect. Headteachers working together are doing so, and I commend them on that.

I have a number of asks of the Government. Will the Government look again at the expectation that mainstream schools such as, for example, Pittville School or Balcarras School in my constituency should pay for the cost of SEN support up to £6,000? That places a financial burden on schools. Although they are living up to their obligations, we should recognise the strain that that places on them. Secondly, I have indicated that we need to progress work on identifying causes. Thirdly, we need to look again at the code of practice and, in particular, the threshold for education, health and care plans. We simply cannot duck that. Finally, is now the time that we ought to look at whether clinical commissioning groups should bear some of the burden, particularly where there is increasing medical intervention? As a society, we have to grapple with those issues. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Twickenham for raising the debate and I pay tribute to the teachers who deliver so much in Gloucestershire.

3.7 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): It is a massive honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson), who made an outstanding speech. I am grateful to her for leading the debate.

In the run-up to the debate, I contacted all the headteachers in my constituency to ask what they wanted me to tell the Minister about special educational needs funding and provision. The collective message that came

back is one of desperation. In rural communities such as ours in Cumbria, small local schools simply do not have the financial resilience to cope with the ludicrous cuts they have to face from the Government, but it is especially tough when it comes to SEN funding.

My constituency has eight secondary schools, two of which have fewer than 200 pupils; 35 primary schools, 10 of which have fewer than 30 pupils; and three primary schools smaller even than that. They are all fantastic schools. They are small because they serve sparsely populated areas that are significant distances away from one another, and small schools are the most vulnerable. One of our larger secondaries, Kendal's Queen Katherine School, spoke for all the heads when it revealed the real financial pressure in being expected to fund the first 11 hours of education, health and care plans out of the school's own budget. Because of the cuts that the Government have made to overall per-pupil funding, they have no reserves to provide that support.

The head of Storth Primary School sent me a copy of the letter that he had written to the county. He described the school's reputation for being a caring and nurturing setting and how that has resulted in the school attracting more children with special educational needs. That should be celebrated, commended and rewarded. Instead, the lack of funding has made it a burden. In recent years the school has had children needing full-time 2:1 or 1:1 support, but no funding has been provided. They have been under a deficit recovery plan for five years. The head speaks of the pressure and anxiety that the staff are under and the frustration and pain of trying to provide the best possible care and education for all pupils on a budget that simply will not allow it.

A similar picture was painted by the special educational needs co-ordinator at Cartmel Primary School. The local authority recommends the school as suitable for children with an EHCP and 4.3% of its children have one, significantly above the national average. Although the school expresses its pride in its reputation, it is in danger of buckling under the funding pressure that falls on its shoulders alongside the usual strains that fall on small school budgets.

Cumbria is as vast as it is beautiful. Often in rural communities such as ours there simply is not the alternative provision available in reachable distances. The head of Langdale Primary School described how for many pupils the available special schools would require travelling extreme distances, and therefore they are effectively unavailable. She wrote with some distress that, despite the incredible hard work and enthusiasm of her excellent team, its ethos—to be wholeheartedly centred on individual children—was coming under increasing strain.

Heads in south Cumbria say that they are challenged by the lack of staffing, and in my experience that is the case. Cuts in support staff have left teachers isolated in supporting children's needs in the classroom. St Martin & St Mary Church of England Primary School in Windermere described the extremely high criteria set to qualify for an EHCP, so only children with the most severe needs receive any funding at all. On top of that, many schools have to contend with long waiting lists for SEN referrals, followed by delayed assessments. Children are often then refused support, despite their evident need, and that leaves schools in Cumbria also having to find the resources to support the significant number of

[Tim Farron]

children who are in limbo, waiting for an assessment. They have needs but do not have an EHCP, and indeed they may never get one.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is completely unacceptable that families have to wait for far too long? He mentions the delays and assessment refusals, and how people have to wait a long time once assessments are granted. The statutory timescale is 20 weeks: four and a half months to wait to get an assessment. Even in my area of Hertfordshire County Council, one in five of the families do not get their assessment within the statutory period, so does he agree that the timescale should be shortened?

Tim Farron: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. The situation is the same in Cumbria. The point was made earlier by the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), who is no longer in her place, regarding the lack of educational psychologists. The Government are not funding the support needed to get people to have their EHCP in the first place, and therefore schools are picking up the tab for assessments that have not been made. Nevertheless, the needs are absolutely still there.

The head of Dallam School in Milnthorpe expressed concern on another matter: the lack of resources available to access quality training and training providers to equip staff to support pupils' mental health needs. Many of the other heads shared the concern that it damaged their schools' ability to do the job that they are so desperate to do. The Government can talk a good game on mental health, but they are utterly failing to invest in preventive mental health with the staff and training necessary in schools to keep our children mentally well. Indeed, across the whole of Cumbria only 75p is spent per child per year on preventive mental health work, which is an outrage.

The Government are demoralising our teachers and letting down our children, because schools have to fund those first hours of provision for children with EHCPs. We therefore have a system that punishes schools that have a deserved reputation for being nurturing and for caring for their children's needs. The Government are systematically penalising the schools that do the right thing, and that must change. I challenge the Minister today to ensure that all funding to support children with EHCPs is delivered centrally and does not come from the school's own budget.

I am grateful to all the headteachers who contacted me—many more than I have had time to refer to here. They are all hard-working, enthusiastic and caring, and so are their staff. I am incredibly proud of all of them, but they are desperate because Government funding has put them in an impossible position. They are outstanding professionals who love their jobs, love their schools, and are driven to make a difference in the lives of the children of Cumbria, whom they serve. Imagine how unbearable it is for them to know that they cannot do what they know they should; cannot meet the needs that they know they should; cannot support the children in the way that they know they should. It is as heartbreaking as it is outrageous. Let us have no more excuses. The Government must act.

3.14 pm

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I hope that Members will forgive me if I speak for slightly less than the allotted time, but that is because Members before me have said a great deal of what I believe, and I understand the passion and feeling about the issue. I thank the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) for securing the debate. She has set the bar very high for the new intake of MPs. I suspect that my hon. Friends the Members for Ipswich (Tom Hunt) and for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn) and I will all pay great attention to her career, and to how we can match her skills.

My hon. Friends the Members for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) and for East Devon (Simon Jupp) have asked me to say some words on this topic. Given that across Devon we have 6,500 young children in EHCPs, 794 of whom are looked after, with 94,000 pupils and 369 schools, the issue is hugely impactful and it is necessary that we address it. I welcome the Government's actions over the past few years, including the recent £780 million; the 2014 reforms to extend eligibility for support for 16 to 25-year-olds; delivering a further 50,000 teaching assistants; and, as has been mentioned, the further commitment to £31.6 million to train more than 600 educational psychologists. That is welcome news and should be applauded.

However, I am not here to be a mouthpiece for the Government. Although I recognise their successes, there is more work to be done. For all the positive action that has been taken over the past few years, there have also been some serious negative impacts. Within my constituency of Totnes there is undoubtedly a considerable challenge for the local authorities that have to subsidise the dedicated schools grant high needs block. The continued demand for EHCPs, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) mentioned, obviously takes up a huge amount of time, and it is difficult to get through them. That difficulty is also reflected in school transport and how that can be taken on by local authorities.

In my efforts to be brief, I shall put a few questions to the Minister. What action will the Government take to ensure that schools receive further funding for SEND children in future? Will they recognise the requirement of mixed provision and the benefit of it? Do they understand that mainstream settings can often be as beneficial as those in special schools? Lastly, does the Minister agree that providing long-term support allows for improved school budgeting and consideration for how to effectively provide for SEND children?

I have one last point about the families of those who travel abroad in the service of a Government Department and who then return and have to reapply through the EHCP programme, which is incredibly difficult. Will the Government look at how those who serve this country abroad with their families can go forward in that process when they return?

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Order. We need to move on to the Front-Bench speakers at 3.30. Five people are trying to catch my eye. We will have to go to a time limit of three minutes for four speakers, and unfortunately somebody might be disappointed.

3.17 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) on securing this excellent debate. As a former secondary school teacher, I know that not providing properly for children with special educational needs impacts on the whole school environment. All our children deserve a good education, and at the core of that is how we deal with and provide for those who need support. It impacts on all children if we do not support those with special educational needs.

I want to draw attention quickly to the situation in Bath and North East Somerset. Like the rest of the country, we deal with a growing number of children who require SEND provision, with less funding to do so. More than 1,350 children now need support via an EHCP, compared with just over 800 in 2013. That is partly due to the widening age range of zero to 25—previously it was five to 18. However, it is also because of the expectations that SEND reforms have created, and rising levels of need in BANES. It is most likely linked to autism, and to social, emotional and mental health difficulties.

My main concern is the lack of general direction around SEND. The performance regime that schools must follow means that there is now a low incentive for inclusion in mainstream schools for children with SEND. For BANES Council, there are three things that the Government can do to improve the situation. First, they must provide the local authority with the finance it needs in the high needs budget and provide appropriate funding for the delivery of local authority services. Secondly, they can be clearer and more specific about the role of schools in supporting children with SEND, and link that to school performance and inspection regimes.

Finally, the Government should seek to reward schools that are successful in being inclusive of children needing SEND provision. There are, as has been said, perverse disincentives for doing so—particularly, for example, when children move from junior to senior school. Because it takes so long to secure the funding, often children do not get that at the end of their time in junior school, because the school itself will not benefit from the extra funding. I therefore urge the Government also to look at children's transition from one school to the next.

3.19 pm

Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson), who personally invited me, across the Chamber, to come and speak in the debate. While I absolutely agree on the need for sustainable funding for SEND services, I want to touch on the way local authorities run them.

Unfortunately for children in my constituency, the local council is not providing the leadership required. The Liberal Democrat-run council was slammed by Ofsted for its lack of leadership. In fact, the report explicitly stated that money was not the issue in that case, because Sutton Council is one of the best funded authorities, if not the best funded. I am not entirely sure where it lies on the league table now, but at the time of the report it was certainly not having much trouble with its funding.

The failure of political leadership in Sutton has meant that parents have had to band together to form the Sutton EHCP crisis group, because they do not have access to the support that their children are entitled to. That includes the failure of Sutton Council to comply with the Children and Families Act 2014. I commend the work of the group, and particularly the work of its founder Hayley Harding, who has just been nominated for an autism professionals award, in the best volunteer category. No one could be more deserving. Thanks to the group's tireless campaigning, and the fact that they have held the council to account, there has been some—I stress it is only some—progress. Some of the findings of an investigation into the council's failure have included an admission that past systems have not worked, and that the system is still not as good as it should have been.

Problems remain, particularly with respect to the accountability and transparency of Cognus, the arm's length company that the council uses to process the plans. There is still substantial evidence of non-compliance with the 2014 Act. However, the big problem that we have is a failure of any political will on the part of the council to hold itself to account or deal with the problem. Frankly, I find it scandalous that no councillor has felt the need to resign over the poor standard to which Sutton's SEND service has been allowed to fall. Time and again we hear repeated bleats that the system is not as bad as it is, and that parents are on the council's side. At the same time, parents in the public gallery at council meetings say the exact opposite.

The council needs to take responsibility. I hope that the Minister will agree that, although we need to provide sustainable funding, we cannot allow the situation to continue in which councils fail to provide the leadership required for services. I hope that we will get the changes necessary in Sutton, and ensure that the most vulnerable children in Carshalton and Wallington get access to the support that they are entitled to.

3.22 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) for bringing the issue to the fore. It is replicated across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. There will not be any region where it is not an issue. Regions including my own fail on this, and improvement is absolutely necessary.

Children are simply falling through the cracks as budgets are stretched beyond belief. Special needs services clearly do not have the resourcing needed to make the difference. In the previous Parliament, the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee made it its business to carry out a study on education and health. The education study mirrored all the issues that have been referred to. One of the main findings was that Northern Ireland has faced the highest school spending cuts per pupil in the UK over the past decade—11% in real terms, compared with 8% in England, 6% in Wales and 2% in Scotland. The money set aside per pupil in Northern Ireland, at £5,500, is less than in Wales, where it is £5,800; England, where it is £6,000; and Scotland, where it is £6,600.

Today I had the opportunity to meet some people from Disability Action. They were people at secondary school or in further education. The issues for them are clear. Transport to school is important, as well as the

[Jim Shannon]

assessment that other Members have referred to, which can take four to six weeks. In Northern Ireland it can take from four to six months, so we are worse off. Even then, there is no guarantee of getting the cash that is needed.

We have had a failure in the Assembly for the past three years. It is important now to move on. There is a Minister in place in the Assembly, who happens to be my colleague. We need sustained, enhanced funding UK-wide, for all schools, and particularly for children with special needs. I know that the Minister is here to respond on her portfolio and not on Northern Ireland, but we want to have some input on Northern Ireland in this process, and to discuss where we are.

I pay tribute to every teacher who gives up even more of their home life to consider the child who is not statemented but needs extra help, and to every classroom assistant who makes the difference for that child. I also pay tribute to every volunteer who takes training in Campaigners or the Girls Brigade and Boys Brigade, to learn how better to connect and deal with the special needs child who needs to know, as we do in those organisations, the Bible story that Jesus loves them and they have a place within every youth organisation. It is important that there is funding so that the people we charge with the education of our vulnerable and needy children can have the tools that they desperately need to enable them to achieve what they know they can, given the chance, which is that children can fulfil their potential.

3.25 pm

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) for securing the debate. I do not think that there is a more important issue in our society than making sure that every child, regardless of any disabilities they are born with, has every opportunity to achieve their full potential. Often their full potential is not just being average, but being a high achiever—I say that as someone who has dyspraxia. I was born with dyspraxia and dyslexia. When I was 12 I had the reading and writing age of an eight-year-old. I said I was going to leave school because I did not really care about it at that time—I just cared about football and that was about it—but I was able to turn things around.

I will share some insights about what I think is key. A lot of the issue in relation to people with special educational needs is to do with structure and the approach to education, but much of that is of course linked to funding. What made a difference to me was having fantastic learning support assistants who, at key moments in my life, made key interventions at the right moment. I was so lucky that that was the case. It was also crucial that I was at a school that had the freedom and flexibility to make certain decisions. Recently I spoke to a parent whose daughter has dyspraxia. For me, being taken out of French lessons was crucial. As important as it is to learn a foreign language, I was four years behind with writing and reading in English, so French was not the greatest priority. It was the same for the parent I spoke to.

It is also important to have, at the heart of teacher training, the development of a full understanding of the range of special educational needs, whether it is autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia—you name it. Of course, early

intervention is crucial. The hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) made a point about Ofsted inspections, and that issue is behind many of the problems in the education system. The right incentives need to be put before schools and teachers so that they can focus on the right areas. No school should be rated good if it does not cater for everyone. No child should be left behind in our education system.

It has been an honour to speak in the debate. I only knew it was happening a couple of hours ago. My time management is not the best—perhaps it is linked to my dyspraxia—and I was only planning to speak for three minutes anyway, so I have not been negatively impacted.

3.27 pm

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) on securing this incredibly important debate.

In the short time we have, I join colleagues in heartfelt thanks and admiration for those on the frontline who are dealing on a day-to-day basis with children with special educational needs. “Dealing” is not quite the right word. I used to be a teacher and know that, as has been said, those students are often the most creative and giving, intellectually, in the class. Once that potential has been unlocked, they can fly.

I often go to special schools in my constituency, and we speak about how students can feel excluded from the system. Children are pulled out of classes when they want to be included. I would love us one day to have an education system that is fully inclusive and is allowed to make accommodations on a case-by-case basis for every single child. Most teachers know what those accommodations need to be. We have heard already about the funding crisis. There is a notional SEND budget that comes out of the main schools grant. It is £6,000 from every school and it creates a perverse incentive. That has to go, which is why in the last election the Liberal Democrats suggested that it should be cut to £3,000 for each child, but the fact is we need to make sure that any child, anywhere, gets the full accommodations that they need.

In the short time I have remaining I will highlight the “h” part of EHCPs. We often talk about autism and dyslexia, but it is also meant to cover children with disabilities. The other part of the NHS that feeds into the issue is child and adolescent mental health services. I have constituents in my area of Oxfordshire who have waited nearly two years for their EHCPs. That is a direct result of underfunding in CAMHS, which the local CCG and the local authority commission together. What work is the Minister doing with other Departments to ensure that they are meeting their requirements for EHCPs?

I will quickly highlight unregistered alternative provision. What happens to students who are excluded from school? Very often those schools do not want to do that, but for the sake of other children in school, or because they simply cannot provide the resourcing needed, they move the students on, often asking for them to be home-schooled or otherwise. Why do we have a system that allows any child essentially to be pushed out of the system altogether? I can understand that the child might go somewhere

else, but that provision needs to be fully registered and fully inspected. If the child is to be home-schooled, that needs to be up to a standard. My final question to the Minister is about what happened to the consultation on children not in school. We were meant to have a response by the end of the year. That is an important part and we have not seen it.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Order. It is now time to call the first of the Front Benchers.

3.31 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) for securing this debate. Clearly there is an appetite to discuss this important issue. I stand to speak for the third party as a former English teacher of 23 years and as a Member of Parliament from Scotland. Before I begin, it is worth pointing out that in Scotland some 27% of our school registered pupils have special or additional support needs. In England, the figure is 15%. The debate is of particular importance to Scotland, as a higher percentage of our children are affected and require extra support.

We can all agree that our children and young people must receive the support they need—we have heard much about that today from all parts of the House—and must be helped in school to reach their full potential. It is important that our systems focus on overcoming barriers to learning so that every child can enjoy a positive and fulfilling school experience. Part of that must be ensuring that children are in an environment that best suits their needs. For some children, that will be mainstream education, but for others it will require a specialist setting. Today we have heard of some of the challenges for pupils in accessing the kind, level and nature of support they need. We must remember that we are dealing with a spectrum and range of different needs when we talk about special or additional needs. That could be a learning difficulty or another kind of disability where special provision is required.

Having special educational needs can impact on a child in a range of ways, including their ability to make friends, their ability to understand things, their concentration, their physical ability, their ability to read and write and even their behaviour. The challenges faced by children with special educational needs are often lifelong. School must be a place where they feel supported and included and find fulfilment, because their lives will not get any easier when they leave school. There is no doubt that a school must have the appropriate and correct level of staffing and support to ensure that those needs are being met appropriately, as the hon. Member for Ipswich (Tom Hunt) pointed out when referring to his personal experience. I think his was probably the most powerful contribution to the debate, because there is nothing more important than hearing from somebody who had been through the system and seen things from that side. Even though many of the Members in the debate are former teachers, we do not necessarily see the issue through the child's eyes.

Like the rest of the UK, Scotland faces challenges in delivering the kind of education that we all agree children with special or additional support needs deserve. I would like to take a few moments to set out some of the action being taken in Scotland to try to address the issues. Nothing I say should in any way indicate that it is

job done—far from it. The challenge will continue to present itself and re-present itself with every new generation going to school.

In 2018, 14,457 staff had a role in supporting pupils with additional needs in Scotland. That was an increase of more than 1,000 on the previous year, representing a 7.7% rise. Teacher numbers also increased for the fourth year in a row. Scotland has more teachers than at any time since 2009, and the pupil-teacher ratio is at its lowest since 2013. In Scotland, there is a review of the implementation of additional support for learning, including where children learn, and its findings must be used to inform the work being taken forward to enhance the implementation of additional support for learning. The review will report in spring 2020, and it will inform and, I hope, dictate what more can be done to support children with additional needs.

While more needs to be done—I do not think anyone would deny that, and we have heard much today about the challenges—there is also, as I am sure Members would agree, some excellent practice going on in our schools. It is important to remember that, and I echo the tributes that have been paid to teachers on the frontline working hard to deliver the best support they can to children with special and additional needs. That is often in extremely challenging and difficult circumstances, as the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) and others have pointed out. In my constituency, I have seen some inspiring and inspired examples of the kind of support that can be given, such as nurture bases, including the one in Auchenhavrie Academy in Stevenston in my constituency. The nurture base does what it says on the tin. It supports pupils who have special or additional needs. It helps them access and navigate the curriculum in their own particular way, it increases their confidence in doing so, and it helps them socialise into the school environment itself.

Such success stories as those we have heard about today do not happen overnight. The key is the staff working day in, day out to support pupils in the way they need to be supported. Achievement for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream secondary education and in specialist settings continues to rise in Scotland. The percentage of children with an additional support need having a positive follow-up destination has increased by 5.9% to 87.9%. The percentage of children with additional support needs leaving school with one or more qualifications has increased by 5.4% to 91%. Alongside that, exclusions in Scotland are at their lowest level since 2002-03. We have more young people in school and learning constructively, but more still needs to be done.

We have to ensure that every single young person has the positive educational experience they need and deserve, and the Scottish Government continue to work with local authorities to improve the consistency of support across Scotland through, for example, improved guidance, building further capacity to deliver effective support and improving career pathways and professional development and training for school staff on inclusive practices.

One of the issues identified following research is that almost all parents of children with special or additional support needs and almost all of the pupils felt that their needs were being met at school. Many parents felt it had simply taken too long to get their child into the right

[Patricia Gibson]

environment, and we have heard much about that today from a number of Members. This is clearly an area that needs to improve right across the United Kingdom. With a £15 million investment to further enhance capacity in education authorities and schools to support more effective responses to the individual needs of children and young people, I hope this area will become less of an issue in Scotland and before too long across the United Kingdom.

We can all agree that what we have heard today shows that not every child is being supported in the way they need to be supported to reach their potential. There are challenges across Scotland and the UK, and I have tried to set out some of the measures that the Scottish Government are taking to try to address the challenges. I hope the Minister will set out how she feels the challenges can be addressed, given some of the concerns expressed by Members across the United Kingdom.

3.39 pm

Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. As many others have done, I congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) on securing this important debate. She has big shoes to fill, following her illustrious predecessor, but has certainly made an impressive start this afternoon.

Children with special educational needs and disabilities are some of the most vulnerable children in our country. They need help and support when they are young to help them to cope with the rest of their lives, which can be very challenging. I join the many Members who have congratulated the incredible professionals who dedicate their time and their lives to supporting those children.

There can surely be no MP who has not encountered heart-rending cases of children who have been refused the support that they so urgently need. In my constituency of Croydon North, I have been dealing with the case of a young boy with dyslexia whose family have to spend four hours a day travelling to take him to an appropriate school. Another child, aged just seven, had to be educated at home for more than a year because none of the three special schools that were close enough for him to attend had a place to offer him.

The cause of those problems, and many like them, is the severe underfunding of such services by the Government. The Conservative-led Local Government Association says that, even after the additional funding that I suspect the Minister will shortly trumpet, high needs services face a shortfall of £109 million over the coming year. They cannot plan for what comes after that because the Government have still not announced the funding. Councils, which are responsible for those services say that high needs funding is one of the most serious financial headaches that they face. The money simply is not there to provide an adequate service for every child who needs it.

Things have got so bad that the LGA says that councils will no longer be able to meet their statutory duties to support children with special educational needs and disabilities. That is simply shocking and unacceptable. It means that children in desperate need—children with severe disabilities—will be turned away because the Government refuse to pay for the care that they so urgently need, and that every single one of them deserves.

Ofsted, which inspects such services on behalf of the Government, tells us a very similar story. According to Ofsted, last January almost 3,500 children who needed special support were still not receiving any. Of those, 2,700 were not in school or receiving an education of any kind because of the lack of support. That is not only short-sighted but cruel. It is cruel to the children whose futures are being curtailed, and cruel to their parents, who are left struggling, angry and frustrated that their child is being denied that most basic of human rights: the right to an education.

Layla Moran: The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful speech. Does he share my concern that very often these children end up in the prison service, and is he aware of the statistic that children in custody are, on average, twice as likely to have SEND problems as those in the general population? If we intervene early and ensure that they do not go to prison, that will save the state money.

Steve Reed: The hon. Lady makes an important point. Many of the outcomes for these children in later life are negative when they could have been positive.

The failure to fund high needs services adequately means that lower-level support suffers as a result. The Children's Commissioner says that speech and language services and mental health services have all suffered. Leaving children with such disabilities unable to cope means that their chance to function well as adults is taken away from them. It is fair neither on the children, who deserve much better, nor on society as a whole, which will be left to pick up the much higher costs of supporting them as adults.

We cannot just abandon these children, so I would be grateful if the Minister responded to a few specific points. Councils need the powers and funding to open new special schools where they are needed. Will she confirm that that will be part of the Government's review? By the end of August last year, half of the 100 areas that had been inspected by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission were found to have significant weaknesses in their SEND services. They were all required to submit written proposals for improving their services. That is a shockingly high level of failure. Why has it not triggered a co-ordinated action plan across Government to bring those services up to the level required?

The inspections identified a long catalogue of failings. Here are just some of them, according to the reports: joint commissioning and service planning is weak; education, health and care plan assessment is not working well enough; too many care plans are not finalised within the 20-week timescale; designated medical officers are under-resourced; oversight of care plans is inadequate; transitions into adult health services are inadequate; families do not know where to get the help and support that their children need; more than half of parents or carers have had to give up work to care for their disabled child; more than half of parents and carers have been treated for depression, including suicidal thoughts; and too many parents and carers say that their views and experiences are neither heard nor valued.

That all comes from Ofsted and the CQC, the Government's official inspectors for such services. Is the Minister really content to preside over services failing to that extent, because she should not be? I hope that she

will not just dismiss that evidence, as previous Ministers have, or resort to platitudes about inadequate funding increases. Special needs services are in crisis. Too many vulnerable children with disabilities are living in crisis, and they deserve an urgent response from the Government to put things right.

3.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Michelle Donelan): I congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) on securing today's really important debate. I know that she has been working particularly hard to highlight the concerns of some of her constituents regarding SEND provision and funding. I put on the record the fact that I share her concerns, and stress that the Government are taking action and will continue to do so. Our ambition is for every child, no matter what challenges they face, to have access to a world-class education that sets them up for life, enabling them to reach their full potential. We need to ensure that that is happening across the entire UK.

Funding has been raised by several Members, and is extremely important. It is part of our commitment to level up across the country, but I also stress that the issue is about so much more than just funding, as my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn) mentioned. We should accept that there are large amounts of money in the SEN system, but it is important that that money is spent efficiently and effectively to really raise outcomes for these children, and to ensure that the system is child focused. We also recognise the value of the role that mainstream education plays in providing a wonderful education for children with specific challenges, as my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) referenced.

We are undertaking a cross-Government review of our SEND provision, and we must ensure that every penny that we spend helps to achieve better outcomes, so that parents and teachers have confidence in the system to deliver for these children. The review will look at how the SEND system has evolved since major reforms were introduced in 2014, and will consider how the system can be made to work better for all families, ensuring that the quality of provision and the support available to children and young people is sustainable in future.

The review will also look at the supply and delivery of support at the moment. The hon. Members for Croydon North (Steve Reed) and for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) touched on supply, which is a particular concern of mine, and of the Government. We want to ensure that support in different local areas is consistent and joined up across health, care and education services, and that high-quality health and education support is available across the country. We must ensure that all funds are spent efficiently and effectively, so that children's needs are adequately catered for. My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan) mentioned that the EHCP process is too burdensome and long, and that people can struggle throughout it. That will also form part of the review.

[SIOBHAIN McDONAGH *in the Chair*]

The SEND review will look at how the future system for supporting children and young people should operate, and later this year we are planning to begin a review of the formula that calculates funding allocations for individual

local authorities. The hon. Member for Twickenham called for a strategy, but it is really important that we hear what the review has to say before we make our long-term plans, because they must be evidence-based, and focused on delivering for these children and young people. I recognise this is not a sufficient answer for those areas that are struggling now to provide the support that parents expect and their children need.

We are, however, consulting on changes that would reduce the adverse impacts of carrying forward cumulative deficits, which the hon. Member for Twickenham mentioned, and will be responding to that consultation very shortly. We recognise the urgency of doing so, and have been developing a response in conjunction with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and with the Treasury. I can assure the hon. Lady that we will publish that response shortly, and I am more than happy to meet her in the forthcoming days.

Jim Shannon: One delicate and important issue is that of children with complex health needs, who do not have just one single health need but maybe three or four, which then impact on their education. Is the Minister prepared to set some funding and resources aside to deal with those children with complex health needs related to education, as well?

Michelle Donelan: The review is encompassing the EHCPs, and is going to look at exactly those challenges in the system, including the point that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), who said that we should look at the threshold. That is something that we will look at, and it will address whether we are giving enough support to those children who have complex and compounded problems. We will also examine the £6,000 contribution that mainstream schools have to put in; that issue was raised by a number of Members, and I know from my own constituency that it can be a challenge for school provision.

The SEND review is looking at how future systems for supporting children and young people should operate, but it is important to recognise that it is not a sufficient answer for those areas that are struggling now, as I have pointed out. I am more than happy to meet any hon. Member who has a challenge locally and go through this with them.

Stephanie Peacock: I represent Barnsley, which is projected to have a high needs spending deficit of nearly £6 million in the 2020-21 financial year, taking into account the extra money that the Government have given. Does the Minister accept that there is simply not enough money in the system? It is all very well to talk about all the other issues, which are important, but the money is absolutely critical.

Michelle Donelan: We are looking at the deficit issue, as I have just said, and I am more than happy to meet the hon. Lady about her particular local issue.

It is important to spell out the action that we have already taken on funding. We have given the largest cash boost in a decade to increase school funding by £2.6 billion in 2020-21, followed by increases of £4.8 billion and £7.1 billion in 2021-22 and 2022-23 respectively. Next year's increase includes £780 million of additional funding for those with the most complex SEND, representing an

[Michelle Donelan]

increase of 12% compared with this year. Although the challenges are still stark and there are a number of problems in the system, it would be unfair to say that this Government have not invested in this area, or in education. In fact, every local authority will receive an increase in high needs funding of at least 8% per head, which is a remarkable figure. This is not just a question of funding; as I said before, it is also about where that money is going, and ensuring the money is best placed to make sure that these children have the very best outcomes that they possibly can.

Elliot Colburn: I will not keep the Minister for very long. I just want to make sure that as we conduct this review and the additional funding is going in, we are not going to let local authorities off the hook of fulfilling their statutory obligations. As the example I gave from the London Borough of Sutton shows, there are occasions on which the council just is not putting in the leadership that is required. I hope that the Minister can give me that assurance.

Michelle Donelan: Every local authority does indeed have statutory obligations, and as it says on the tin, it should be meeting them. As was raised by a number of Members, these children are some of the most vulnerable in our society, and their needs should be paramount and at the top of our agenda when we are setting policy and ensuring that it is delivered on the ground.

It is not the case that this is a problem up and down the country, or that the system is failing everywhere, because it certainly is not. There are a multitude of examples of excellent service for children with SEND, some of which were mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester in relation to her local college; I would be delighted to visit that college in order to see the work that it is doing. As a number of Members have done, I praise the excellent staff up and down the country and the professionals who work tirelessly in this field. By focusing on the negatives, we can sometimes detract from the tremendous work that those people do.

Layla Moran: I absolutely share that sentiment. Before we move away from what the Minister was saying about the new consultation that she will be carrying out on this issue, I wonder whether she might answer my question about where the consultation is on children not in school. Clearly, we should be seeing the results of that before we launch a new consultation that might be linked to it.

Michelle Donelan: Indeed, but one review—the SEND review—will be published in the first quarter of this year, so we will then be able to make a strategy and move forward with an evidence base. The other consultation that the hon. Lady is on about is not the same as this consultation, which is completely targeted at SEND and the children who we are talking about today, and will inform our policy as we move forward.

The hon. Member for Croydon North mentioned the importance of working across Government, an issue that has been raised by a number of other colleagues. I want to reassure everybody that this area does not just fit within the Department for Education. I have regular meetings with my counterparts, and in addition, the cross-Government review takes that very fact into account.

Patricia Gibson: The Minister has talked about the importance of valuing staff, and all the positive and excellent professional work they do in supporting children. I think everybody in the Chamber would agree with that, but could I draw her attention to the fact that one aspect of how we value public sector workers is how they are paid? In Scotland, a teacher's starting salary is £32,034, but in England, a teacher has a starting salary of £24,373. I wonder whether the Minister thinks that valuing staff might be reflected by giving a better pay rise to teachers in England.

Michelle Donelan: The hon. Lady will note that that was a key part of the Conservative party manifesto, which allowed us to gain our majority Government.

In conclusion, I am enormously grateful for the contributions that have been made today, and am more than happy to answer separately any questions about particular local issues. Regarding the hon. Member for Croydon North's comment about the supply, I want to reassure him that we are taking that very seriously as part of the review. I am also grateful for the support that the hon. Member for Twickenham has given to the important topic that is on today's agenda, raising its profile and showing the level of interest in it across the whole country. The review of SEND is crucial for making sure that we deliver the outcomes that these children deserve, and demonstrates how seriously this issue is being taken across the Government, not just in the Department for Education. I want to reassure all hon. Members that, despite the claims made today, no children shall be abandoned on this Government's watch.

Siobhain McDonagh (in the Chair): I call Munira Wilson to sum up.

3.58 pm

Munira Wilson: Thank you, Ms McDonagh; it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, now that Mr Pritchard has left.

I thank all hon. Members who have contributed so well today. We have heard a lot of common themes from all sides, including delays in children getting the EHCPs they need; the horrendous deficit that councils are carrying, and the financial strain they are under; the strain that families are put under; and the schools that are penalised for doing the right thing. Some powerful contributions were made about exclusions and off-rolling; I was not able to cover those very valid points at the start of the debate, but they should be taken into account. The consultation that my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) referred to, which still has not been addressed, needs to be included in the Government review of SEND that the Minister discussed.

I thank the Minister, first of all for agreeing to meet my council colleagues and me, and secondly for the fact that the Government are looking at what can be done to ring-fence the deficits, so that other council services are not put at risk. I reiterate, however, that the funding that was announced was a one-year one-off, and therefore is not going to help bring down those enormous deficits—which, again, will be a cumulative £15.85 million by the end of this financial year. For a council such as Richmond, that is unsustainable, so I ask again for that provision to be examined. We have had so many reviews, including

by the NAO, the Select Committee, the LGA and the London Assembly, and now there is this cross-Government review. We absolutely need action to follow those reviews—action for children, their families and local authorities—if we are going to meet these needs properly and appropriately.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered special educational needs and disability funding.

4 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.19 pm

On resuming—

Bovine TB: Compensation

Siobhain McDonagh (in the Chair): This debate will last half an hour from the time you start, Mr Thomas.

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered compensation for bovine TB.

I know that the Government recognise the contribution that small abattoirs make to the food and farming sector; the previous Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs went as far as to suggest that direct Government intervention should be considered to help them survive. I am in full support of that. The closure of a small, local abattoir has a major impact on the farmers and smallholdings that use it, not to mention on the local food market, as the meat from such an abattoir travels a much smaller distance to market. There is also the loss of the skilled workmen and women who work in the abattoir.

I rise today to raise a particular anomaly in the compensation scheme for bovine tuberculosis. Correcting it will not itself save small abattoirs, but it will help. The case relates to Vivian Olds, a traditional family butchers of 120 years in St Just in my constituency, which is basically as far west as one can get in England. It has a small abattoir at the rear of the premises. Ms McDonagh, if you chose to shop at Vivian Olds—you would be very welcome; I would love to take you down there—you could be sure that the meat you purchased was locally produced, that the welfare standards were as good, if not better, than any other abattoir, and that you were getting some of the best meat that money can buy.

The case I want to raise is as follows. During the ordinary process of slaughtering a steer—a bullock—the Government vet, who is legally required to be present at the time of slaughter, identified lesions in more than one location on the carcase. Lesions are a strong indicator of bovine TB, and if they are visible at more than one site, the carcase cannot be used for human consumption—rightly so—and must be destroyed. Roughly 6% of carcasses of animals removed for TB control purposes are condemned.

As you and I would expect, Ms McDonagh, the farmer did not get paid for the steer. The bovine TB scheme does not pay for an animal suspected of carrying bovine TB after it has been slaughtered, and it is not reasonable to expect the slaughterhouse to pay for the loss of the asset. On this occasion, the farmer did not agree, and neither did the judge at the small claims court, who found against the abattoir and required Mr Olds to pay in the region of £1,500, including the value of the meat and the cost of disposing of the carcase. The judge cited the fact that Mr Olds had received the goods and must pay.

The truth is that the butcher was really nothing more than a bystander in this case, which is why I believe the compensation scheme for bovine TB must change. The moment that the lesions giving rise to the likelihood of bovine TB were identified, the vet took the only decision available to him. Where there are indications of generalised TB or TB lesions with emaciation, the entire carcase and all the blood and offal is rejected as unfit for human consumption. The law rightly requires the carcase to be removed from the food chain. Mr Olds, the butcher, had

[Derek Thomas]

no say in the matter. The owner of a small abattoir is not in the business of paying for meat he cannot use; nor can he or she afford to.

I ought to clarify that this case did not arise over the weekend in my regular MP's surgery; it was raised with me more than a year ago. To get some form of justice, several letters have been written. The Food Standards Agency has been involved, as have Ministers from the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. So far, a change in the compensation scheme eludes us, so I bring this matter to the Minister and the House today. I am simply asking him to change the rules relating to bovine TB to include animals removed from the food chain if evidence exists to suggest that bovine TB is present.

The Cattle Compensation (England) Order 2019 sets out the compensation rules for animals slaughtered for a number of diseases, including tuberculosis. It only provides for compensation to be paid where the Secretary of State causes an animal to be slaughtered. In practice, that relates to live animals that react to a TB test and are slaughtered in order to stop the spread of bovine TB. However, the fact remains that for Mr Olds—my local butcher—the Secretary of State caused the animal to be slaughtered. It was the legislation that required the animal to be lost from the food chain—as I say, rightly so. I ask the Minister to insert some equality into the bovine TB compensation scheme.

Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): I represent many thousands of beef farmers in Wales who are very frustrated by the Welsh Government, who have not shown anywhere near the kind of ambition or bravery that the UK Government have shown. I was heavily involved in the original pilot badger cull back in 2013, so I know the scourge of bovine TB incredibly well. Does my hon. Friend agree that pedigree animals, which are often part of a long-thought-out genetic plan—a bloodline strategy—organised over many generations using our farmers' expertise, often merit a higher form of compensation?

Derek Thomas: I agree, and I welcome that intervention. I believe that the Government pay the value of the meat as if it was to go into the food chain. My hon. Friend is right, and I know farmers in my constituency and elsewhere in Cornwall who have lost prize herds through bovine TB. It is a really tricky issue.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): My hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones) is right. In my constituency, the assessment for compensation can be wholly inadequate. For example, the economic losses to dairy farms, in the case of lost milk yield, can be further impacted by financial penalties imposed by dairies through breaches of contract when farmers are not able to meet forecasted milk yields because herds have had to be put down.

Derek Thomas: I welcome that intervention. Both interventions are important. The previous Secretary of State requested a review of the compensation scheme and the eradication strategy. As far as I understand the

situation, it has reported back, and we are waiting to hear from the current Secretary of State about what the implications might be.

The National Farmers Union and other representative groups have argued for clarity, for the process to be accelerated, for better communication and for fairness. I am just arguing for fairness. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones) said, there is a commitment to deliver wildlife and a farming community free of bovine TB. That is absolutely the prize to reach. Today, we are discussing the compensation scheme, which is relevant to all my farmers, including those with dairy herds.

This is where it gets a bit tricky. I recognise that the change to a bovine TB compensation scheme requires legislative change. I understand why the Government might have other things on their plate than revisiting that piece of legislation. I also know that in 2018 the Secretary of State ordered a review of the strategy for eradicating bovine TB in England. I understand that the compensation scheme is included in the review report, and I would like the Minister to indicate when the Secretary of State expects to issue her response to the review.

On the wider issue of the compensation scheme for bovine TB, which my hon. Friends raised in their welcome interventions, it would be remiss of me not to take the opportunity to ask the Minister whether, as part of his deliberations, he will consider what they said and look at improving the communication between Government bodies and the farming business. There is definitely a breakdown between DEFRA and the farming community, whether it is about surveillance testing, a TB breakdown or the details regarding when compensation will or will not be paid. Providing timely guidance gives clarity to farming businesses and instils confidence at a local level, within a complete bovine TB eradication strategy, helping to build a stronger partnership approach between the farmer and the Government or Government agency.

I know the Minister well: he knows how important it is that we continue to work closely with the farming community and landowners to ensure we can continue to drive down the incidence of bovine TB. One way would be to issue more details about the methodology involved in calculating the compensation values. We have heard about the loss of a prize herd. The compensation values would be beneficial in how they were calculated and would allow transparency in the current processes.

I mention again in closing my friendly butcher in St Just. It is my profound belief that compensation should also be paid to farmers when a TB reactor is identified by a vet at the abattoir. The whole process of a steer going to an abattoir to be slaughtered and then the entire carcass being lost because of Government legislation, which we support and agree with, must challenge the Government and the Minister to consider what compensation there should be, so that the difficulty that my local abattoir faced is avoided.

I hope that DEFRA does not oppose a change to the legislation. Unless a change in the compensation scheme is secured, it remains possible that Mr Olds and abattoirs large and small—especially, as we have heard, in badly affected bovine TB areas—could be affected by similar cases in the future. I know the Minister has been listening and is keen to get this right; it is a difficult and challenging issue that requires a change in legislation.

I really hope that, after more than a year of battling to resolve this particular abattoir's issue, which is not isolated—6% of carcasses are removed after slaughter because of an indication of bovine TB—there is an opportunity now to look at the matter again and simply change the compensation scheme so that farmers are compensated, at the request of the Secretary of State, when they lose animals. That is perfectly fair and reasonable, and I am delighted that the Minister is here to give us his response.

4.31 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): It is a real pleasure to respond to my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas), who represents a neighbouring constituency. I am very familiar with many of the farmers in his constituency, and I am aware of the abattoir he mentioned.

Bovine TB is the most pressing animal health problem in the UK. Although the recent statistics show an encouraging decline in TB incidence and prevalence rates in cattle herds in high-risk areas, there is no room for complacency. The west of England still has the highest levels of bovine TB in Europe. Over the last 12 months, over 32,000 cattle have been slaughtered for TB control reasons in England—that is an appalling waste. The disease is damaging our rural businesses and causing much distress to farmers and rural communities, and it impacts businesses operating in all parts of the food production chain, including, as my hon. Friend has highlighted, abattoirs.

The individual case of the abattoir that my hon. Friend mentioned is unusual in that the animal had not been condemned by DEFRA vets as a result of a test; it had been sent for slaughter and to be sold, but was deemed by the official veterinarian working for the Food Standards Agency to be unfit for human consumption and was condemned. The farmer then took the abattoir to the county court, which found in his favour. It is important to note that the judgments made by county courts in such situations do not set any legal precedent in the way that those made by the High Court do.

I will clarify the approach that we take to this issue. Under the provisions included in the Animal Health Act 1981, the Government pay compensation only when the compulsory slaughter of disease-affected animals is required. All cattle herds are regularly tested for TB, and most infected cattle are disclosed through that on-farm testing programme.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): As the Minister just mentioned, this is not just about compensation but about testing. Any cow—or any bovid, such as the bison in Nether Broughton in my constituency—that is diagnosed with bovine TB comes at a huge economic cost to the farmer, so we must get the test right. Does he agree that it is a good thing that farmers in my constituency are partnering with the University of Nottingham to develop a more accurate phage test, and that DEFRA should look into that further, because it directly affects the compensation scheme and, in particular, the viability of the farmers in my constituency?

George Eustice: My hon. Friend makes a very important point; none of the tests that we have are perfect. TB is a difficult, insidious and slow-moving disease that is sometimes difficult to detect. We are doing a big piece

of work to try to improve diagnostics, including by looking at options such as the phage test, and in recent years our use of the interferon gamma test—the more sensitive blood test—has been more widespread.

A relatively small additional number of animals fall into the category highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives. Around 550 animals per year are picked up through routine post-mortem inspections during commercial slaughter, either because they became infected between tests or because they were missed by less than perfect tests.

Since 2006 compensation for TB-affected animals is determined through table valuations, whereby the compensation paid for the animal mirrors the average price paid on the open market for similar types of cattle. There are around 51 different table value categories, which are based predominantly on the subdivision of non-pedigree beef cattle from pedigree beef cattle, and non-pedigree dairy from pedigree dairy. There is a whole range of subcategories based on the age of the animal.

My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) made the important point that farmers will sometimes say that the table valuation does not represent the value of the animal. That can be difficult, and we are constantly looking to refine the tables, because the value of a small pedigree Dexter cow might be very different from that of a pedigree Hereford or a pedigree South Devon, which are larger animals. We recognise those issues and are constantly trying to refine the tables. It is also important to recognise that we went to a table valuation system, because prior to 2006 there were individual valuations for each animal. Unfortunately, however, we found that land agents would often tend to value up animals, and the taxpayer was not getting good value for money as a result of individual valuations. That is why we introduced a table valuation system. It is different in Wales, which remains on an individual valuation system.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): We have had a large number of bovine TB outbreaks in Northern Ireland, especially in my constituency of Strangford. We want to make sure that the compensation scheme to which the Minister refers is uniform across the whole United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I want to be sure that, for any potential legislative changes to the compensation scheme that result from this debate, discussions will take place with the Northern Ireland Assembly and, in particular, with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, to ensure a uniform response across the whole United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

George Eustice: Disease control and dealing with epidemiological outbreaks, including TB, are devolved matters, so each part of the UK has a different approach. In Scotland there is not currently a TB problem as it does not affect the badger population. Wales has a severe problem but is not using culling at this stage. In England we are starting to make significant progress through culling. Northern Ireland is trialling different approaches, such as “test, vaccinate or remove”, although that is rather expensive. It is a fully devolved matter that is decided by the relevant Administration—we are delighted that there is a new Administration in Northern Ireland.

To support and inform the table valuations, we collect data for around 1,250,000 animals every year from the sales of store cattle, calf sales, breeding and dispersal

[George Eustice]

sales. That ensures that the table values are based on real sales data and are as accurate as possible. I take on board the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton and others about the table valuations, but I hope that she understands why we switched to that system over individual valuations.

To return to the specifics of this case, decisions on whether meat is fit for human consumption are made by the official veterinarians who work for the Food Standards Agency in the slaughterhouse. Their decisions are based on findings from the post-mortem inspections that they carry out, as enshrined in the food hygiene regulations. Those involve a set of criteria and an approach very different from what a DEFRA or Animal and Plant Health Agency vet would use on-farm.

When post-mortem inspection reveals lesions indicative of TB in more than one organ, or in more than one anatomical region, the whole carcass is declared unfit for human consumption. As my hon. Friend pointed out, that occurs in a relatively small number of cases, but I appreciate the significance to the farmer affected. About 6% of such cases are picked up in that way. However, when a TB lesion has been found in only one organ or just one part of the carcass, only the affected organ or part of the carcass is rejected. In the vast majority of cases, therefore, when an animal goes to the slaughterhouse and is not condemned entirely, there is generally a significant salvage value.

DEFRA only pays statutory compensation when it has deprived someone of their property to help eradicate a disease. The reason involves DEFRA requiring that an animal be killed as a disease-fighting requirement. DEFRA uses legal powers under the Animal Health Act 2002 to dictate that an animal must be seized, and it has enforcement powers to seize and remove an animal if, as sometimes happens, a farmer resists. In such instances, it is deemed appropriate that the farmer should be compensated.

When a farmer has an animal that has been picked up not by a test—therefore not compulsorily slaughtered by DEFRA—but only on arrival at the slaughterhouse, that situation is much more in the realm of commercial risk. An animal can be condemned for many different reasons for which a farmer would not be compensated, and it is regarded as an issue of commercial risk.

The situation can be addressed in two ways. First, in the specific case of the abattoir concerned, perhaps abattoirs need to be clear in their contracts with farmers and stipulate who is liable in the event that a carcass is condemned. If an abattoir wanted to make it clear that it would not pay for a condemned carcass, stating that in a contract could mean that the county court might find in a different way.

Secondly, we have done some work with NFU Mutual. The National Farmers Union and NFU Mutual are working on an insurance policy product to deal with such situations—either an abattoir can take out insurance to cover the cost of an animal where that happens, or the farmer could arrange to take out some insurance to cover such issues.

To go back to the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton, many farmers who have highly prized show-winning cattle—not just pedigree beef or dairy cattle, but ones that have a huge value—privately insure them, to top up the difference between the table value and the actual value. The commercial insurance market will help farmers to cover those costs and to protect them against loss of their prize-winning bloodstock.

I accept the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives about the need to share more effectively the details of how the TB compensation system works. We are looking to address that by publishing a briefing note on TB compensation, which will go on to the TB information hub operated by the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board. More generally, there is always room to improve communications, so we will continue to work with the farming unions and others to meet the needs of those who deal with such difficult situations. We invested £25,000 in that TB hub website to improve information available to farmers and give them other practical advice on aspects of their TB programme.

I hope that I have been able to address some of the issues raised by my hon. Friend. He will be disappointed that I have not announced at the Dispatch Box that cases such as his will in future be compensated, but I hope he understands that to do so would be a leap from what we have always done as a nation, in particular since the Animal Health Act 1981, in which the clear concept was of a duty on Government to compensate when we required animals to be destroyed for disease-fighting reasons. Unfortunate cases in which we have not required compulsory slaughter are very much in the realm of commercial risk. It is for abattoirs and farmers through their contracts, or for both through insurance products, to cover their risk.

Finally, I make an offer to my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives, given that he is a close neighbour all the way down in west Cornwall. I am more than willing to meet the particular abattoir owner concerned and to discuss the matter with him. My hon. Friend mentioned the Godfrey review, and we will be responding to that imminently. It will include some proposals to do with TB compensation but, alas, not the one that he is seeking for me to confirm today. However, we have had a good debate and covered many different areas. Again, I thank my hon. Friend for bringing the issue to my attention.

Question put and agreed to.

Defence: Rotary Strategy

4.46 pm

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered UK defence rotary strategy.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McDonagh, and to return to a favourite topic of mine. Many hon. Members present have joined me on this topic before, which is future flying capability for the UK armed forces. At the outset, in the usual way, I refer the House to my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

In November 2018, in a debate on the RAF's centenary, I pressed the Secretary of State for Defence to start thinking about helicopters. I warmly welcome the new Minister to his place, because I know that his experience and enthusiasm for the topic will be a great asset to the Department. If I may, I suggest that this might be one of the first things in his in-tray.

I will give some brief background, although I am conscious that a number of other Members wish to speak. The UK helicopter fleet is unusually diverse. The days when our three flying services, the Royal Air Force, the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm and the Army Air Corps, could boast a glittering kaleidoscope of different aircraft types—large, small, generalised, specialised—are long gone and, realistically, will not return. However, although capability in other spheres—fast jet most obviously—has seen a contraction of platform types and a concentration on one or two multi-mission types, the rotary fleet and indeed the transport fleet more generally have tended to buck that trend. There are good capability reasons for that, which we will probably touch on, mainly concerning capability and lift.

I will briefly lay out the position as it is today, because it and the background bear thinking about. There are 322 rotary-wing aircraft in the UK armed forces, across the three services. The Army Air Corps operates the Apache attack helicopter, a battlefield close air support aircraft, which will probably fall largely into a different category from those that we will debate today. It is a highly specialised strike platform that does not have the capability for any significant lift, and certainly not for carrying troops.

The Army operates one variant of the Wildcat, primarily for reconnaissance and command, with a limited air transport capability. The Royal Navy operates a naval variant of the Wildcat, as well as two variants of the Merlin: the Commando Merlin—the ex-Royal Air Force Merlin—and the naval variant, as well as some ex-Danish examples used for training only.

The Royal Air Force operates the Chinook—the heavy-lift delivery truck of the skies—and the Puma. There are a number of other types used for training or transport to a lesser or greater degree: the Gazelle, the Bell 212, the Leonardo AW109 and the Juno and Jupiter training aircraft used by the defence helicopter flying school at RAF Shawbury. That makes a relatively large number of platform types, which will present an increasing headache as they all move towards their retirement date, subject to upgrades, and need to be replaced.

I applaud the recent approach by the Ministry of Defence to many aspects of procurement policy. I have spoken about that in the House, particularly back in

2017 when calling for the combat air strategy, in conjunction with colleagues on both sides of the House. I have spoken of the dreadful historical spectacle of outstanding British defence products that have either been cancelled or have not reached their full potential, because of an historical lack of political will or long-term procurement thinking.

In 2017, we welcomed the national shipbuilding strategy, which set out an aspiration for an holistic plan to build the Royal Navy's Type 31e frigates and support ships, and the industry backing to make them happen. Later that year, we led a call for a combat air strategy to begin considering the aircraft that will, in due course, replace the Typhoon. Because of the development period, for all those systems it is necessary to start developing replacements sometimes decades in advance. I asked the then Secretary of State in November 2018 to start thinking about helicopters, and I return to that theme today, because a similar approach would bear fruit when we start to consider the UK's future rotary capability and where it will come from.

Let me take a quick canter across the types. The Chinook, as I mentioned, is essentially a giant delivery truck, with a lift capability of 10 to 11 tonnes. That is expected to continue in service until approximately the 2040s under the Chinook heavy-lift sustainment programme. Similarly, the Apache, as upgraded and replaced with the final delivery of the second type bought but expected only in 2024, is intended to go out of service in 2040. Those two types are probably the least urgent platform types to be considered.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. He always makes knowledgeable and interesting remarks. He alluded to the Chinook being the delivery truck of our armed forces. I draw his attention to the role it played in operational theatres, picking up casualties and operating a pretty much mobile operating theatre to make sure we got casualties back to Camp Bastion as quickly as possible, to give them the best possible chance of surviving what were quite often terrible injuries. Will he join me in congratulating Boeing and the RAF on operating that aircraft for 40 years? As he says, that will have a continuing service until probably the 2060s.

Robert Courts: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; the Chinook is an extraordinarily capable aircraft. I referred to it as a delivery truck of the skies simply in reference to its extraordinary lift capability, but he is quite right that that lift capability means that it is able to take a great deal of medical facilities. Many people owe their lives to that aircraft; I pay tribute to everybody who has flown it and kept it flying over the course of many years. He is quite right to draw attention to the aircraft's capability.

The Apache and the Chinook may need upgrades to avionics, cockpits and perhaps engines as time progresses, probably because of their expected longevity, as my hon. Friend said. It would be good to consider, as part of the strategy that I am calling for, whether any of those roles could be absorbed by other fleets as we look at upgrading or replacing capability. I suggest that the case is more pressing with medium-lift types. The difficulty with Chinook is its sheer size. While it is able to operate happily from aircraft carrier decks, it is far more challenged in urban environments, as is the Merlin—although in theory a medium-lift and smaller airframe, it actually covers much the same footprint size.

[Robert Courts]

The Puma is critically important. That fleet of approximately 23 is based at RAF Benson in Henley, which borders my own constituency. I understand that it is due to go out of service in about 2025, although some service updates may keep it in service longer. In any event, we are looking at an out-of-service date for that aircraft of 2025-30—about five to 10 years away. That will have an impact on all the other types of helicopters in service.

In theory, the Merlin, which is operated by the Royal Navy, supplements that capability as another medium-lift type, but is primarily designed to operate at sea level as a naval helicopter. That means it is not ideal for some of the environments we have asked it to operate in, such as the hot and high environment of Afghanistan. Its lift capability is closer to four tonnes, meaning that while very capable, it approaches the size and weight of the Chinook but without anything like as much lift capability. Crucially, as the Minister will probably refer to in due course, some of those air frames are earmarked—approximately 10, I think—for use in the Crowsnest role, which will limit their capability for other purposes.

The impending retirement of Puma in five to 10 years' time leaves a potential shortfall among that medium-lift capability. That is particularly the case because any incoming platform does not come up to full operating capability immediately, but has to be operated alongside the type it is replacing for a period of time. The obvious example of that in the fast-jet world is the way that Tornado and Typhoon operated alongside each other until Typhoon was able to take over all or most of the capabilities of Tornado, under the Centurion programme. The teething problems that have to be worked out—as we saw with the Hercules and the A400M—may mean a period of running in parallel, which would bring the decision point closer, bringing forward the date on which replacement would need to be considered.

The type of aircraft system or systems that we might need is very much dependent on what we envisage the need to be. Let me make a general foreign policy point, which I think many hon. Members will agree with: foreign policy goals ought to be decided first, with the military capability developed to match those goals, and then appropriate funding. It has often been the case in the past that defence capability is trimmed piecemeal in order to fit the available budget, leaving our forces ever more stretched as they try to fulfil a full-spectrum capability, from peacekeeping to expeditionary warfare, but with fewer platforms to do the work. The Minister will tell me that there is a review ongoing, and critical it is, too.

Equally serious, although perhaps a matter for another debate, is the fact that budgetary pressure on procurement of kit means that the men and women operating it do so under deteriorating service conditions, as more of the defence budget is required to deal with platform renewal. That leads to an increasing concern, as we have all spoken about many times, with retention of those men and women who fight and run our armed services.

Let me take the two aircraft carriers as an example of a microcosm of how this works. I refer to the relatively recent debate on a carrier strategy. The nation has to decide how and in what circumstances it is to use this new capability. The obvious deployment is for power

projection: carrier strike, using the F35s that we are buying. If that is the case, those carriers are likely to be kept as far offshore as possible, to keep them safe from land-based threats. If so, would there be a need for organic carrier-based air-to-air refuelling capability, to maximise range or to sustain combat air patrols? What about the resupply of weapons or engine changes? Our American allies have a different approach; they have the speed and lift of something like the V-22 Osprey to resupply their smaller carriers, but I fully anticipate that the complexity and cost of a machine such as that may not be realistic for us to consider. On board our carriers, the absence of cats and traps means that a fixed-wing-capability delivery truck such as the Grumman Greyhound equally is not possible for us to have. There is the lift capability of the Chinook, as I said, but that severely limits range. That would also be available for any littoral role, which of course presents another set of challenges, particularly with regard to land-based threats. In any event, it is clear that those carriers and carrier battle groups will require a huge amount of protection. I referred to the Merlin force and Crowsnest, although of course other platforms will be required for anti-submarine capacity, which is now highly defensive rather than primarily offensive, as submarine capability was in the past.

One new factor that will have to go into the strategy is how much of the current rotary output could be conducted by unmanned aircraft. That is why I call for a strategy rather than just talking about helicopters per se. The advent of unmanned aircraft and artificial intelligence brings a whole new dimension to this picture.

Looking first at the naval picture, the role of naval surveillance aircraft is to loiter and search—to spend time looking for submarines or hostile small craft. Some of that could be done by unmanned aerial vehicles based on warships, either alongside or to a certain extent replacing—supplementing—piloted helicopters. That would have benefits in terms of cost and survivability, and it would free up manned assets for use where they are truly needed, such as for troop transport. In short, UAVs could be used for dull, dirty, dangerous tasks such as stand-off surveillance, search and reconnaissance, and long-term anti-submarine operations, but they would be a real game changer in terms of their size on a warship, payload, and persistence.

Having considered the maritime domain, it is easy to see that many of the same benefits could apply across the land domain as we look at some of the smaller helicopters used by the Army Air Corps. This technology is only emerging, and it is vital that we put a strategy in place to ensure that we are leading in the digital world—the artificial intelligence world—particularly so we do not end up having to rely on technology developed by others, who may not have our best interests at heart.

Let me say a few words before I conclude about sovereign capability and other nations. There has been a trend across defence recently towards foreign military sales and purchases, for various reasons. I do not want to critique the rights and wrongs of any of those decisions, but whereas an off-the-shelf purchase can provide a proven, established, matured capability and speed of procurement, it means we lose British sovereign capability and experience all the impacts of that in terms of defence security, investment, tax revenues and, of course, jobs.

As with combat air, I suggest that anything we do in the future is likely to be in concert with other nations, with Britain likely to add value in the high-tech sphere rather than in airframes. As with combat air, it will take time to explore the options, but we need to consider what we would want to contribute to any such future programme and what the industrial base would be. In so doing, we will ensure that we do not either miss out on making the most of everything British industry could add to that or, by failing to think about the issue in advance, failing to plan and failing to have a strategy—frustratingly, this has so often been the case in the past—have to buy off the shelf because there is an urgent procurement requirement for an operational reason.

We ought to consider who our partners might be, whether we could expand bilateral relationships and what that might mean for foreign policy. For example, France's largest helicopter is the Super Puma, our medium-lift aircraft, so our Royal Air Force has been assisting the French in Mali and they are considering a heavy-lift acquisition of their own. One option might be to consider some sort of NATO helicopter force along the lines of the Heavy Airlift Wing, which provides three C-17s to 12 participating nations including the United States, either to provide a heavy-lift joint helicopter capability or to address the requirement for medium-lift capability that France is likely to have at about the same time as the United Kingdom.

There are other bilateral arrangements that could build on the Lancaster House principles, and all sorts of issues would need to be worked out. We would need to consider what would happen in a war-fighting rather than a peacekeeping situation, and what would happen if only one country were operating and wished to use part of the fleet. At this stage, I do nothing more than to ask for those things to be considered, because it takes time to work them through. I am conscious that I am asking not so much for a rotary strategy as for a defence/foreign policy/industrial rotary strategy. What I ask for is multi-pronged and multi-departmental—perhaps we could call it a global rotary strategy to fit with global Britain—and it will take time.

I thank hon. Members for listening. I am conscious that I raised more questions than solutions, but my aim really was just to provoke debate. I have no preference for any particular outcome, but I would like gently to press the Department to consider what the rotary fleet is likely to look like in around 10 years' time, what it is the country wants or needs—I accept that is a foreign policy consideration as much as anything—when it will need it by, what it will cost, and the technological and industrial requirements of that. Then we will have a rotary fleet fit for the future.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Siobhain McDonagh (in the Chair): Order. Can I just advise Members that if they make a reference to their interests, they need to be slightly more specific than just referring to the register? I apologise for the fact that I came in at the end to say that. I call Marcus Fysh.

5.5 pm

Mr Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McDonagh. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert

Courts) for securing the debate. He gave a thoughtful outline of some of the high-level strategic issues we need to consider. I welcome the Minister to his place. It is a great honour to have a Somerset colleague performing such an important role for the country at this time.

I absolutely agree that we need a helicopter strategy, or a rotary-wing strategy. I have been championing the issue with the Department for some time. My hon. Friend the Member for Witney made some of the arguments for that very eloquently. In my constituency, we have probably the biggest centre of helicopter manufacturing operations in the UK. It is the only end-to-end design and manufacturing aerospace capability left in the UK. It is really important for the community and, I think, the country that we preserve those design skills, for some of the reasons that my hon. Friend mentioned.

It is massively important that we have the capability to make the most of the advances that are coming with autonomous vehicles in the aerial space. Unless we preserve some of those skills and invest in them for the future, it is difficult to see how we will play a full part in the development of new technologies. As my hon. Friend also said, if we want to be global Britain, have more of an industrial footprint in the world and have more influence with our NATO allies and others, it is massively important that we have a contribution to make in the technology sphere. I welcome the Government's focus on more spending on R&D, skills and infrastructure, and their focus on investing in regional areas such as Somerset in order to level up and take advantage of some of the installed base we have.

I thank the Ministry of Defence for its support for the helicopter industry in the UK. It does a lot of work on export promotion and on helping to demonstrate the current capabilities that we build in Yeovil. My hon. Friend mentioned some of the platforms produced there, including the Merlin, which is a heavy-lift helicopter, and the Wildcat, which is a much smaller helicopter but is very well regarded around the world. I know how much the company appreciates the MOD's help in demonstrating what a great aircraft that is to some of its export opportunities around the world. The company currently estimates that there is potential for £11 billion of export sales. This is a real opportunity to utilise what we do well in Yeovil to advance the nation's export interests.

It is fair to say that the Wildcat is integrated in the Navy's defence systems. The Navy has been more inventive and creative in thinking about how that platform can be integrated in its systems, and there are opportunities for the Army to use the Wildcat creatively. If it can get a missile, it would be brilliant to have it working in tandem with the Apaches to increase frontline capability. It is worth looking at that properly.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the potential for thinking about what replaces the Puma. Leonardo has a civil helicopter platform in Italy, the AW189, which it would like to militarise, and it has suggested that it might use Yeovil for its global centre for military excellence should sufficient orders come through for the AW149—the AW189's militarised variant. It would be worth the MOD conducting a capability review to see whether that helicopter might form part of the solution.

I completely agree with my hon. Friend that we need to look at all these things in the round, and a formal helicopter strategy would be an ideal way of conducting that. The defence industrial policy was welcome, but we

[Mr Marcus Fysh]

must focus on rotary wing. We have heard about some of the possibilities with using autonomous vehicles on our aircraft carriers. We welcome the MOD's collaboration with Leonardo on unmanned aerial vehicles to investigate capabilities and potential solutions to needs in that area. That, however, is a long-term programme, and unless we invest now, we cannot expect the UK's industries to be leaders. I therefore welcome that collaboration.

We should look more at how we procure, because, as my hon. Friend said, when procurement is done reactively, there is a need to look only at headline price, which does not necessarily take into account the gross value added to an economy by long-term programme development. Leonardo, for example, has nearly 3,000 employees at its Yeovil site, but there are about 10,000 people in the supply chain, and for every £1 of headline direct value added, 2.4 times that is added through consequential impacts on the rest of the economy.

This is a really important industry. The capability it provides for our forces is important, and we really need that sovereign capability. We also need to get better at innovation. It is therefore worth looking at how we certify, because some of the certification processes take so long. In other industries in the modern world we see shortening product development cycles, so we need to ensure that certification burdens and bureaucracy do not interfere with the swift development of our military capabilities. The ability to commercialise products depends on that. Often, a defence industry skunkworks—that is the technical term for a little company trying to do something unusual—will not know whether a product may be regarded as a dual-use product until five or six years into the development cycle, by which time it may have had to spend up to £10 million getting a working prototype up and running. That is a huge risk to take before knowing what its marketability will be. There are ways in which we could change the procurement process to make the system more innovative and easy to commercialise.

On foreign military sales, we should think about whether the UK should have its own sales programme. We hear a lot about what the US does in that regard, and it is quite attractive, but the US should not be the only country able to deal Government to Government. It might be worth thinking about whether the UK should offer similar deals to friendly allies, whether France or others, and how such a scheme could work.

I absolutely agree that we must make the most of our opportunities. I support the call for a formal helicopter strategy to complement the combat air strategy, as it would help enormously our long-term decision-making processes and justifications. On that basis, I absolutely welcome the debate and thank my hon. Friend for bringing it about.

5.17 pm

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Witney (Robert Courts) on raising these issues, particularly how we plan—or do not properly plan—our defence strategy. It is interesting to see today many of the same faces we saw pre-election for a defence debate.

I have a particular interest in this issue, having been rescued by a Sea King helicopter on the Cobbler, on the hills of Argyll, when I was a teenager. I was hill walking with two friends, and unfortunately one of my friends dislocated her knee; the other one ran to alert mountain rescue. We were airlifted off the Cobbler by a Royal Navy Sea King helicopter. While my poor friend spent the journey in the back of the helicopter, I was taken into the cockpit and got a wonderful ride down Loch Lomond to the hospital in Alexandria. For me, what started off as a not terribly great experience ended up as a particularly memorable one. The Sea King was retired in 2018, of course, and it is right to discuss how we will replace different types of aircraft that are important to our armed forces.

In July 2016 the MOD signed a 10-year partnering agreement with Leonardo, which envisages the MOD spending about £3 billion with the company in the next decade on the upgrade and support of its helicopter fleets. Although the arrangement commits both sides to working together to achieve improvements in cost-effectiveness and innovation, the agreement is not a legally binding contract with a definite financial value attached, but an indication of support. We have hit this issue before in defence debates, because defence procurement requires long-term assurance. The UK Government should commit to long-term funding to ensure a steady drumbeat of orders, not just for rotary-wing aircraft but for different areas of our defence landscape.

The hon. Member for Witney mentioned that we should bring in new technology while old technology is still in use, and the importance of working in parallel. That has not always worked in the past. With the Nimrod, we know there was a gap when capability was reduced while we were waiting for P8 to come online. That is now starting, but there has been a vulnerability for several years, particularly in the north Atlantic. That should not happen. We should see where the threats and potential issues are before they strike us.

Our defence policy must also remain in step with our European allies and closest neighbours, even after we leave the European Union. The combat air strategy states:

“The UK has a unique network of capability collaborations and will work quickly and openly with allies to build on or establish new partnerships to deliver future requirements.”

There is a strong overlap between the defence interests of the UK and those of the EU. UK Government policy must take that into account despite the fact that we will leave the EU in just a few days' time.

The hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Fysh) mentioned skills and the skills gap, which is an issue that is close to my heart. I believe that we are starting to see some progress on that. We see companies taking active positions in order to attract a more diverse workforce into different areas, but it is not enough; more has to be done. I have spoken many times about the lack of female representation across the STEM subjects—science, technology, maths and, in particular, engineering. We still do not see enough female role models or companies doing enough to go out and attract them. The importance of that is that if we are missing out on 50% of the population, we are missing out on 50% of the skills. The hon. Gentleman also talked about the importance of research and development, and spin-out products that could

come as a result. As a scientist, I am never going to complain about more money being spent on R&D, so I was pleased to hear that.

The strength of our armed forces' defences depends as much on the strength of personnel as it does on equipment. We must ensure that any steps take into account the needs and requirements of the men and women who serve in the armed forces. We have mentioned before in this place the need for some sort of representative body that can consult current and former personnel to ensure that issues pertinent to them are at the forefront of defence planning.

The hon. Member for Witney talked about strategy, which is the nub of this debate. What do we actually need? He talked about unmanned aerial vehicles and cyber aircraft. We have to be careful that we do not think that what is required in 2020 is the same as what will be required in 2025 or 2030. We must always be planning our defence capability by looking to the future. It would be naive to think that we will still need the same sort of defence in 50 or 100 years' time as we do today, so it is important that any decision about defence planning or procurement is taken with an eye to the future.

The hon. Member for Witney talked about the possibility of a NATO helicopter force, which was an interesting idea. We do not always need to have everything here in the UK. Where can we provide specialisms? Where are our areas of pure expertise? What can we contribute to a NATO taskforce? As we look at defence procurement in the future and as budgets become increasing tight, can we look at where capability is needed and how we can contribute to that force without trying to do everything? In trying to do everything, we spread ourselves thin and inevitably some things are not done as well as others. Where is our expertise and our excellence, and what do we need in terms of rotary capability?

Finally, I again thank the hon. Member for Witney. He has a knack of securing Westminster Hall debates—I may have a word with him after this to find out the secret of his success. Hopefully he can get similar success with his rotary strategy.

5.25 pm

Mr Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms McDonagh. I thank the hon. Member for Witney (Robert Courts) for securing this important debate. I have observed his commitment to our armed forces through the armed forces parliamentary scheme—I think we have both been fortunate to have had the opportunity to travel in a Merlin, a Chinook and a Wildcat, seeing at first hand what our armed forces do.

I also thank the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Fysh), who made an important point about the value of industry and the need for skills to meet the challenges that our nation faces, and the Scottish National party spokeswoman, the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan). I certainly value the contribution that she made about continued collaboration as Britain leaves the EU.

From troop and equipment transportation to search and observation work and submarine protection, the 332 rotary-wing aircraft in the UK armed forces play a crucial role in defending national security. I have always been clear that the Government have no higher duty

than the protection of our citizens, and the maintenance of national security. Alongside that responsibility, the Government must strive for operational advantage. Key to that is maintaining sovereign capability. A national strategy for naval shipbuilding and combat aircraft has paved the way for an ambitious vision for the future in those sectors. As the hon. Member for Witney said, it is now time to talk about helicopters as part of a wider defence industrial strategy.

If the Government fail to provide a clear strategy for the protection of our sovereign capability to design and manufacture helicopters, it could jeopardise investment, jobs and the security of our nation. We have heard the case for a comprehensive, joined-up and integrated wider approach. It will allow a conversation to take place about defining a clear way ahead to preserve our national advantage. It will ensure that our highly skilled workforce continue to deliver innovation, and are at the heart of discussion, and it will bring to the forefront arguments for building British, securing us as world leaders.

For that reason, I reiterate the calls on the Government to look urgently at a wider defence industrial strategy, with rotary-wing aircraft playing a key role. That must be part of a strategic defence and security review, and it must encompass expenditure, policy and operations across the full spectrum of defence, security and foreign affairs. Therefore, when does the Minister expect the formal process for the SDSR to get under way? In that review, when can he confirm that rotary-wing aircraft will receive consideration tantamount to the contribution they make to the UK armed forces?

We know that future air warfare will be increasingly complex, with significant technological advancements over the lifetime of a single rotary-wing aircraft. As threats evolve, we must evolve with them. Without a comprehensive strategic defence and security review, that will be deeply challenging. I vow to continue applying scrutiny and pressure to the Government on this issue, and will continue to work alongside all Members present to ensure that rotary-wing aircraft are given the priority that they deserve.

5.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (James Heappey): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McDonagh, on my maiden voyage as a Minister. I am slightly nervous of inadvertently spending loads of money and getting told off when I get back to the Department, but it gives me great pleasure to respond to the debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts) on securing it. Last Thursday, he and I had the opportunity of visiting RAF Brize Norton in his constituency. He is an eloquent and passionate supporter of the Royal Air Force and of its importance to the community that surrounds the base. It is fantastic to see today that his interest extends beyond the parochial to a wider interest in defence matters.

I should add that in my previous career I had some first-hand experience of the fantastic work of those who serve in our joint helicopter command. They have flown me in Northern Ireland, Iraq and Afghanistan, on occasion with things travelling very fast to try to hit us. The courage that our helicopter pilots show while flying in combat zones and the amazing ingenuity of the engineers who keep them flying, often in challenging

[James Heappey]

environments, is not to be underestimated. So, at the start of my first opportunity to speak as a Minister, I put on record my admiration for those who fly and support our helicopters on operations.

Defence already supports 115,000 jobs across the UK—one in every 220—through £18 billion of annual spending with industry. There is an opportunity for that to translate positively into the Government's levelling-up agenda. This year, as we go through the integrated defence, security and foreign policy review, we will seek to understand the opportunity to participate in that levelling-up agenda, and to see how we can spend that defence budget to have effect in the regions of the UK where there is opportunity to invest in defence.

I am pleased to say that I have personal experience of that, having seen it with the rotary sector in Somerset. This year will see the opening of the iAero Centre in Yeovil, for which my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr Fysh) campaigned vigorously. That facility will drive innovation in local aerospace and promote its ongoing competitiveness in the UK and the world. It has been made possible by Defence's long-term investment in Leonardo helicopters and the financial commitment of Somerset County Council and the local enterprise partnership.

The centre will deliver a real opportunity for our region, but also for industry and academia to collaborate on innovation. It will be an accelerator for our region's goals of looking at how clean tech can be employed in manufacturing and focusing on future developments in autonomy, artificial intelligence, hybrid and electric power, as well as other sustainable technology in advanced manufacturing and engineering.

Our investment in rotary will act as a catalyst for wider innovation, which is hugely exciting. Having seen how that opportunity might work in Somerset, and having recently visited other defence companies that are investing in skills and innovation in the communities in which they operate, I am clear that there is a real opportunity to exploit that further. It is a very exciting proposition and one that I am looking to make an important part of my work in this brief over the years ahead.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) made an excellent point about people in the defence industry. She is right to note that, too often, when we walk into a boardroom in a defence company, it is very male indeed, and that quite a large part of the senior workforce in those places is very male indeed.

I have noticed an interesting discrepancy between the graduate entry into defence companies, which is still very male, and the apprenticeship-level entry coming directly in at 16, which is much more balanced. That is a very interesting issue for us to explore. Why is it that male and female students look at an apprenticeship in the defence industry with equal enthusiasm, yet when we come to recruiting people out of universities into engineering roles in defence, we have less success?

Carol Monaghan: Some of these companies have told me that they will actively go out and recruit a certain number of girls and a certain number of boys. That does not seem to be happening to the same extent at

graduate level—maybe the women simply are not there at graduate level—but I would agree that at apprenticeship level we are seeing some improvements.

James Heappey: I thank the hon. Lady for her interest. The best way to accelerate the pursuit of equality in defence companies' recruitment is for those of us in ministerial office or shadow roles—and, indeed, those with a wider interest in defence—to put pressure on them to do that. There is clearly a workforce challenge when it comes to high-end engineering. The fact that we are not good enough collectively at attracting half the population into defence roles is clearly an area for significant improvement within the industry.

Moving on to equipment, I should say that over the next decade we are spending more than £180 billion on equipment and support. That includes £9.6 billion specifically on rotary wing. However, our financial commitment to rotary is much greater, at nearly £24 billion over the next decade, including infrastructure, personnel and training, all of which will have a positive impact on local economies.

Our armed forces are obviously the biggest customer of the UK helicopter industry. I will summarise some of the investments the Government have made to date, which include more than £1 billion to develop and manufacture 62 Wildcat helicopters, £900 million on delivering 30 Merlin Mk 2 into service, about £300 million on upgrading the Merlin Mk 4 across a 25-aircraft fleet and £271 million on Wildcat support. My hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil made a point about arming the land variants of Wildcat; the maritime version will already have a missile, and I am certain that the Chief of the General Staff will have noted his suggestion that the land variant might have one too. We have also put £269 million into Crownest. Finally, this year, the first of the new Apache AH-64e models will arrive in the UK and provide a step change in capability for our land forces. Through that continued investment, our rotary capability is growing.

Those developments have been made possible by our relationship with the rotary-wing industry. Airbus continues to support the Puma fleet and provide our training helicopters, which are modified in Oxford. In Yeovil, Leonardo continues to be the only UK-based company with an end-to-end design, build and support capability. It is seen as world leading in advanced rotor systems, transmissions and blade technology.

Our long-term commitment to Leonardo through the 10-year strategic partnering arrangement has allowed it to have the confidence to invest in its skilled Somerset workforce, technology and supply base. It has 2,795 highly skilled jobs, with many more in the supply chain; 114 apprentices and 33 graduates, with a further 65 joining this year; and £340 million invested in UK R&D over the past five years and around £400 million per year with over 800 UK suppliers, including 105 small and medium-sized enterprises.

We have also bought highly capable rotary platforms from Boeing and, through our partnering initiative, have secured Boeing investment in advanced manufacturing in Sheffield. Boeing, in turn, has committed to increasing UK jobs and supply chain opportunities, including UK companies' providing 5% by value of the entire Apache AH-64e fleet.

A key part of the Government's rotary strategy and defence industrial policy is a collaborative approach to exports. Exports will continue to be fundamental to

delivering affordable equipment to our armed forces and greater value to the UK. With the support of the UK Government, industry won export orders worth £14 billion in 2018.

Rotary is an important part of that export success. We supported the export of £12.3 billion of sales of Merlin, Wildcat and Lynx, and have enabled around £8 billion of associated support business. That has allowed Leonardo to invest in skills and generate new products in the UK. Most recently, that included the export of the AW101 Merlin helicopters to Norway and Poland and sale of the AW159 Wildcat helicopters to the Republic of Korea.

I move on to the rotary strategy, which is the crux of the debate. We all know that we now operate in a more uncertain, more complex and more dynamic environment. As we develop our future operating concept for our modernised force and consider what that means for our rotary-wing strategy, we must be mindful of certain technological improvements.

This afternoon, I had the opportunity to sit down with the former director of the Defense Acquisition Program Administration and the Ministry of Defence's former and current chief scientific adviser, to have exactly that discussion about how, with an exponential technological curve, we make the right decisions about future capability to avoid fielding capability that is already near obsolete. This is a timely discussion about what that looks like specifically in the rotary space.

We believe that manned rotary capability will continue to be a vital requirement in all environments, but it will increasingly be teamed with small unmanned systems and may in some areas be replaced entirely by large autonomous systems by the 2040s. We are innovating with industry to test these unmanned air systems and ensure that our UK armed forces can access what they need. These unmanned systems range from small vertical take-off and landing systems to very large-scale, 2 or 3-tonne unmanned air systems, which our Royal Navy sees as critical to the future maritime environment.

The Navy's discovery, assessment and rapid exploitation team is partnering with innovative UK companies to develop small rotary or vertical take-off and landing unmanned aircraft systems technology. This includes £250,000 investment with Malloy Aeronautics to develop a tethered rotary drone. The MOD has already invested with Leonardo helicopters on rotary-wing unmanned concepts, and we continue to discuss how we might develop a UK large rotary unmanned air system that could support rotary assets in the future.

As I have explained, the environment we operate in will continue to change. This is an ideal opportunity to review our approach to rotary-wing capability ahead of big decisions on future capability. This debate has also highlighted that it is not just about equipment. The 2009 rotary-wing strategy recognised the need to change how we operate our rotary-wing capability. Since then we have rationalised our core fleet to only five platforms, providing efficiencies in how we operate, man and support these platforms, to be an effective fighting force.

Our aim is to ensure that we can mobilise, modernise and transform the way we develop and operate rotary capability across defence. This is not just about platforms, personnel training, infrastructure and in-service support, all of which will be vital in delivering our aims; we must ensure that the enterprise is as efficient as it can be, so that we can deliver more military capability to the frontline.

Our thinking is also informed by our international partners, some of which have been discussed in the debate today. We are leading efforts within NATO to look at next-generation rotorcraft concepts and opportunities. This will help to drive consensus on what the future requirements will be and ensure that industry is ready to meet them. We are also observing the US army's ambitious future vertical lift programme to develop a family of new-generation helicopters. There is much we can learn from the US approach and conclusions, but we have made no decisions on our future rotary requirements, or on how we would deliver them.

Our review of the rotary-wing strategy will need to inform and be informed by the Government's overall defence and security objectives. That is why I am pleased that the Government are committed to the deepest review of Britain's security, defence and foreign policy since the end of the cold war. I note the shadow Minister's hope that a timeline might be confirmed soon; I am sure that news will be forthcoming. The MOD will enthusiastically participate in that review, and it will ensure that we have in place the right strategy to meet the challenges and opportunities that we face as a country in the decades ahead.

The industrial backdrop and some of the themes mentioned—skills, exports and new technologies—are applicable across our industrial base. Our refreshed defence industrial policy, published in December 2017, sets out our commitment to encouraging a thriving and globally competitive UK defence sector. We have decided in the past to adopt alternative approaches in specific areas—shipbuilding and combat air—and we continually assess our approach to other sectors to determine whether we need to develop separate strategies or whether they can form part of a wider defence industrial strategy.

This Government recognise the importance of the defence rotary-wing capability today and in the future. We will continue to ensure that our long-term strategy is coherent and encompasses the equipment, support, training, basing infrastructure and the industry that we need to deliver it. Moreover, we see this as an opportunity for the defence pound to contribute meaningfully to the Government's levelling-up agenda. It is encouraging to note the number of local enterprise partnerships that have included defence and aerospace in their regional industrial strategies.

The rotary sector has a great story to tell, and it is fortunate to have champions in Parliament as eloquent and knowledgeable as my hon. Friends the Members for Witney and for Yeovil. It is also good to hear the considered and largely consensual contributions from the Opposition parties. I am particularly looking forward to working cross-party in defence—although I am sure we will have our moments. This is an area of policy where everybody wants the best for the soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines who ultimately have to go to dangerous places on behalf of our country. I am really looking forward to working with spokespeople and shadow Ministers on the Opposition Benches to make sure that, as we go through this security, defence and foreign policy review, there is an opportunity to share our ideas together, so that we can come to some sound and enduring conclusions.

Finally, there is understandable pressure from my hon. Friend the Member for Witney, who has sought this debate principally to raise an ambition for a rotary-wing

[James Heappey]

strategy. My gut feeling is that in a year when we are looking more broadly at defence, security and foreign policy needs, and seeking to understand the threats that are emerging and how we will counter them across all five domains—land, sea, air, cyber and space—we first need to understand all of that and work out from it what our strategic ambition is, which is exactly what the strategic defence and security review is there to do. We need to work out what the role is for the defence pound and the levelling-up agenda, and how that contributes to a defence industrial strategy, and then look beyond that at whether there is a requirement for bespoke sector deals, or whether the wider programme actually covers what we need. I hope that my hon. Friend will be patient and will participate, just as all other colleagues will. This is going to be a fascinating time to be involved in defence policy, and I look forward to hearing the further thoughts of colleagues as the year goes on.

5.45 pm

Robert Courts: I have one or two comments. Thank you, Ms McDonagh, for your guidance on the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I was referring to air show tickets, which I have declared, and hospitality received through the all-party parliamentary group for the armed forces.

I thank all other colleagues for the constructive and collegiate approach they have taken to this debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr Fysh) has enormous constituency interest in the matter, and he is absolutely right when he speaks of R&D, skills and the potential for export sales. I had not referred to that, but he is absolutely right.

I am very grateful to the Scottish National party's spokesperson for her story. I am not surprised that helicopters matter to her, given the story she told. She is absolutely bang on about the skills gap, and the importance of STEM and inspiring our young people, particularly women, given the lack of female engineers. We are all aware of that and absolutely must address it. I am very grateful to the Opposition's Front Bencher for making, as always, constructive and collegiate comments. So much of what we are trying to do in this sphere is cross-party, and he is absolutely right about the wider defence industrial strategy, which I had not quite put into that context. I am grateful to him for doing so.

I am also grateful to the Minister for his highly constructive comments. It was an outstanding flying start, if that is not too much of an awful pun to close the debate. I am grateful to him for mentioning the Jupiter and Juno helicopters, which are serviced just outside my constituency at Oxford airport. Many of my constituents work on them and it is of enormous importance.

I applaud the Government's investment, but it is the strategy surrounding it that I push for, and I know the Minister understands that. I entirely accept his point that a wider defence and foreign policy review is going on at present, and that the strategy may have to await that. It is simply something I put across his radar. On the wider importance of the rotary strategy within the foreign and defence review, we are in cordial agreement.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered UK defence rotary strategy.

5.48 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 29 January 2020

EDUCATION

Kensington and Chelsea College: Contingencies Fund

The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson):

Given wider exceptional circumstances, the Department for Education will purchase the Kensington Centre (Worlington Road, London) and provide a 125-year lease to the Further Education institute formed by a merger between Kensington and Chelsea College (KCC) and Morley College. The Secretary of State for Housing Communities, and Local Government will be the named freeholder-lessor in each instance.

Parliamentary approval for additional capital of £10,000,000 for this new expenditure will be sought in a supplementary estimate for the Department for Education. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £10,000,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

The advance will be repaid immediately following Royal Assent of the Supply and Appropriation Bill.

[HCWS72]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

ENABLE Build Guarantee Scheme

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): Today, I am laying before Parliament a departmental minute setting out the details of a contingent liability that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government intends to take on. The contingent liability will be created by the £1 billion ENABLE Build guarantee scheme.

ENABLE Build—announced at autumn Budget 2018 and launched in May 2019—is being delivered through the British Business Bank with the support of Homes England. Under the scheme the Ministry is guaranteeing loan portfolios of new lending to smaller housebuilders in order to encourage additional lending.

A lack of development finance has been identified as a barrier preventing smaller builders from delivering more. Through this scheme the Government will support SME housebuilders to grow and get Britain building the homes we need.

[HCWS74]

TRANSPORT

Passenger-focused Railway

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps):

Wherever you live, you deserve a railway that widens your children's horizon, gives you access to highly skilled, highly paid jobs, and provides a viable green alternative to getting in your car.

For too long, millions of rail passengers in the north of England have not had that. They have had to start and end their working day facing cancellations and delays. Some stations, particularly on Sundays, have been left without trains for hours on end.

It's no surprise that passengers have lost trust in the north's rail network. The service provided by the rail network in the north has failed to meet the needs of passengers. People across the north deserve better, their communities deserve better and I am determined to achieve that.

In January I announced that the Northern franchise was no longer financially sustainable and would only be able to continue for a small number of months. I am announcing today that from 1 March the Northern rail franchise will be taken into public ownership and the Government will begin operating services through the public sector operator—the so-called operator of last resort.

The public sector operator is a company entirely owned by my Department and run by experienced railway managers. It already owns and oversees another franchise, East Coast, which it brands as London North Eastern Railway. Passenger satisfaction has risen in the 19 months it has been operating the service.

This is a new beginning for Northern, but it is only a beginning. Northern's network is huge and complex, some of the things which are wrong are not going to be quick or easy to put right. Nonetheless, I am determined that Northern passengers see real and tangible improvements across the network as soon as possible.

The roll-out of new trains that has already begun under Northern will continue and Pacers will be banished very soon on the western side of the Pennines. In Yorkshire, Pacers will be gone by the spring and next year, we will move electric trains from elsewhere on the network to the north, boosting capacity for commuters into Manchester and Leeds.

We know overcrowding is a problem. To ensure we are deploying the trains in the right place to meet demand, we will be trialling new technology to identify crowding pinch points. We will also be extending platforms at 30 stations on the Northern network to allow for longer trains.

We will also be making sure that every journey is made on a train fit for passengers: all Northern's trains will be deep-cleaned and we will review the cleaning pattern to make sure the first and last passengers travel on trains in the same condition.

Over many months we have seen completely unacceptable numbers of cancellations on Sundays, affecting town centres, businesses, families and community groups. We understand this and I have therefore asked the public sector operator to prioritise building on the recent

agreement with ASLEF to improve the reliability of Sunday services and significantly reduce the number of cancellations.

Beyond this, I have asked Robin Gisby and Richard George, who lead the public sector operator, to prepare a plan in their first 100 days, to make sure we leave no stone unturned in improving this franchise for passengers.

Improvements cannot be delivered in isolation, so the public sector operator will work hand in hand with Network Rail to make sure the railway delivers as one, with a single-minded focus on the interests of the passenger. As part of this a newly created cross-industry north west recovery task force, co-ordinated by Network Rail, will deliver recommendations on how best to boost capacity and performance in the short, medium and longer term.

Many of Northern's problems are due to inadequate infrastructure. That, too, must change—though inevitably it will take longer than some other improvements. I have instructed the leadership of the public sector operator to sit down with Network Rail and build a comprehensive new masterplan to review congestion around Manchester. Continuing to assess the Castlefield corridor, as well as key junctions and interactions across the wider network to develop a series of interventions which will actually deliver the improvements required. This will complement the work already ongoing to develop an ambitious package of enhancement works at Leeds station.

The vast majority of Northern's trains pass through Leeds or Manchester, often picking up delay as they do. Improving the railway in these cities will have knock-on effects for passengers across the north of England.

The action we are taking today is in no way a reflection on Northern's dedicated and hard-working staff. Staff have had an incredibly tough job to do in challenging circumstances. I want to reassure them that their jobs are safe and they will be transferred to the public sector operator on their existing terms and conditions. I recognise that many of the staff facilities are not up to scratch and have asked the public sector operator to look closely at making improvements.

I would also like to be clear that the only differences passengers should notice is services gradually starting to get better. All tickets, including season tickets, will still be valid.

Today's announcement will inevitably raise questions about the future of rail privatisation. Over the past 20 years privatisation has reversed over two decades of declining passenger numbers and passenger journeys have almost doubled to nearly 2 billion.

However, it is clear that the current model is now struggling to deliver. Across the country a number of franchises are failing to provide the reliable services that passengers require. We know change is needed, and it is coming. The Williams review is looking at reforms across the railway to ensure customers are at the heart of the system.

The railways were invented in the north of England and last year the Prime Minister promised that we would give the railway back to the places it was born. With local leaders having more power over local services, timetables, fares and stations. Today marks the first small step in that journey. The first step towards the north taking back control of its railways and its people taking back control of their travelling lives, and its economy being strengthened rather than weakened by its transport network.

There will be no more leaving behind, this Government are committed to levelling up.

[HCWS73]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Diffuse Mesothelioma Payment Scheme

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson): The Diffuse Mesothelioma Payment Scheme (Levy) Regulations 2014 require active employers' liability insurers to pay an annual levy, based on their relative market share, for the purpose of meeting the costs of the diffuse mesothelioma payment scheme (DMPS). This is in line with the insurance industry's commitment to fund a scheme of last resort for sufferers of diffuse mesothelioma who have been unable to trace their employer or their employer's insurer.

Today I can announce that the total amount of the levy to be charged for 2019-20, the sixth year of the DMPS, is £33.3 million. The amount will be payable by active insurers by the end of March 2020.

Individual active insurers will be notified in writing of their share of the levy, together with how the amount was calculated and the payment arrangements. Insurers should be aware that it is a legal requirement to pay the levy within the set timescales.

I am pleased that the DMPS has seen five successful years of operation, assisting many hundreds of sufferers of diffuse mesothelioma. The fifth annual report for the scheme was published on 6 November 2019 and is available on the www.gov.uk website. I hope that Members of both Houses will welcome this announcement and give the DMPS their continued support.

[HCWS71]

Ministerial Correction

Wednesday 29 January 2020

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Accident and Emergency Waiting Times

The following is an extract from Questions to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on 28 January 2020.

Mr Perkins: I do not know whether the Minister is aware, but we have a winter every year. We have had one for the past 71 years, and yet these are the worst A&E waiting times in history, and they are the culmination of the policies that his party has followed for the past nine years: the cuts in social care, the number of GPs driven out of practices, and this Government's failure on prevention. All of that has led us to the worst A&E waiting times in history, and the Minister's answer does not start to look at the failure that he has delivered.

Edward Argar: Well, as I pointed out to the hon. Gentleman—he may not have heard this—demand in A&E has significantly increased this winter. He asks about GPs. I am sure he fully supports our clear

commitment to 50 million more GP appointments and 6,000 more GPs. I am sure he also welcomes, in his own constituency, the £19 million investment by this Government in 2017 in a new urgent treatment centre, which will serve his constituents and is due to **start work** this summer.

[Official Report, 28 January 2020, Vol. 670, c. 664.]

Letter of correction from the Minister for Health, the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar):

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr Perkins).

The correct response should have been:

Edward Argar: Well, as I pointed out to the hon. Gentleman—he may not have heard this—demand in A&E has significantly increased this winter. He asks about GPs. I am sure he fully supports our clear commitment to 50 million more GP appointments and 6,000 more GPs. I am sure he also welcomes, in his own constituency, the £19 million investment by this Government in 2017 in a new urgent treatment centre, which will serve his constituents and is due to **start building works** this summer.

ORAL ANSWERS

Wednesday 29 January 2020

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	759	INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT—continued	
Bilateral Trade: Developing Countries	763	Preventable Child Deaths.....	765
Female Genital Mutilation.....	764	Topical Questions	766
Forestry/Biodiversity.....	760		
Hunger.....	766		
Palestine: UK Aid	765	PRIME MINISTER	768
Plastic Use	759	Engagements.....	768

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Wednesday 29 January 2020

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
EDUCATION	33WS	TRANSPORT	34WS
Kensington and Chelsea College: Contingencies		Passenger-focused Railway.....	34WS
Fund	33WS		
HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL			
GOVERNMENT	33WS	WORK AND PENSIONS	36WS
ENABLE Build Guarantee Scheme	33WS	Diffuse Mesothelioma Payment Scheme	36WS

MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Wednesday 29 January 2020

	<i>Col. No.</i>
HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	5MC
Accident and Emergency Waiting Times.....	5MC

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CONTENTS

Wednesday 29 January 2020

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 759] [see index inside back page]

Secretary of State for International Development
Prime Minister

Opposition Day [1st allotted day]

Policing and Crime [Col. 783]

Motion—(Ms Diane Abbott)—on a Division, negatived
Amendment—(Kit Malthouse)—agreed to
Motion, as amended, agreed to

Homelessness [Col. 844]

Motion—(John Healey)—on a Division, negatived
Amendment—(Robert Jenrick)—agreed to
Motion, as amended, agreed to

Wards Corner Redevelopment [Col. 896]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

Planning System: Gypsies and Travellers [Col. 283WH]
British Overseas Passport Holders in Hong Kong [Col. 308WH]
Special Educational Needs and Disability Funding [Col. 313WH]
Bovine TB: Compensation [Col. 340WH]
Defence: Rotary Strategy [Col. 347WH]
General Debates

Written Statements [Col. 33WS]

Ministerial Correction [Col. 5MC]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
