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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
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HOUSE OF LORDS
OFFICIAL REPORT

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The first time a Member speaks to a new piece of parliamentary business, the following abbreviations are used to show their party affiliation:

Abbreviation	Party/Group
CB	Cross Bench
Con	Conservative
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
GP	Green Party
Ind Lab	Independent Labour
Ind LD	Independent Liberal Democrat
Ind SD	Independent Social Democrat
Ind UU	Independent Ulster Unionist
Lab	Labour
LD	Liberal Democrat
LD Ind	Liberal Democrat Independent
Non-afl	Non-affiliated
PC	Plaid Cymru
UKIP	UK Independence Party
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

No party affiliation is given for Members serving the House in a formal capacity, the Lords spiritual, Members on leave of absence or Members who are otherwise disqualified from sitting in the House.

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House of Lords

Monday 3 July 2017

2.30 pm

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Truro.

Oaths and Affirmations

2.35 pm

Lord Moonie and Lord Ricketts took the oath, and signed an undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct.

Retirements of Members

Announcement

2.36 pm

The Lord Speaker (Lord Fowler): My Lords, I should like to notify the House of the retirement, with effect from 30 June, of the noble Lord, Lord Feldman, and the noble Earl, Lord Mar and Kellie, pursuant to Section 1 of the House of Lords Reform Act 2014. On behalf of the House, I should like to thank the noble Lords for their much-valued service to the House.

Education: English Baccalaureate

Question

2.36 pm

Asked by *The Earl of Clancarty*

To ask Her Majesty's Government when they will respond to the public consultation *Implementing the English Baccalaureate* which closed on 29 January 2016.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education (Lord Nash) (Con): My Lords, the results of the consultation on implementing the English baccalaureate and the Government's response will be published in due course—I hope soon.

The Earl of Clancarty (CB): My Lords, is this long delay because the overwhelming public response voices the concern that the EBacc excludes art and design subjects? I ask the Minister not to continue to justify the EBacc with the New Schools Network stats on the percentage of pupils taking one arts GCSE, which represented a shift away from other qualifications, but instead to look at the latest Ofqual figures revealing—two years in a row—a hugely alarming 8% decline in the take-up of arts GCSEs. The EBacc must be scrapped.

Lord Nash: I can tell the noble Earl that it is not a result of the points he has made. We have been considering carefully a great many responses, and there have been a few political issues in the meantime. I am certainly encouraged to see that we have been improving the quality of these subjects with help from the Royal Academy of Engineering and the James Dyson Foundation. The decline in the subjects to which the noble Earl refers has been more than made up for in the substantial increase in the number of pupils taking IT and the now almost 70,000 pupils taking computing.

Lord Baker of Dorking (Con): My Lords, is the Minister aware that the GCSEs which are just now finishing this term have seen a drop in every technical subject and every creative and artistic subject? If this trend continues, there will be no technical education or creative education in schools for those aged under 16. This is a disgrace and really is unacceptable. Changes must be made to the EBacc, otherwise the Government will not meet their objective to improve technical education.

Lord Nash: I refer to my previous remarks about the take-up of computer science and the dramatic increase in the number of pupils taking IT. Of course, we must always remember the very low base that we had in 2010 when only one in five pupils was taking a core suite of academic subjects, which we know are so essential particularly for those from a disadvantaged background. I think that we should all be extremely pleased that we have actually doubled the percentage, which is rendering our education provision much more fit for pupils, particularly for pupils from a disadvantaged background.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall (Lab): My Lords, can the Minister please explain the remarks he made in answer to the noble Earl, Lord Clancarty? I believe he said that the loss of entries into the creative subjects is more than made up for by an increased number of entries for IT and computer science. Can he explain in what way those things compensate for one another?

Lord Nash: Numerically. I think we all know that the quality of some of these subjects was not what it might be, and that quite a few people were taking some of them not because they suited them but because they were easier. Of course all schools teach many of these subjects, although it may not necessarily lead to exams, and of course all schools have to provide a broad and balanced curriculum—something which the new chief inspector seems to be particularly focused on, which I am very pleased to see.

Lord Addington (LD): My Lords, does the Minister agree that a GCSE is a good basis for starting study? As there has been a drop of 50,000 in the number of those taking design and technology GCSE, how do we get a good basis for those going on to study creative and technical subjects if we cut a subject such as that?

Lord Nash: I agree that a GCSE is an extremely good basis. In fact, the drop in take-up of design and technology over the last six years has been less than the drop over the previous four years to 2010. We are keen to improve the quality of those subjects and to give our pupils a wider choice of subjects.

Lord Berkeley of Knighton (CB): My Lords, given that the Government frequently salute the creative industries for what they bring into the Exchequer and the tourists they bring to this country, is the Minister not concerned about the next generation of creative artists, who are not getting the necessary inspiration they need while at school?

Lord Nash: Again, this assumes quite a lot. As I said, it is clear to us that a number of pupils taking these subjects in the past were not the next generation of creative artists; they were people that suited, for instance, the Labour Government's equivalence structure, whereby they were helping the statistics. Heads will respond only to the incentives set for them. We have set them an incentive to have many more pupils doing a core academic suite of subjects. That seems to be working and we should celebrate that. But we are investing considerably in the creative subjects, and we have a number of free schools and technical colleges focused specifically on that.

Lord Watson of Invergowrie (Lab): I very much note the concerns expressed by noble Lords on the teaching of creative and technical subjects, but, perhaps offering the Minister some welcome respite, I will look at another aspect of this Question: the rather worrying trend developing in the Department for Education and its Ministers of the inordinate amount of time it takes them to respond to consultations. In January this year, I asked in a Written Question how many DfE consultations that had a closing date between January 2015 and September 2016 had still not been responded to, including the one in the Question asked by the noble Earl, Lord Clancarty. The Minister replied, saying that there were seven—one of which, incidentally, was the revision of fire safety for buildings in schools. That cavalier approach may have been something the Government felt they could get away with when they enjoyed a majority. Now that the Tories are merely the largest of the minority parties down the Corridor, will the Minister commit to noble Lords that he will ensure his department replies to consultations in a much timelier manner?

Lord Nash: I do not think that this slow pace of response is in and of itself necessarily cavalier, but I have said I very much hope that our response on EBacc will be available shortly, and I shall do all I can to try to make sure that we respond quickly in future.

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, is my noble friend truly satisfied that we are exposing our young people to the beauties of art and music, and giving them a proper opportunity to participate, in what is becoming an increasingly depersonalised age where young people spend more time with their machines and hand-held devices than they do with their fellows?

Lord Nash: I certainly agree with my noble friend's comment about the amount of time our young people spend gazing at screens of one sort or another and the balance that subjects such as music, dance and drama can provide. Of course, all good schools do this, not necessarily aiming at exams—music and dance are compulsory in key stages 2 and 3, as is drama up to key stage 4. As I said, the chief inspector is very focused on this. I am sure that noble Lords will see the fruits of that work in due course.

Youth Services Question

2.45 pm

Asked by **Baroness Gardner of Parkes**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the need for youth services and how they propose to fund those services.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Lord Ashton of Hyde) (Con): My Lords, local authorities are responsible for assessing local need for youth services and allocating funding. The Government recognise the importance of activities and services outside formal education settings that can help young people develop skills, improve well-being and participate in their communities. The Government are investing up to £80 million through the Youth Investment Fund and the #iwill fund in voluntary and community organisations that work with young people and are continuing to back the National Citizen Service.

Baroness Gardner of Parkes (Con): I thank the Minister for that Answer. Of course, I do not think that that is too little, but local authorities are all cutting back. The Avenues youth centre on Harrow Road has been in existence for 40 years. For the first time, the council has cut all grant to that body. Not only is this a time when young people need to have their outlooks broadened and some joy in life, but we and they need to be protected from knife carrying and the terrible occupations that can easily fill in work for idle hands. How does the Minister think the voluntary sector will cope with that?

Lord Ashton of Hyde: As I said in my previous Answer, local needs are best addressed by local authorities. It is not the ideal position of central government to look at local needs such as those to which my noble friend referred. However, it is not just a question of local authority spending. That is why we are spending £200 million on the National Citizen Service, £40 million on the #iwill fund—looking after a third of its running costs—£40 million on the Youth Investment Fund and £10 million from LIBOR fines for uniformed youth groups. Importantly, we are spending £700,000 on the Delivering Differently for Young People programme, which gives local authorities technical and legal support to help them develop new models for delivering youth services.

Lord Harris of Haringey (Lab): My Lords, it is all very well saying that decisions are best made locally, which of course they are, but if the Government reduce the funding to local authorities by more than two-fifths, it is inevitable that youth services and other non-statutory mainstream services will suffer. The Government have a responsibility. What are they going to do about the fundamental issue underlying the noble Baroness's Question, which is that there is a problem in terms of activities for young people which should be properly resourced and funded?

Lord Ashton of Hyde: When local authorities have to make difficult choices, who would noble Lords rather did that—the local authority or central government? We have provided additional money to enable local authorities to look at sustainable models. There are very good examples of local authorities which have grabbed the opportunity, looked anew at how to provide youth services and done it with local partners. I can give the example of Knowsley.

The Earl of Listowel (CB): My Lords, I welcome what the Minister said about additional investment, but going beyond the local and thinking about national security—in terms of preventing the radicalisation of young people and the creation of gangs—does he not think it vital that we invest in youth services? These have been cut to ribbons in the recent cuts arising from the economic crash—they have been decimated. I welcome the money, but so much more work is needed. Will he and colleagues consider putting youth services on a statutory basis so that they are protected over time?

Lord Ashton of Hyde: The noble Earl may be aware that such services are on a statutory basis, and local authorities have a statutory duty to provide them. If we just take specific examples from recent years, Unison reported on the cuts to local youth services. For 2014-15, it reported that £85 million was cut. In the meantime, the Government spent £170 million on NCS, £10 million on the Uniformed Youth Social Action Fund, £300,000 on the British Youth Council, £500,000 on Delivering Differently and £270,000 on the Centre for Youth Impact. That is some £128 million against £85 million of cuts. My central point remains that difficult decisions should be made locally. It is not true that, for the reasons that the noble Earl expressed, the Government are doing nothing—let alone the National Citizen Service, which the coalition started in 2011 and which now has about 100,000 young people going through it.

Lord Elton (Con): My Lords, it has long been clear that voluntary agencies deliver more effectively and at lower cost youth services such as those discussed and as a result keep children out of crime. What are the Government doing to encourage and support the voluntary sector in this vital area?

Lord Ashton of Hyde: For example, there is the National Citizen Service, which I keep mentioning—

Noble Lords: Oh!

Lord Ashton of Hyde: I do so because I think it is vital. When the National Citizen Service Bill went through the House, it received virtually unanimous support because it was regarded as a good thing. I encourage noble Lords to visit the NCS during the Summer Recess. They will be impressed. We deliver 80% of that service through local community action groups. The money that central government allocates is spent through local charities, authorities and voluntary groups in the various regions of the country.

Baroness Janke (LD): My Lords, is the Minister aware that cuts to youth services, public health, libraries and education all hit hardest young people in the

poorest and most vulnerable communities? What assessment have the Government made of the impact of these cuts in such communities? What are they going to do about that?

Lord Ashton of Hyde: The Government looked at these particularly disadvantaged areas and set up the Youth Investment Fund, funded by DCMS and the Big Lottery Fund. It will award £40 million to the most disadvantaged areas in the country.

Baroness Farrington of Ribbleton (Lab): My Lords, would the Minister accept that those of us who believe in local government in England despair at the way Westminster and the Government appear to be determining priorities? It is no good saying that local authorities have a statutory duty to provide when there is no quantity attached to that. The Minister keeps referring to local authority choice, but there is none in England: Westminster decides what can be spent and therefore determines what is needed. When will those of us in the English local authority system get the sort of money the Government appear to be spending per capita in Northern Ireland?

Lord Ashton of Hyde: It is not true that it is just a question of local authority cuts. That is why central government is spending £40 million on the Step Up To Serve #iwill fund, £40 million on the Youth Investment Fund and £200 million on the National Citizen Service. They are providing real money to help youth services all around the country.

Overseas Development Assistance Question

2.53 pm

Asked by **Lord Collins of Highbury**

To ask Her Majesty's Government how they intend to consult non-governmental organisations and development aid charities regarding the commitment in their manifesto to work with like-minded countries to change the rules relating to overseas development assistance.

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Lord Bates) (Con): My Lords, we are consulting with civil society organisations to hear what rule changes they believe would be beneficial in helping us deliver the sustainable development goals. NGOs have been invited to share with us their thoughts and indications as to what changes might be envisaged as part of a wide consultation process.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): I thank the noble Lord for that response but the question was about what the Government are thinking. In 2016, Justine Greening sought from the DAC changes to accommodate the SDGs. What more changes do this Government want? They should come clean about that and then consult properly. Does the Minister not accept that if the United Kingdom went alone on these changes it would break the international rules-based agreements we have, which would have severe consequences for international development?

Lord Bates: Of course we are not talking about going it alone. The OECD and DAC process is made up of 30 countries. It is a consensus operation and we have to work with colleagues to bring about the changes that we seek. The Secretary of State convened a meeting of 18 NGO leaders in the department last Wednesday, which I attended. It was a very productive session. The first thing it recognised was that the existing rules were not perfect. The second thing, which we are absolutely sure about, was that it was essential to preserve the primary purpose of aid; namely, economic development. That will remain our focus as we consult colleagues on the DAC, NGOs and other parties here.

Baroness Hodgson of Abinger (Con): My Lords, it is often the small organisations working at grass-roots level that can really make a change and a difference to the poorest communities around the world, but they find it very hard to apply for these grants; there are often very complicated procedures to get the money. Will my noble friend please tell me what is being done to help these small organisations access funds?

Lord Bates: My noble friend is absolutely right. Small organisations often bring innovation to the process, passion and low overheads, which are deeply needed in the way that we develop aid. As part of that process, the Secretary of State has announced that we are going to launch a small charities challenge fund aimed particularly at small organisations with a turnover between £25,000 and £250,000 for accountable grants of £50,000 each. We will be making an announcement about that next week but I will certainly make sure that all Members of your Lordships' House, who I know follow these matters closely and have good links to many small charities doing amazing work around the world, have details of that fund.

Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale (Lab): My Lords, as part of this consultation will the Government publish an assessment of the impact of the changes that were made in 2016—they were indeed made to accommodate the sustainable development goals, as well as the UK priority of investment in conflict-affected and fragile states—before then asking for more?

Lord Bates: That is certainly something that we will look at once we figure out the exact routes that we are going down. We have identified a number of areas. For example, development assistance is available post-conflict to rebuild countries but when it comes to peacekeeping, only a small percentage of that budget is attributable to development assistance. When we want to help with training militaries in how to prevent sexual violence in conflict, we find difficulties in getting that element there. When we want to look at refugees providing vocational assistance here in the UK, that is deemed to be a benefit to the national economy and therefore is not allowed. So there are a few things here but the essential point, which the noble Lord is absolutely right about, is that we have to work together on this to resolve those differences with the primary purpose in mind.

Baroness Sheehan (LD): My Lords, I would like to press further the point that the noble Lord, Lord Collins of Highbury, made. Will the Minister share with your Lordships' House a definition of ODA that the Secretary of State will be content with, bearing in mind that she is on record as saying that she would like to see the department that she now leads abolished?

Lord Bates: She is also on record as a passionate defender of the 0.7% target. That was in the Conservative manifesto; it was secured under a coalition Government and maintained under a Conservative Government, and it is something that we are extremely proud of. The fact that we have a 0.7% commitment does not mean that everything to do with reform should stop there. We want to make sure that every single penny and pound of that is directed to the people who are in the greatest need because we cannot afford to leave them behind when there is so much need visible around the world.

Baroness Hayman (CB): My Lords, the Minister referred to the prime aim of aid as economic development. We have discussed before in this House how economic development cannot take place without investment in health and in the empowerment and education of women. The UK is a respected global leader in many of these areas: malaria, neglected tropical diseases, maternal and child health, and the education of women and girls. Can the Minister assure the House that any changes that are made will not be to the detriment of continuing investment in the areas in which we have proved to be effective and successful?

Lord Bates: I can certainly give that assurance. In fact, health is one of the key areas in which we have been investing heavily. I know that the noble Baroness has taken a great interest in neglected tropical diseases. We announced a further £200 million for that cause, which is saving hundreds of thousands of lives, just a few months ago.

Fire Safety: Schools

Question

3 pm

Asked by **Baroness Walmsley**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, in the light of the Grenfell Tower fire, what plans they have to review their guidance *Fire safety in new and existing school buildings*.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education (Lord Nash) (Con): My Lords, our thoughts and prayers are with the relatives, friends and families, and all those people affected by the Grenfell tragedy. The department certainly has no plans to introduce any changes to its guidance that would make fire safety laws for schools less strict. Alongside the rest of government, we will review and act appropriately on any findings from the tragic events at Grenfell Tower. We are undertaking an analysis of all school buildings to identify any at a fire risk from cladding.

Baroness Walmsley (LD): I thank the Minister for his reply and share his concerns about the victims of Grenfell. Is he aware that last year the London Fire

Brigade did 184 school fire safety consultations and that, despite it feeling that all new and refurbished schools should have sprinklers fitted, only 2% of such schools were fitted with them? This indicates that the current guidance is not being followed. Given that sprinklers can save lives and reduce the rising cost of property damage, will the Government commit to making sprinklers mandatory in new and refurbished schools and producing up-to-date and robust information about the cost of school fires in lives, cash and educational disruption?

Lord Nash: My Lords, all new schools must comply with fire safety guidance before they are allowed to open and only in those assessed as low risk are sprinklers not expected to be installed. The number of fires in schools has halved in the past 10 years. The department is not aware of the claims that the noble Baroness makes. Our recent consultation involved discussions with experts from across the fire sector, including the Chief Fire Officers Association and the London Fire Brigade. We would welcome any intelligence that they or she have to offer in relation to this.

Lord Knight of Weymouth (Lab): My Lords, the Minister will be aware that the school immediately adjacent to Grenfell Tower is the Kensington Aldridge Academy. It has sprinklers installed, thanks to the regulations that I pushed through when I was a Minister, with the presumption that all new schools should have fire sprinklers fitted. Has the Minister seen the figures from the London Fire Brigade that show that, in the nine years since those regulations came in, there have been 717 fires in schools in London and in only 15 of those schools were sprinklers installed? I support what the noble Baroness, Lady Walmsley, said. Now is the time to go further than the regulations I agreed, to listen to the London Fire Brigade and to make sprinklers mandatory in all refurbishments as well as all new schools.

Lord Nash: I am fully aware of the situation in Kensington Aldridge Academy, which is right next door to Grenfell Tower, and that a number of its pupils have died. Of course we will look at this further. We have not changed the regulations. The regulations that the noble Lord introduced are still extant. Although we thought they were absolutely on the right lines, we thought that in some ways they were a little long and potentially confusing. We have been discussing some changes, but we have no intention of changing those regulations and we would welcome discussions with anybody about any further changes and improvements they think are necessary.

Lord Brookman (Lab): My Lords, with many other Peers of the realm, I sit on the All-Party Group for Fire Safety and Rescue and sprinklers and the Fire Brigades Union and so and so forth. I have to tell the House that the most frustrating of meetings take place because these people who are really keen on having sprinklers all over the country, not in Scotland or Wales but excluding England, are very frustrated that the Government of the day are not acting accordingly.

Lord Nash: As I mentioned, the recent rather technical consultation we had on the precise wording upset a few people who thought we were reducing the expectation, which we certainly were not. I thought I had pretty much reached an agreement with the APPG on this—but I am very happy to have further discussions.

Baroness Brinton (LD): My Lords, I am also a member of the APPG for Fire Safety and Rescue, which I joined when I came into your Lordships' House because the primary school where I was chair of governors burned down in 2004. Because one and a half classrooms survived, it was deemed to be a refurbishment, and under the guidance there was no requirement to increase the level of safety to that required in new schools. The key thing for both new and refurbished schools is that the Government's advice is advice—it is not statutory. Will the Minister ensure that it becomes mandatory to have the highest standard of safety protection, including sprinklers, in all schools, new and refurbished?

Lord Nash: We would expect all schools to follow that guidance, but I certainly will look at the point the noble Baroness makes.

Lord Naseby (Con): I, too, am a member of the all-party fire group. Is it not right that Members of this House and others who comment from outside should now take a deep breath and hold back a little and allow those who are competent in this world to tell us what action is needed? These actions should flow from proper, deep investigation—and hopefully we as a House will be told as soon as possible what changes are to be made.

Lord Nash: My noble friend makes an extremely sensible suggestion. We will have to wait on this, but the DCLG has set up an independent expert advisory panel to advise the Government on any immediate measures needed to make buildings safe. That panel met for a full day last Thursday.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab): My Lords, what discussions has the Minister or any of his colleagues had with his counterparts in Scotland to exchange experiences north and south of the border and advice? Here is another sensible suggestion: if he has not had any meetings so far, will he do so now?

Lord Nash: We have had conversations on this, particularly in relation to recent events and to universities, but I will look more closely to see whether there is more we can learn.

Baroness Deech (CB): My Lords, closer to home, given the long delay to the refurbishment of this building, is the Minister satisfied about fire precautions in the Palace of Westminster?

Lord Nash: I do not think that I am qualified to answer that question.

Inshore Fisheries

Private Notice Question

3.07 pm

Tabled by Lord West of Spithead

To ask Her Majesty's Government how they intend to police and enforce the new regulations for UK inshore fishing waters.

Lord West of Spithead (Lab): My Lords, I beg leave to ask a Question of which I have given private notice.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Gardiner of Kimble) (Con): My Lords, the UK has a robust enforcement system, delivered by the Marine Management Organisation, or MMO, and the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities, or IFCAs, in England. The MMO covers the UK's exclusive economic zone from six nautical miles to 200 nautical miles or the median line, while the IFCAs cover the area from zero to six nautical miles. As we leave the EU, we will need to review and reflect on the level of fisheries enforcement required.

Lord West of Spithead: My Lords, I thank the Minister for his Answer, but I have to say that this simple sailor is absolutely stunned by it, as it shows amazing complacency. The bottom line is we have very few vessels involved in this and they are not properly co-ordinated centrally. We have already seen a number of the countries involved saying, "To hell with what you say, we're coming there anyway". We will be made a laughing stock if we apply some rules and cannot enforce them. Will we now establish a centralised command system to control the various assets we have—far too few of them to be able to focus on things such as someone fishing illegally in the six-to-12 mile zone? Will we also ensure that we build some more ships and boats so that we can actually enforce this?

Lord Gardiner of Kimble: My Lords, the best thing may be if the noble Lord would be prepared to come with me to Newcastle to see the vessel-monitoring system, which I have learned a great deal about since his Question was on the Order Paper. It is a digital service which enables us to target those areas, so that we know every vessel that is at sea within our waters. I have some very interesting statistics on enforcement by the Royal Navy and others. In addition to that, not only are there three offshore patrol vessels but a further five new River class offshore patrol vessels are currently being built. They will be used for, among other things, fisheries protection. However, as I said earlier, we will have to review what we need to ensure that.

Baroness Jones of Whitchurch (Lab): My Lords, does the Minister accept that if we are to have sustainable fishing in the longer term, which obviously will need to be based on clear scientific evidence, there has to be some alignment and co-operation with neighbouring countries? Fish stocks cannot be managed unilaterally—fish shoals can sometimes move hundreds of miles. Indeed, our own fishermen sometimes fish from the north of Russia right down to southern Portugal. This

cannot be resolved by a unilateral declaration. There have to be detailed discussions because, as we know from the very good Brexit fisheries report produced by your Lordships' House, there is an incredibly complicated set of agreements in place. I hope the Minister will take the message back to the Secretary of State that there is no point in just making a unilateral declaration on this; there have to be thoughtful, detailed discussions on the future.

Lord Gardiner of Kimble: My Lords, I agree with a lot of what the noble Baroness says. We need to base our decisions on science. We have a responsibility under international law to have sustainable fish stocks, and I am pleased that in this country we have had some considerable successes in getting sustainable yields. The basis of this is that we have given two years' notice that we intend to leave the London fisheries convention, which is necessary under legal advice. We now need to negotiate with our partners and friends in Europe so that, as I say, we have a sustainable fishing industry. Also, for the first time we will have the ability to decide who fishes in our waters.

Baroness Parminter (LD): My Lords, our fishing industry contributes less than 0.5% to our country's GDP, yet it is hard to think of any industry that will be affected more by Brexit, along with the rural communities that fishermen come from. How are the Government going to guarantee that our fishermen and their industry are not used as a bargaining chip in the Brexit negotiations?

Lord Gardiner of Kimble: My Lords, I say to the noble Baroness that the chief executive of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations has said today that our giving withdrawal notice from the London fisheries convention,

"is welcome news and an important part of establishing the UK as an independent coastal state with sovereignty over its own exclusive economic zone".

The noble Baroness says that the fisheries sector makes a small contribution to our GDP, but it contributes £1.3 billion to the economy, employs 34,600 people in 6,000 fishing vessels, and landed 708,000 tonnes of fish worth £775 million. To the coastal and fishing communities of this country, the United Kingdom, that is a very important consequence. I assure her and your Lordships that we will be very conscious of their interests.

Baroness McIntosh of Pickering (Con): My Lords, does this mean that the inshore fishermen, with vessels under 10 metres, will have a higher quota? That would be very good news.

Lord Gardiner of Kimble: I am sure your Lordships will understand that these issues are all subject to negotiation. However, one of the things that we wish to do, in having the ability to control our own waters, is have a sustainable domestic fishing industry.

Lord Rooker (Lab): My Lords, almost exactly a year ago the EU sub-committee of this House published the first of the Brexit reports on fishing. Could the Minister tell the House what he thinks was the most significant paragraph in it?

Lord Gardiner of Kimble: I remember replying to the debate on that very interesting report, but I am afraid I cannot remember the precise details. I know that it featured the phrase “the requirement for co-operation”, which is clearly important; that it said we need to fish sustainably, which is also important; and that the sub-committee saw that there were opportunities for the domestic fishing industry. I remember the noble Lord, Lord Teverson, and the sub-committee giving us a very helpful and important report, which has and continues to have considerable consideration by the department.

Lord Spicer (Con): My Lords, is not the noble Lord, Lord West, with whom I often agree on many matters, arguing that the Royal Navy is out of control on fishing protection? Surely, that cannot be right.

Lord Gardiner of Kimble: We rely very much on the Royal Navy and I am pleased to acknowledge what it does, and has done over centuries, to help us with the protection of fisheries. It is very important that we work with the Royal Navy, Border Force and a number of other agencies, including the National Crime Agency, so that we not only have a sustainable and successful fishing industry but we co-operate, which we must do, with our partners in Europe so that we have robust and clear negotiations.

Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale (Lab): My Lords, will the Government guarantee as part of these discussions that the correct, accurate powers will be devolved to the devolved Administrations, where the powers coming back from Brussels tie in with the existing devolution settlement? Will they further guarantee that there will be an effort across the United Kingdom to establish a UK common fisheries policy with the co-operation of the four nations of the United Kingdom?

Lord Gardiner of Kimble: My Lords, I hear what the noble Lord said, and that is one area where close discussion and co-operation with all parts of the United Kingdom is very important indeed. We have had successful and continuing discussions with all Ministers concerned. We are certainly looking to have a UK policy in bringing back to this country our own fisheries policy. We are working with the devolved Administrations so that we are working together in the negotiations. This is a key area where all the coastal fishing communities of Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England are looking to the Government to secure a good deal for them.

Lord Campbell of Pittenweem (LD): My Lords, I appreciate that I may be inviting the Minister to depart a little from his responsibilities, but perhaps he would join me in welcoming the fact that there are reports in Scotland this weekend that the Government are about to place an order for a further three frigates to be built on the River Clyde—yet another illustration of the advantages to Scotland of being part of the United Kingdom and not being independent.

Lord Gardiner of Kimble: My Lords, what the noble Lord said is precisely what so many people are reflecting on: that unity in the United Kingdom is a force for good. I very much endorse the importance of vessels

being built for the Royal Navy in Scotland—and in other shipyards, but I am delighted if they are being constructed in those excellent shipyards, which have so much expertise in their workforce, over many generations.

Lord Pearson of Rannoch (UKIP): My Lords—

Lord Harris of Haringey (Lab): My Lords—

Noble Lords: Pearson!

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Earl Howe) (Con): My Lords, I apologise for intervening, but the noble Lord, Lord Pearson, has been trying to get in for a while. I hope that we will have time to hear from the noble Lord, Lord Harris, as well.

Lord Pearson of Rannoch: My Lords, I am most grateful. Will the Minister confirm to your Lordships that the figures he has given for the British fishing industry are for as it is now, in a state decimated by our membership of the European Union and the common fisheries policy? Can he give us any idea of the figures which pertain to the wonderful future when we have taken back control of all our waters, having left the common fisheries policy?

Lord Gardiner of Kimble: My Lords, our whole purpose is to ensure that we have a sustainable future for the UK fishing industry. It is the first time in 50 years that we will have been able to control access to our waters. That is a force for good because, in particular, it is very important that we have sustainable stocks for the future.

Bat Habitats Regulation Bill [HL]

First Reading

3.18 pm

A Bill to make provision to enhance the protection available for bat habitats in the vicinity of a building site and to limit the protection for bat habitats in buildings used for public worship.

The Bill was introduced by Lord Cormack, read a first time and ordered to be printed.

Civil Partnership Act 2004 (Amendment) (Sibling Couples) Bill [HL]

First Reading

3.18 pm

A Bill to amend the Civil Partnership Act 2004 to include sibling couples.

The Bill was introduced by Lord Lexden, read a first time and ordered to be printed.

Divorce (Financial Provision) Bill [HL]

First Reading

3.18 pm

A Bill to amend the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973 and make provision in connection with financial settlements following divorce.

The Bill was introduced by Baroness Deech, read a first time and ordered to be printed.

Duchy of Cornwall Bill [HL]

First Reading

3.19 pm

A Bill to amend the succession to the title of the Duke of Cornwall, to remove various powers, exemptions and immunities from the Duchy of Cornwall, to make provisions relating to the Treasury Solicitor and any solicitor or attorney appointed in the affairs of the Duchy, and for connected purposes.

The Bill was introduced by Lord Berkeley, read a first time and ordered to be printed.

Children Act 1989 (Amendment) (Female Genital Mutilation) Bill [HL]

First Reading

3.19 pm

A Bill to amend the Children Act 1989 to state that proceedings under Section 5A of, and Schedule 2 to, the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 are family proceedings.

The Bill was introduced by Lord Berkeley of Knighton, read a first time and ordered to be printed.

Development Aid Budget

Motion to Take Note

3.20 pm

Moved by **Baroness D'Souza**

That this House takes note of the case for measuring the impact of the United Kingdom's development aid budget.

Baroness D'Souza (CB): My Lords, development aid is a subject of much discussion, debate and starkly different opinions. For example, it is said that development aid is good and necessary, but we should not have a mandatory annual budget; money, after all, could be misused in order to meet targets. It is said that development aid is good and necessary and a mandatory annual budget allows proper longer-term planning, and that it achieves economic growth, albeit in modest terms, while others assert that aid has had no positive effect on growth. There is a further important division on development aid itself—that which is carried out by experts exported to a developing country to run a programme, or that which funds a recipient country to develop the skills and capacities to carry out development programmes itself. The issue here is that none of these viewpoints can be wholly rejected or accepted unless we know more about the effectiveness of aid in the medium to long term, and this in turn requires clear objectives and evidence-based evaluation.

There has been no dearth of debate on this topic in both Houses. Briefly, the 1970 UN target of 0.7% of gross national income, amounting in the last financial year in the UK to £13.5 billion, was eventually achieved in the 2015 international development Act under the coalition Government. This put to an end a pattern of aid flows generously funded by one Government to be

restricted by the next Administration, and so on. The Independent Commission for Aid Impact, or ICAI, was set up in 2011 to evaluate aid spending and its contribution to development results. Meanwhile, reports from the House of Commons International Development Committee, the All Party Parliamentary Group for Debt, Aid and Trade and the House of Lords Economic Affairs Select Committee in March 2012 all covered similar ground. But dissent continued. Last November, the Private Member's Bill proposed by the noble Lord, Lord Lipsey, aimed to amend the annual expenditure of £13 billion to a five-year cycle to enable some rollover and avoid unplanned project overspend at the end of each financial year. One view is that a predetermined, and indeed statutory, aid budget may lead to uncontrolled spending and a distortion of genuine and lasting development, another that the amount spent is less important than the result achieved. While it is always easier to demonstrate failure rather than success, the literature is not filled with examples of wasted aid, but nor is it heavy with proper methodological impact surveys.

More specific conclusions on UK development aid overall include that the Department for International Development emerges as a worldwide-respected and effective aid agent; economic growth is the essential ingredient for reducing poverty; there should be greater clarity on the aim of aid programmes; and, while aid is not the main driver of growth, it can and does play a catalytic role.

Development aid, formally defined as financial aid, “given by governments to support the economic, environmental, social and political development of developing countries”,

is a multibillion dollar business, which is changing, and we would do well to understand better what the longer-term implications are. I hope that this debate is not so much about aid spending but more concerned with the need to develop models that assess impact and, to paraphrase the noble Lord, Lord Judd, to ask how much aid adds to the creation of world justice, peace and stability.

A significant factor is the growing acceptance that giving aid is very tricky to accomplish, and even trickier to evaluate. It is difficult to make ambitious, large-scale aid work and especially difficult to improve the lot of the very poor. This is exacerbated by the fact that the goals of major aid programmes are often very different and sometimes inadequately articulated. These can range from reducing the incidence and prevalence of water-borne diseases, through increasing the income of a significant sector of the population to streamlining tax collection. The larger and more ambitious the development programme the more difficult it is to judge the outcomes, whereas focused and contained programmes that incorporate capacity building have effective long-term benefits, as is the case, for example, with immunisation programmes. However, the nature of aid is changing: budgets grow larger while, at the same time, there is reduced administrative support. I asked the Department for International Development to consider giving a grant to a school in Afghanistan, which would have met all DfID's objectives, and was asked: “Can you handle £10 million”? Well no, certainly not, but the inference was that it was not cost effective for that department to manage small grants.

There has also been a massive increase in private sector delivery, which has advantages and disadvantages. The older model of development assistance—a form of so-called soft power—has been based on the gradual building of enduring individual and institutional relationships with officials, government and otherwise, in the countries concerned and a resulting trust and joint ownership of outcomes. Working at country level, DfID has always been especially good at this extension of its political and diplomatic influence. A study by the Institute of Development Studies pointed out that effective aid requires as much investment in relationships as in managing money. The need for neat results often ignores the reality that effective aid is too often untidy and even messy.

However, private sector delivery is less committed to oversight of aid programmes, and the multiplicity of freelance experts, subcontractors, and commercially confidential information makes impact evaluation virtually impossible, while longer-term evaluation may not be in the interests of the private contractor. It certainly limits knowledge of local cultures, and therefore the likely outcomes, of a major aid programme. The move towards technical assistance also reflects the changing nature of aid. Technical assistance, such as help in setting up insurance schemes to help farmers when crops fail, is best delivered by the private sector which advises and runs such schemes. Yet again, although there will be excessive scrutiny of planned and actual expenditure—down to the last bus ticket in many cases—there is far less, if any, scrutiny of the impact of these schemes, which are usually expensive and less amenable to detailed examination. The growth of a whole industry of private sector companies which exist solely to win development assistance contracts is alarming. Following the earthquake in Haiti, some \$6 billion of aid was allocated to a country of 10 million people. Some 70% of the aid was delivered through private contractors and, as we know, the outcomes, or lack of them—notably the devastating cholera epidemic—are a continuing source of anger among the Haitian population.

Capital flows and trade far outweigh development aid, and the use of public money to incentivise private investment is fine and acceptable. However, this makes it far harder to assess how well money is spent, and aid delivered via other departments is harder to track. Despite these difficulties, it is nevertheless imperative that we do so. Since development deals with people, much cannot be reliably predicted, and all these variables make it extremely difficult to evaluate anything but the “simple” achievement of modest goals in proper time: that money has been spent roughly in accordance with the protocols and broadly within the timeframe set. Is this enough? Together with many others, I, think not and this is a legitimate question for the public to ask.

A search of the considerable literature reveals endless evaluation studies but very few long-term and reliable impact studies. A colleague cited an example which I think illustrates the kind of difficulties that arise: Lake Victoria Dam in Sri Lanka, a project conceived in 1978 and completed in 1985, aimed to provide hydroelectricity for a given population and thereby release them from the vagaries of fluctuating oil prices. Costs were astronomical but planned spin-offs included

consistent irrigation for several thousand farmers downstream. After more than 30 years’ operation, it is clear that the power output estimates have consistently fallen far short of predicted levels and the irrigation catchment area has been significantly smaller than anticipated. Estimates of the irrigation plan did not take into account major factors such as the leakage or the evaporation rate of the reservoir, and there were adverse unintended consequences: an increase in the incidence of malaria in the below-dam population; poor water quality affecting lakeside settlements; and a failure to capitalise on other benefits such as fisheries and recreation facilities.

An evaluation funded by the UK concluded that the whole project would have benefited from more comprehensive planning and more extensive data at the outset, and:

“Short term and partial studies by consultants are neither a cost-effective nor a professionally adequate substitute”.

The evaluation report also concedes that proper studies would have required,

“a mass of hydrological, financial, agricultural, social and environmental data and computer models developed over a number of years”.

One could argue that the cost was unacceptable and that the spin-off benefits were unrealistic. Would it, for example, have been more cost-effective to put the money required for the dam on a money market, with a guaranteed return which would have paid for oil and provided a profit? But would it have been possible to predict the investment return rates over the course of the building of the dam, or the fluctuations in the price of oil? It is this unpredictability that tends to defeat long-term impact studies.

Systems are needed to justify projects and calculate the so-called return rates, but systems do not necessarily reveal everything and are liable to manipulation. We do not as yet have sufficiently sophisticated mechanisms to measure outcomes, but this does not mean that we should abandon the focus on impact. A well-informed, plausible narrative by reasonable people of good will based on statements from project recipients—so called self-reported impact—is not to be sniffed at. Distrust arises when there are discrepancies between what is claimed and what little evidence is produced. For example, ICAI reviewed cash transfer programmes and pronounced them significant in reducing poverty and vulnerability and,

“presented a strong value for money case”.

Many of these cash transfers took the form of microcredit and microfinance schemes, but the large literature on access to finance, especially by women, shows it to have a very poor record. One respectable study even went so far as to say that many of these projects were counterproductive in the longer term in that they built up unsustainable debt and, in some cases, reinforced the gender inequalities already present in the society.

The mantra “aid works” repeated by the aid agencies is a bit like saying Brexit is Brexit. Of course aid works. The question is how well does it work, and whether,

“you might have to wait for your grandchildren to tell you”.—[*Official Report*, 18/11/16; col. 1668.],

[BARONESS D'SOUZA]

according to the noble Viscount, Lord Eccles, when questioning DfID aid channelled through the Asian Development Bank. Does the bald fact that 166,000 households out of several million were supplied with water tell you as much as you need to know? How much did it cost? How well is the water flowing? What are the maintenance costs? Are maintenance skills being taught? What is the consequent reduction in disease?

Does it matter? Should we spend even more millions on monitoring and evaluation reports and yet more consultants winging their way to underdeveloped countries? One can define good aid as the art of spending modest amounts over long periods in careful co-ordination with recipient Governments, in step with the ability to meet recurrent costs. On the whole, aid is benevolent and beneficial, but we need to dig deeper. “Bad” aid is bad for communities for many reasons, some of which are: it can preserve the status quo and release Governments from undertaking reform and development; it can create further divisions between the poor and the not so poor; it may protect corrupt Governments—in one example, the revenues of a World Bank-funded oil production project were used to buy arms; it will result in repeated ill-conceived programmes; and it may promote expensive self-interest purchasing on the part of donor countries to the detriment of local industries in recipient countries.

In a democratic country such as the UK we should have utter transparency on major expenditure in our name, and question whether aid is used for political purposes. Understanding based on evidence as to why some interventions work and others do not in different communities is crucial to ensure that aid inputs achieve desired results, or at least do not make things worse. In conclusion, therefore, it does matter that the long-term impact of development aid is systematically assessed and published.

3.35 pm

Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale (Lab): My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness for tabling this Motion for debate here this afternoon. It is the first specific debate of our new parliamentary Session and a very appropriate and timely topic to choose. I also welcome the Minister back in his post following the election. I think we all appreciate his knowledge of and commitment to this subject and to the department, and we look forward to working with him.

I was for many years a sceptic about the idea of putting the 0.7% target into legislation. At one time, it seemed that it was perhaps an unnecessary gesture which was detracting from the real debate that needed to take place. However, as the debate developed over the years and the department's budget grew, I became absolutely convinced that passing that legislation was essential, not just to secure the UK's contribution to a better world but, perhaps even more importantly, to allow us to move on to a debate about how we spend the money rather than how much money we are spending. I therefore welcome this debate in your Lordships' House, at the first opportunity in the new Session, on how to tackle some of these important issues.

I also welcome many of the initiatives over recent years of the last two Governments, both the coalition Government and the solely Conservative Government. The establishment of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact was a very good initiative; it was timely, necessary and appropriate, and it has produced some excellent reports that perhaps both we and the department should take more account of. The establishment of the Building Stability Overseas Strategy was also a very welcome initiative. However, like many other initiatives of the Government, I have some concerns about the way in which these initiatives are consistently followed, and about the subsequent impact of that on the impact of our aid and development spend.

I strongly believe that our development finance should increasingly be concentrated on the least-developed and the conflict-affected and fragile states rather than on those that are already making significant progress or which could easily do so with better governance. I also believe very strongly that we should be investing in capacity, particularly of the business environment in countries that need more jobs and better businesses, but also in the capacity of individual countries to run, manage and improve their own services and support their own communities rather than relying on finance and expertise from elsewhere.

As I said, I am concerned that the Government's overall commitments of 0.7% to effective international development spend, to engaging in the international arena on these issues, and to the new rules—as we discussed in the House earlier this afternoon—on overseas development assistance, which were welcome last year, are somehow not translated into updating and making as transparent as possible the expenditure of now both the Department for International Development and the other departments that are involved in overseas development assistance expenditure.

For example, since the Building Stability Overseas Strategy was agreed in, I think, 2011 and launched by the then Secretary of State, Andrew Mitchell, we have seen the development of the biggest conflict in the world today—in Syria—and all the implications that that has not just in the neighbouring countries but in Europe and beyond. We have seen the rise and fall of better governance in Libya and all the implications that that has in the wider areas in north and west Africa. We have also seen dramatic changes in Myanmar and more recently in the Philippines and south-east Asia, with a constantly changing conflict there. Therefore, our support for peacebuilding strategies needs to change as a result. We have also seen changes in the United Nations, yet we still have the same Building Stability Overseas Strategy as we had in 2011. In that time, the Government's commitment to expenditure on conflict-affected and fragile states has gone from 33% to over 50%, yet we have the same old strategy. It is out of date and should be updated to ensure that that increased expenditure, both in volume and percentage, is targeted in the right way on peacebuilding initiatives and conflict prevention in the right parts of the world.

Since 2010 we have seen the agreement on the millennium development goals—we have actually seen it since we debated in your Lordships' Chamber putting the 0.7% target into legislation—and we have seen the agreement on the sustainable development goals. Those

goals are very different from the MDGs. They encompass better governance and economic growth and investment in the sort of infrastructure that creates economic growth. Those were never mentioned in the millennium development goals but are now part of the SDGs. Goal 16 is a commitment to the institutions that promote peace and justice for all. These fundamental changes in the global goals—the UK was integral both to the debate and to the final agreement on them—are not yet fully reflected in the expenditure plans and strategies of the department two years on, and undoubtedly they are not yet given full regard in the other departments that are spending overseas development assistance. Yet again, that is an example of a need for clarity and a published strategy by the Government, as well as a linking of expenditure to the new framework—the SDGs—that is not yet transparent enough.

Specifically on the subject of impact, I notice yet again—even in the information that we each receive from those who contact us when these debates are about to take place about the impact and the effectiveness of UK aid—lists of figures relating to the number of children now going to school or the number of people who have had vaccinations or have access to clean water. These statistics get bandied around on these occasions. I appreciate that and welcome it, and I have seen it in action in different parts of the world. It is good news, and it is good that Britain makes its contribution to it, but to me it is much more important for us to look at the long-term impact that UK aid is making.

Where are we investing for the long term? Last year I saw projects in northern Nigeria and in Mombasa in Kenya that were investing in the life opportunities of young Muslims coming out of school with an inadequate education and no hope—they were being recruited by al-Shabaab in one case and by Boko Haram in another—yet through British aid they were getting an opportunity of an apprenticeship or of starting a business, with the necessary skills, support and mentoring that allowed them to do so. This is an impact that will not be seen next week or the week after or even next year or the year after but in five, 10 or 15 years' time, both in the life opportunities of those young people and their children and in the safety and security of the communities in which they live.

Also in terms of impact, I think that in many individual expenditures we realise the opportunity that we have, but when we talk about this we underestimate the opportunity to catalyse investment from others as well. I think our impact is not just the schools that we open, the teachers that we employ, the volunteers that we send or the vaccinations that British taxpayers pay for. It is the way in which that then catalyses all sorts of donations both from other Governments and from international organisations and private donors too.

I would like to see in the measurement of impact not just the individual numbers that make us feel good on the occasions when we have these debates, but a measurement that has some indication towards the long term and a measurement that indicates how we are catalysing the resources of others who share the objectives that we seek. I hope that in each of these areas the Minister will be able to give us a response.

3.45 pm

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): My Lords, it is always a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, as there is such common ground between us on these issues and he speaks a great deal of sense. I agree with him that we are lucky to have the opportunity, courtesy of the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza, to raise these issues today in a full debate in Parliament. In doing so, I also, from these Benches, welcome back the Minister to his brief and welcome the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, to her Front Bench role as a Whip covering this department. I wish her well.

There is no doubt that, when it comes to spending more than £13.5 billion of public money, there should be full and relentless scrutiny of how, where and on whom it is spent. This is a public duty on us as parliamentarians. Full accountability needs to be applied to Ministers or officials, too, if any of that money is misspent or misdirected. Focusing on these questions, rather than whether we should meet the 0.7% target, is a point on which I agree with the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, very strongly indeed. There is a wide consensus on this. This was shown during the passage of the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015.

If I have one area of slight disagreement with the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza, it is that I think it is still not the case that everybody agrees that aid works. There is still a school of thought that does not believe that overseas development assistance works and that development comes purely from private sector sources. I am not of that school, but many of those who hold that argument like to peddle a myth that the bulk of UK ODA is frittered away or wasted on corrupt programmes. When asked to provide evidence, they usually point to an individual programme that they happily mispresent in the process. Because it is impossible to deliver such a large budget without some errors or some programmes along the way that fail, these are used in vain against UK ODA over all. However, I suspect that that will not be the focus of this debate this afternoon, which is welcome.

Section 5 of the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015 covers the independent evaluation of the extent to which UK ODA,

“represents value for money in relation to the purposes for which it is provided”.

I agree very much with the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza, that this is hard. Given the breadth and the complexity of ODA across many different fields, it is often easier to calculate a numerical output for some aid programmes and harder to calculate outcomes, especially when many of these programmes are delivered in very difficult circumstances. It is also harder when UK aid programmes are delivered in a certain way that is not always consistent with the in-country way of budgeting and of delivering public services.

It is 10 years since I served on the Finance Committee in the Scottish Parliament. We had regular debates there about delivering services in the UK, when it came to public sector intervention, and about what outcomes were delivered, rather than simply outputs from the financial inputs. However, I am pleased to

[LORD PURVIS OF TWEED]

say that, since the passage of the Act, the structures in place for Parliament to scrutinise this work are proving effective. Indeed, in the most recent review of its own procedures, the Independent Commission of Aid Impact, which has been referred to, highlighted not only the number of reports it has carried out but also the fact that the Government listen to its advice. Many of the recommendations made by this independent body have been taken into consideration by DfID and acted on. Indeed, through the sub-committee of the IDC Committee in the Commons, the accountability to Parliament is also here.

I have no deep-seated objections to UK ODA being delivered by departments other than DfID, but we have to be cautious. The ambition of 40% of ODA being delivered outside DfID has had little debate in this House. I cannot recall since I have been a Member having a full debate on ODA in government time considering these issues. I do not doubt the commitment of the Minister when assurances are given that, for example, the department will not be subsumed into the FCO, and I hope that that will not allow any mutterings from those who argue for this to be the case. That is a distraction. In last week's debate on the Queen's Speech, the noble Lord, Lord Dannatt, questioned whether it would be better simply to amalgamate all development, diplomatic and security presence around the world into one, so there are still some voices. However, I hope that they are in the minority and do not distract us from where we really need to focus.

We have also seen growing global UK leadership on transparency and the calculation of effectiveness and delivery. In many respects, it is the delivery standards of DfID that are now being seen across the world as the leading approach. The 2015 Act requirement on government to demonstrate value for money and effectiveness is deliberately broad enough to ensure that all Whitehall departments have to be scrutinised by ICAI and be equally accountable to the IDC and not only to their own scrutiny committees in Parliament. Can the Minister assure the House that all necessary agreements are in place across Whitehall to ensure that that can be done properly and that there are no barriers to ICAI doing its work?

This is important not only to demonstrate to our own public that money is being well stewarded but because across the world we want to see the growing UK leadership in this respect being carried on. In the Global Fund's Aid Transparency Index, the UK, with its full government department, is the only country in the world that has retained its top status since the global transparency index of 2013. Other countries have looked to DfID as the exemplar and have copied our approach. In 2013, there were 26 donor countries in the very poor category of transparency; in 2016, there were only five. This is welcome. Interestingly, while the UK scored 88.3% on aid transparency, Italy scored just 16%, France 9.2% and China a derisory 2.2%. Given the extent of the delivery of trade and concessions for aid from China, Africa and elsewhere, a level of scrutiny on their programmes is almost impossible to carry out.

There is no question that the UK is a leader overall. It was therefore with more than a little concern in that

regard that I read the Conservative manifesto, which pointed to a slight differing in the direction going forward. In his response to the noble Lord, Lord Collins, in Questions today, the Minister indicated only part of the commitment in the Conservative manifesto. It states:

“So we will work with like-minded countries to change the rules so that they are updated and better reflect the breadth of our assistance around the world”—

which is what the Minister said. However, the following sentence states:

“If that does not work, we will change the law to allow us to use a better definition of development spending, while continuing to meet our 0.7 per cent target”.

This begs the question whether the Government have ruled out unilateral changes to our approach on ODA. We have not only complied with the DAC rules but have been a leader in their delivery. Can the Minister rule out any unilateral moves away from that?

Which are the like-minded countries referred to who also wish to change the rules? What changes are the Government seeking? Can the Minister give examples of specific projects that are not currently covered under OECD rules that the Government would like to see counted as aid? What assessment have they done of the impact that increased links between defence and aid may bring about—if, indeed, this is the Government's intention? I hope the Minister will have an opportunity to address some of these points.

Finally, on the basis of the continuing and very welcome wide consensus in this House, I have said that the UK comprises just 0.6% of the world's population but that we punch considerably above our weight on the international stage. I feel that this may well be diminished by Brexit, but that is a separate issue and for a different debate. The UK is a global citizen and we demonstrate leadership around the world, so if the Prime Minister's tagline of a “global Britain” is anything, it is indeed that British aid works, that UK leadership is gaining results and that we should do nothing to undermine it.

3.55 pm

The Lord Bishop of Truro: My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza, for initiating this debate on such a very important and topical issue.

As no doubt we will hear from other speakers, the UK is known around the world as a leader in international development. It has achieved great results during the past two decades. I have no doubt of the importance of the case for measuring the impact of our development aid. I want to underline that case and also, perhaps more importantly for me, to ensure that we try to measure the right things if we can and do not understand aid only as a financial investment which can be measured simply in financial terms. I fear that too many people in our debate will go immediately from talking about aid to talking about money and finances rather than going back and thinking about what the word “development” might mean. It seems that development is in itself a fascinating idea in our world today with perhaps an assumption that other countries are less developed than we are. We must be careful about the assumptions and presuppositions we make when we use the word.

For more than 40 years, the Church of England has campaigned for the UK to spend 0.7% of gross national income on aid and has applauded the commitment made by the Government back in 2013. Despite pressure to drop aid spending, it has been reassuring to see that all the major political parties have again recognised its importance and continued with the commitment to allocate 0.7% of our GNI to overseas aid.

Aid is not expensive. It costs the average taxpayer less than £1 a week to support some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world. This money can be used effectively to prevent the arrival of larger and more expensive problems further down the line, again showing the difficulties around how we measure impacts. The Church sees the benefits of aid money through its extensive international links. The Anglican communion is one of the largest international networks and has supported DfID over the years effectively to channel money into the poorest communities worldwide when other avenues are not available. Church networks complement the work of the aid agencies and are often able to reach further, especially in areas of conflict or where natural disasters have disrupted established communication and infrastructure links.

When I served as the Bishop of Sherborne, I had the privilege to visit what was then Sudan in my capacity as chair of the Salisbury Sudan Link. I was able to visit several areas of both Sudan and what is now South Sudan, which sadly is covered by people fleeing the continuing and terrible violence. Tribalism and poverty make for a toxic cocktail. Almost 3.5 million innocent people in South Sudan have been forced from their homes and are desperately in need of food, safety and hope. Christian Aid is partnering with the Episcopal Church of Sudan and South Sudan and other local partners to provide for the practical needs of some of the most vulnerable.

Back in February, when famine was officially declared, the UK Government announced substantial funding for humanitarian relief in the form of food, clean water and healthcare. Without that aid, and the work of agencies such as Christian Aid and their local partners, the situation for many of those affected would be even more unbearable. I was delighted to see today that the Minister of State, the right honourable Alistair Burt, is out in Myanmar seeing at first hand how our aid money is supporting vaccination programmes and farming communities. In the previous coalition, we saw the Government promoting the positive stories about UK Aid Direct, and we need to see more of this. Of course, it is not perfect and there is always room for improvement, but there is a great deal to be proud of and to build on. Despite what we read in some of the more populist press, aid has high levels of support in this country and needs to be seen as a positive contribution to the world, especially in the new climate of Brexit in which we currently find ourselves.

Our changing climate is also one of the biggest factors shaping the future for many of the world's poorest people. It is affecting everything from harvests to clean water, causing drought and extreme floods and the spread of diseases. One important way we can use aid is to boost access to clean energy, especially given that nearly 1.1 billion people in the world still have no access to electricity. Without power in schools,

hospitals and businesses, it is very difficult to combat poverty. In sub-Saharan Africa, around 70% of people have no access to electricity—80% in rural areas. It is important that we ensure access to energy for people, but also ensure that it is clean energy so that we do not contribute towards increasing climate change—another example of how complicated it is to assess impact.

It is my belief that aid should continue to focus first and foremost on poverty reduction and the alleviation of suffering, and not be diverted by, for instance, security or other geopolitical considerations. Of course it is right that we develop the right measures for the impact of our aid investment and improve it all the time so that every penny is spent as effectively as possible. However, I question how we do that and what measures we can use. As a framework, the sustainable development goals are very useful for this. I would like to know how the Government propose to deliver the SDGs at home and overseas. I ask the Minister: what will the Government do differently to meet the new SDGs and will they regularly report to Parliament on their progress?

There are other ways UK aid can be made even more effective. Not all UK aid meets the highest transparency and effectiveness standards. Regardless of which department spends it, these standards should be met. Will the Government continue to commit themselves to transparency and accountability, especially when other departments spend DfID money, as other noble Lords have mentioned?

There is already much to affirm and encourage in the UK's response to the needs of the world's poorest people. We must not, however, be complacent: there are pressures from many directions on the levels of aid, how it is spent, and, as we are debating, how we can assess impacts. The UK must not pull back from its leadership role; if anything we should aim even higher, demonstrating to our G7 and G20 partners that it is possible to meet our international commitments. It is a question of morality, justice and basic humanity.

My final point is that talk of impact should not always assume we are considering money or financial aid. I fear we live in very individualistic times and our society is more and more atomised. If we are not careful, we equate development aid simply to financial benefits or losses. Development aid in fact should mean that we all consider what it means to achieve development. We are partners with others around the world and part of the impact we measure should be what effect other people and places have on us. I mentioned the privilege I had of travelling on several occasions to Sudan and South Sudan. The real need in South Sudan is for help in governance and capacity.

There is an undeniable case for measuring the impact of our development aid, but it should not be a measure simply in numbers or focusing on only financial investment. It must be a measure that understands the sophisticated issues behind development and the interdependence at the heart of working with others.

4.03 pm

Baroness Verma (Con): My Lords, I join all noble Lords in congratulating the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza, on securing the debate. It is a great honour to follow the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of

[BARONESS VERMA]

Truro. I agree with him that this is not just about measuring aid in financial terms. However, most of the data we collect have to have an output somewhere—and, as often as not, it is measured in financial terms.

I had the privilege of serving as a Minister in DfID. I reassure noble Lords that the Government I served in were mindful of the way the media reported on how aid from the UK was spent. I can tell noble Lords that under Justine Greening—and, I am sure, under the current Secretary of State—there was a real pressure on all of us to justify how we funded programmes. However, it is important that we also acknowledge that, unless we collect data and then have the ability to measure outcomes, it will always service those people who have a negative or less favourable view on the impact of aid.

We talk about development aid as we used to talk about it 30 or 40 years ago. The world has changed dramatically in terms of the countries that we now support or the countries that support us in helping others. Our approach and narrative need to change with it. I refer noble Lords to my own interests as declared in the House of Lords register. I support a platform that encourages working with the UN on collecting data through blockchain to measure how the private sector works with Governments and the third sector, and to see how money put in is spent and what outcomes can be measured. For far too long, we have allowed the third sector and the corporate sector to operate on their own. We need to encourage work across all three parts of the equation, so that government, the third sector and the corporate sector are accountable to the people whom we all desperately want to help.

We also need to ensure that the agencies that we support reform and work better together. I had the task of looking at the agencies in the UN and the EU. Often, they did not talk to one another. If we look at the SDGs and focus just on women and girls, we see that they have multiple challenges. It is not that they have challenges in respect of just one SDG; the SDGs have an impact on them across an age spectrum, an ability/disability spectrum as well as all the other challenges that women and girls face. We need to make sure that the department continues to press hard and that the agencies that we fund deliver to the standards that we expect of them. However, there must also be transparency and they must show that they are not working completely in silos.

I want to encourage those of us who make a difference to the third sector to ask those in it to work better together so that their data are gathered collectively and we can have much more of an ecosystem response to the impact of what third sector agencies do. Agencies themselves often operate in silos. It is important that they come together and demonstrate that they can work collectively across multiple facets that have an impact on individuals in developing countries.

I am really pleased that the department is making available funds for smaller organisations, because it is the grass-roots, face-to-face impact of smaller organisations, particularly those which innovate within the development space, that we do not always manage to measure from some of our big organisations.

I encourage my noble friend to look at the whole ecosystem of how we deliver aid and not to look at it as a stop-start process. We often forget that, throughout the cycle, many challenges face older people within developing nations. I was horrified to find that all data collection for women stops at the age of 49. I hope that that is being challenged and that, as aid works and as people live longer in developing countries, we are able to measure beyond the age of 49. I hope that we are able to support the United Nations convention on older people.

I worked incredibly hard within the department to look at inclusive societies. While some countries still sit outside a number of areas that this country is proud to support, I hope that we will not stop with our gentle, soft diplomacy as well as some of the hard conversations that other departments can have. I hope that we will not take our foot off the pedal on making sure that we continue to work on our mission of inclusive societies.

I come back to the measurement of data. It is critical and crucial that, when we get negative stories, they are countered quickly. A lot of our departments deliver aid—the Foreign Office, the Department of Health and the Ministry of Defence—and it is absolutely critical that those departments have the same measurements and transparency tools that we had, which I saw and that the Minister is absolutely aware of in DfID. Unless we have that consistency across all departments, we will continue to firefight some of these rather ridiculous stories that come out in the press now and then.

We should be incredibly proud of the fact that we are a country committed to the poorest people on the planet. That does not mean that we should not also fight hard to stop the discriminating tariffs that prevent these countries from developing economically on their own. It is really important that we help them economically build up their own marketplace and infrastructure in their own countries. As the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, said, in doing that we should also focus on capacity building. The reason we have a lot of issues around young people in developing countries is because they have a dividend of young people. It is a great advantage to have those young people if they can be engaged in meaningful education and employment in their countries.

If anything, we should really try to work harder on this—not only ourselves but other countries, too. That is not just like-minded countries; I worked incredibly hard with unlike-minded countries. At the end of the day, they have a very different vision of what they see as aid. They were looking to the UK for support in delivering their aid programmes. So it is about looking at new partners and old, but not forgetting that we have been a world leader. Our narrative needs to remain that we are a world leader. Sometimes, we need to stand up even more firmly to those who try to change the goalposts simply because it is politically astute to do so in their home countries.

4.12 pm

Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe (Lab): My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza, for introducing

this debate and giving us a timely opportunity to make the case for the importance of UK aid and of continuing to spend it effectively.

First, I echo what others said in recognising the tremendous work the UK has already done and continues to do on the international aid front. We do it quite simply because giving aid is the right thing to do. More than 700 million people today live in extreme poverty. The challenges they face include food shortages, disease, natural disasters and conflict. Limited access to healthcare and education compounds and continues the cycle of poverty. We can help—and we do. The UK gives aid because it makes a difference. UK aid is effective. The charity ActionAid reminds us that UK aid has helped to immunise more than 55 million children against preventable diseases and provides 60 million people with access to water, sanitation or interventions to promote hygiene.

My noble friend Lord McConnell pleaded persuasively not just for such clear, immediate outcomes—good as they are—but for longer-term commitments that deliver wider-scale outcomes. I cite one particular programme that seems to exemplify this: in humanitarian aid, the UK led the way in tackling the Ebola crisis in west Africa. I have mentioned before in this House the expertise at King's College London, which contributed so much to the UK's role in helping Sierra Leone conquer this terrible disease. King's strong background in global health and the creation of the King's Sierra Leone Partnership meant it was able to step up its work in response to the Ebola outbreak, enabling it to treat an estimated one-quarter of the Ebola cases recorded in the country. But since then King's has contributed enormously to healthcare capacity building in the region, demonstrating the vital role that university health partnerships can have in creating sustainable healthcare systems for the long term and globally. We should be able to demonstrate sustained benefits for the longer term in all our aid programmes.

It is to this Government's credit that they have pledged to continue to meet the UK's target of spending 0.7% of our gross national income on official development assistance—ODA, as it is normally referred to. This is entirely in line with the promises we made at the 2005 G8 summit. Of the 15 EU countries that made the pledge in 2005, only the UK and Germany have risen to the challenge since then. The UK was the first to meet that target—in 2013, before it became a legal requirement in 2015. As others have observed, the UK was one of just eight countries to meet that target last year. Indeed, eight of the 15 have actually reduced their ODA spending as a proportion of GNI since 2005. To meet our commitment, our ODA spending nearly doubled between 2005 and 2016, from £7.4 billion to £13.6 billion in today's terms. To continue to meet that commitment, we will need to increase our ODA spending by another £1 billion from now until 2021.

As we have heard, most of our ODA or foreign aid spending is done by the Department for International Development. Between 2010-11 and 2016-17, spending by DfID rose by 24%—at a time when budgets for departments other than health, education and defence were cut by an average of 28%. It is worth noting that bilateral aid makes up almost two-thirds of UK ODA. This means it goes to specific countries, regions or

programmes, and spending is controlled almost entirely by us as a donor, unlike multilateral aid, which is channelled through organisations engaged in development work, with little condition on exactly how the funds are spent.

The recent IFS report, *The Changing Landscape of UK Aid*, highlights the fact that the UK—specifically, the Department for International Development—is seen internationally as,

“a leader in shaping the global development agenda”.

Importantly, the report also notes that despite being one of the smallest areas of government spending, it is one of the most scrutinised. The International Development Committee, the National Audit Office, the Public Accounts Committee and the Independent Commission for Aid Impact all have a monitoring role to ensure that overseas aid is properly spent. DfID is rated in the highest category in the international Aid Transparency Index, and the most recent peer review of the UK aid strategy by the OECD in 2014 was largely positive about the UK's performance. No less a philanthropist than Microsoft founder Bill Gates has said that DfID is,

“one of the most effective, efficient, and innovative aid agencies in the world”.

I was filled with alarm, therefore, when I realised that the strategic focus of the UK aid commitment has shifted to support aid “in the national interest”. This approach seems to mean that when Britain is determining how it will meet its responsibility to the world's poorest, it will make a judgment based on what,

“best serves and protects its own security and interests”.

So while we are reducing poverty, we are also looking to improve the business climate and create international business opportunities for UK companies. I suspect that there will be huge challenges in the evaluation of the impact of these two very different aims. I cannot help but also feel that in our relationships with our partners overseas, it will be counterproductive. The noble Lord, Lord Purvis, raised similar concerns, and I will listen very keenly to the Minister's response to his questions.

Money is being diverted to other government departments which may not be subject to the same scrutiny as DfID, as we have heard already. Between 2014 and 2016, there was a 12 percentage point drop in the proportion of the ODA budget received by DfID. In 2017-18, 20% of the UK's ODA is due to be spent by departments other than DfID or by cross-government funds. That is set to rise to 25% by 2019-20. I feel this should be a matter of real concern, particularly in relation to evaluation, because while DfID is a world leader in delivering aid, the aid spent by other departments does not meet the same high standards. Where DfID was rated very good, the highest category in the Aid Transparency Index, the Foreign Office was ranked poor and the MoD very poor. How can we be sure that the Government will live up to their promise that all departments will follow the same high standards as DfID on fighting poverty? How can we be sure that they will remain transparent and accountable?

A further concern is the recent indication that international definitions of development assistance will be changed to,

“better reflect the breadth of our assistance around the world”.

[BARONESS WARWICK OF UNDERCLIFFE]

Redrawing the definition of what constitutes foreign aid to include work that the UK already does abroad but which cannot currently count towards the 0.7% target has worrying echoes of the changes to the definition of child poverty a couple of years ago. The Government have built on a great track record of generosity from the UK and a strong reputation for effective aid. Will the Minister tell the House how he will ensure that this is not put at risk by poor evaluation of the impact of spend from other government departments?

4.20 pm

Lord Bruce of Bennachie (LD): My Lords, I, too, thank the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza, for giving us the opportunity to have this debate. I found her opening speech interesting and a little challenging. Having had the privilege of being chair of the International Development Committee when ICAI was set up, seeing that process proceed and working with the National Audit Office, I agree that we have got to a much better system for accountability, but there is always room for improvement. In the beginning, ICAI was accountancy-led, but it became much more understanding of the complexity of development and therefore more effective. There is certainly justification for transparency, but we also have mechanisms in place that can improve it. The noble Baroness identified that there is a danger that if we call for too much we will create a whole other industry of evaluation and monitoring that might get in the way of delivery. I draw noble Lords' attention to my interests as set out in the register.

Not surprisingly, given my background, I am a strong believer in the effectiveness of UK aid and its impact. I have had the privilege of seeing it in action in many parts of the world. However, I recognise that the way aid is carried out and its objectives are not well understood, certainly by the wider public. As many people have said, we should do it, because in spite of all our problems we are a rich country and, frankly, people living in this country cannot really comprehend how you can live on less than \$2 a day.

I also accept that it is perfectly reasonable for the Government to want to offer practical examples of positive results and to show that aid is justified by altruism—there is nothing wrong with that—but it also serves the national interest. There is nothing wrong with using aid to strengthen the economic capacity of developing countries so that they can grow their income and tax base and lift their people out of poverty. On the contrary, in the end that is how we can achieve sustainable development. It is also in our interest to ensure that as countries industrialise, which the right reverend Prelate mentioned, they do so in the cleanest and most environmentally sensible way, which is not necessarily the cheapest, so it is perfectly legitimate for them to look for some assistance.

Most of us welcome the cross-party commitment to delivering 0.7% and wish it to continue and to continue to be pro poor. I hope that the Government will continue to resist calls to cut the aid budget—as, for example, this weekend, in order to fund ending the cap on public sector pay. That would be raiding the

poorest people in the world in order to fund easing relative poverty at home and would be a shameful misuse of resources.

It is also worth noting that, contrary to what many critics believe, the aid budget is under pressure. There is an idea that we cannot get rid of the money and that somehow spending it is difficult. The refugee crisis has led to unprecedented sums being spent supporting displaced people across the Middle East. The UK can be justifiably proud of that response, but it has come at the expense of longer-term development funding. Clearly, the devaluation of sterling in the past year has reduced the purchasing power of the UK aid budget. The exchange rate differential between the UK and developing countries has altered by more than 20% in many cases. Can the Minister give any indication of how many programmes have or are having to be cut as a result? People in the department have told me that that is clearly happening.

The IDC recently reported on the role of contractors and partners. NGOs, private sector contractors, think tanks and private businesses are all legitimate and important partners, but the recent report on that use of private contractors led to a focus on Adam Smith International, which was severely criticised for co-ordinating its evidence to the Select Committee. Although there is no evidence that the evidence was actually fraudulent, it was certainly not particularly well constructed. As a result of that, my understanding is that DfID has halted or cancelled a significant number of ASI programmes, leading to about a third of the staff in that company being made redundant currently. That is unfortunate, because it is the dedicated professional delivery staff who are losing their jobs as a result of mismanagement at senior management level. Again, this could have implications for the delivery of programmes if they are terminated before they are followed through or completed. Can the Minister indicate how many programmes have been disrupted and what action is being taken to ensure that the aims of these programmes can still be achieved? I make it clear that I have no interests in ASI and no connection with it; nor have I spoken to it. This is only what I see and hear.

Can the Minister also explain how DfID monitors and works with the impact of ODA spending by other government departments? A number of noble Lords have raised this point. We have had indications or hints in the past of a turf war, with some Ministers being reportedly, not publicly, less respectful of the role of DfID in ensuring that ODA is compliant with both UK and international law and that it meets genuinely pro-poor development objectives. I am in favour of joined-up government, and there is nothing wrong with ODA being spent by several government departments as long as it is co-ordinated and coherent and the same rules apply across the piece. The noble Baroness who spoke before me mentioned King's and the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone, which was a good example of cross-government and cross-departmental work that helped to deliver a solution to a problem that got out of control.

Generally speaking, the Foreign Office and DfID can work well together, especially where they are collocated in our embassies overseas, which mostly they are.

Indeed, that is a virtue, because it is good to get the political environment and development objectives co-ordinated and not operating in separate silos. I am certainly in favour of that.

According to the Library briefing, the business department is the department that accounts for the largest share of non-DfID ODA. Again, this is not necessarily a problem, but I do not think many of us are really quite clear exactly what the business department is doing with that ODA money. Most of it may well be going into the climate fund and/or the prosperity fund, but, again, could the Minister, either now or subsequently in writing, give more details of the main development objectives in the business department? That would reassure people who are concerned and give us a better understanding of how the departments work together.

I will raise another issue quickly. Can the Minister provide an update on DfID gender policy and the prioritisation of disability in our aid objectives? Canada has just published its new development strategy—I have a copy here—which it explicitly defines as feminist. There is no doubt that the low status of women and girls in many countries is the single biggest barrier to development. I know this issue is dear to the heart of the noble Baroness, Lady Tonge, who is speaking after me. Access to effective family planning and safe abortion is craved by millions of women, along with freedom from violence, from female genital mutilation, from child marriage and from exploitation. Lack of legal and financial rights also holds development back.

The Canadian example contrasts sharply with the Trump policy, which really is trying to deny women access to these services. The Government have a very good record on this, but now that the Netherlands and Canada have stepped up to the plate I wonder whether it will be pushed even further up the priority list in their new development strategy.

Can the Minister give us any update on disability commitments, which my noble friend Lady Featherstone championed when she was a Minister, as she did the issues of violence and female genital mutilation? I have a particular interest in deafness, but I believe that standing up for the rights of all disabled people in poor developing countries is something that donors such as the UK should prioritise. Too often they are swept away, ignored and stigmatised. Challenging stigma and encouraging all policymakers to champion a positive approach to supporting disabled people should surely be an integral part of development programmes.

I conclude by saying that providing women with legal rights, access to contraception and better maternal and child healthcare has been shown to have a positive impact on reducing poverty and limiting potentially explosive population growth. Back that up with better education and skills training and the seeds of successful development are sown. Let us not be diverted by cutting our aid budget or redefining it in ways that reduce the impact on ending poverty. Let us do what we set out to do, which is to use our aid budget to make the quality of life of the world's poor better and to eliminate poverty by 2030.

4.30 pm

Baroness Tonge (Non-Aff): My Lords, it is a great pleasure to follow my erstwhile colleague. I was going to say “late colleague” but he might have taken that the wrong way. At one time he held the most coveted position in the House of Commons—or at least most coveted by me—as chair of the International Development Committee.

I also thank the noble Baroness, Lady D’Souza, for securing this debate. It is always important to bear in mind, when congratulating ourselves on our commitment to help the poorest people in the world, that we should ensure its effectiveness and monitor its impact, particularly in relation to the sustainable development goals, which were mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord McConnell. Aid to the poorest people in the world does not just benefit them, if properly spent, but will benefit us in the longer term by reducing migration and expanding our markets. Do not forget that it is also the right and moral thing to do, as several noble Lords have already said. People sometimes forget that, so it is worth reminding ourselves of it.

I remember Justine Greening pledging to scrutinise the aid budget like never before when she became Secretary of State—and Priti Patel is doing the same thing. That is what they do, and of course they should. However, this country’s record is second to none. We have an all-party commitment to 0.7% of GNI to be spent on development aid, and it is worth noting that the International Development Committee, the National Audit Office, the Public Accounts Committee and the Independent Commission for Aid Impact all scrutinise the aid budget more than any other, it would seem. Added to all this scrutiny, as we have heard from the noble Baroness, Lady Warwick, Bill Gates, who is to be admired, has said:

“DFID is widely recognised as one of the most effective, efficient, and innovative aid agencies in the world”—while the campaign for aid transparency Publish What You Fund rated DfID as “very good”, the highest category in its aid transparency index.

There is a long list of what UK aid has helped to do. For example, it has saved the lives of 103,000 women in childbirth, enabled 9.9 million more women to access family planning and provided safe abortions, especially for women raped in conflict. There is no greater impact we can have on development—here it comes—than empowering women, and the best way of doing that is to give them power over their own bodies in the form of family planning. This issue is so misread, and it frustrates me terribly that it is not number one on everyone’s list. If you want a country to develop economically you have to empower women, and to empower them you have to give them access to family planning. That is crucial. Alongside that, bed net distribution has halved the number of deaths from malaria; children are being vaccinated; there is more education, clean water and sanitation—the list goes on and on. There is our impact.

For aid to be effective, though, the recipients must have consistency and reliability, and this is currently at risk under the new Government. Governments of developing countries need to be able to plan and carry their projects forward. NGOs cannot plan if they do not have consistency of funding. I pick out as examples

[BARONESS TONGE]

Marie Stopes International and the International Planned Parenthood Federation, which no longer receive core funding from DfID and have been waiting for guidelines since last autumn to know how to apply for funding—not how to get it but how to apply for it—for the family planning and safe abortion work that they do among women and girls, particularly for the large cohort of young people that we have heard about in some of the most marginalised communities in the world. This work has already been held up for nearly a year.

Will the Minister please tell us when this matter will be dealt with? Women and girls are suffering because of indecision at DfID under the new regime. It seems that everyone from the Secretary of State downwards is saying the right things and supporting development, but there is no action on funding for big NGOs such as those I have mentioned.

I understand that in 2017-18—again, the noble Baroness, Lady Warwick, mentioned this—20% of the aid budget is to be spent in other departments, which will rise to 25% the year after. Will the Minister confirm this and also that these departments are not rated as efficient as the Department for International Development? It is very worrying that the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence will be receiving DfID's money when we know that they are not very efficient at spending the money they have already. The Minister should reassure us on this point.

Finally, on a matter very close to my heart and related to the Foreign Office budget, for how much longer will our aid budget be spent on providing health services and education for the people of Palestine, who could well provide it themselves if they were free to do so and their economy was functional? What impact are the grants to UNRWA to assist Palestinian refugees having? Why is it that we are—and have been for 50 years—supporting and funding the occupation of Palestine by another country, a rich country to boot, while doing nothing to resolve the situation that makes the aid necessary?

Have we ever done this before in our history? The occupying power under international law is responsible for the welfare of the people it is occupying. For 50 years, we have been shoring it up. To use our Department for International Development budget to help pay for Israel's illegal occupation over 50 years surely makes us also complicit in breaking international law. Considering the length of time for which this outrage has been allowed to continue, it is an extremely ineffective way of using our aid budget—which is what this debate is all about.

4.38 pm

Lord Judd (Lab): My Lords, I join all those noble Lords who have thanked the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza, for having introduced this debate. It is terrific to see her in her emancipation leading so forcefully on such a vital issue.

I declare an interest because of my past ministerial responsibilities at the Ministry of Overseas Development, as it then was, at the Foreign Office and at the Ministry of Defence, and because of a great deal of my life spent voluntarily and professionally in organisations in the voluntary sector.

I have one worry underlying this debate: I wish we would stop using the word “impact”. We are talking about development; development enables people to take control of their own lives and take them forward, and enables Governments and communities to take charge of their own affairs and carry them forward. “Impact” is not the right language for doing that; we should talk about contribution or, as my noble friend Lord McConnell put it, effectiveness. Those are the sort of words that we should be using.

The other thing that we should watch carefully is the contrast between long and short term—and, of course, “impact” lends itself to the short term. We have seen that in conflict situations, when the army liberates an area and wants to see something done quickly. DfID may have reservations and say, “This is not going to be sustainable—it's not the best thing to do in the long run”, and we have to look at that. It is also about empowerment, which means prioritising education; it means, of course, income generation, and sweeping up the gender issues in that income generation. But it is not just about women; it is also about too many millions of young men, idle in their community, unemployed and prey to extremism. We really have to think about that very hard.

It is also about multilateral agencies. If my life has taught me anything, it is that competitive aid is doing harm. We need to co-ordinate our efforts with others, sometimes running joint programmes—but not necessarily just that; it is about co-ordinating the priorities that we share. It is also about refugees and displaced people. The difficulties and issues that we face at the moment in this sphere are child's play by comparison with what is going to happen in future if one looks at climate change alone. That demands a global strategy on how we meet these challenges. What exactly are the Government doing to develop those global strategies; how far are they working closely, hand in glove, with UNHCR in this context?

It is about justice. We love to talk about the rule of law, but justice costs money. How do you establish effective systems of justice in the poorest countries in the world? They do not come cheaply. It means that a great deal of resources have to be targeted and provided. And it is also about having security sector reform, because nothing will progress without peace and stability, and the security sector is vitally important. It has to be a sector in which people and communities have confidence, operating to the highest standards of integrity and with a real commitment to human rights.

We have great NGOs in this country—I can say that from personal experience—and their briefing is always invaluable, based as it is, invariably, on the authority of engagement. I have listened to this debate so far and seen that the briefing has not been lacking; it is clear that the NGOs are at work.

Fifty percent of DfID's budget goes to fragile states. We need to hear more precisely about how in such fragile states, often in acute conflict, DfID and the Government's commitment—our commitment—to human rights, sustainable development goals and poverty alleviation is being sustained and developed.

I can see very great potential advantages of interdepartmental co-operation and, similarly, of interdepartmental ministerial appointments. But it is

not just about intellectually seeing it as a good idea; it is about how it is actually helping in these situations. Are the principles, priorities and commitments of DfID really being upheld? Is it really in the driving seat? Otherwise, we must worry that public funds and taxpayers' money may be going to activities which cannot be justified by the aid programme.

There is a disturbing rise in civilian casualties in conflict areas, particularly in siege situations. We need to ask how, in situations where people are really suffering—and, as has been discussed, they are doing so at this moment—DfID's priorities and the Government's professed objectives are being upheld and the standards fulfilled. It is going to be tough and complex but we need to know how it is being done. In general, we also need to know how closely DfID and the Foreign Office are really working together in the application of human rights. In the immediate situation for refugees—not least those in the central Mediterranean area—how are we ensuring that commitments to human rights and the protection of children are being upheld? I am alarmed to hear stories about border patrols, which we may be financing, arresting children who then end up in prison. We need to watch things like that and it would be good to hear more from the Minister.

In conclusion, it is refreshing that Bond, the global forum of our NGO community, has reminded us of the words of the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams—the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Williams of Oystermouth—in April this year. He put it extremely well, saying that,

“aid is not about creating dependence but helping people become valued partners and co-workers for a safe and equitable world”.

4.47 pm

Lord Alderdice (LD): My Lords, the House knows, and was reminded again this afternoon, of the depth and length of the commitment which the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza, has to these matters; it is indebted to her again for this debate. I declare an interest as chairman of the Centre for Democracy and Peace Building and of the Centre for the Resolution of Intractable Conflict at Oxford.

It is a source of considerable pride and satisfaction for many in your Lordships' House and for our country that, with the initiative of Mike Moore and my noble friend Lord Purvis of Tweed, we now commit 0.7% of GNI to international development as a legal commitment, as well as a moral one. Coming from my background, I regard this as a kind of tithe—a commitment we make to show our generosity of spirit and determination to make a better world. It is not purely a question of assessing effectiveness, but it is important to evaluate what our money goes to. In DfID and the British Council, we have two organisations that our country uses internationally and which are much better appreciated abroad than they are at home. They are singular organisations with a global and positive impact. I do not want what I say to take anything away from the very positive things that DfID does, but we are here to try to hold the Government to account and I will touch briefly on four issues.

On the question of evaluation, one has to be a little careful to evaluate the right thing. For example, in the case of Northern Ireland, there was an assumption that the problem of the conflict was one of socioeconomic disadvantage. So even during Mrs Thatcher's time, when money was tight here, lots of money was put into Catholic nationalist and, indeed, Protestant loyalist, areas of Northern Ireland. If you had measured how much went in and some of the economic impacts, it would all have looked very good. However, it did nothing to resolve the conflict. It created upwardly mobile Provos, but it did not stop the conflict because it was not about economics but about other issues. Therefore, when we evaluate, we need to think what we are evaluating and whether it is the purpose for which we are giving the money. That is often not the case because of the dominance of an economic view of humanity and its difficulties. Economics is important, but it is not the sole driving feature and, in resolving economic problems, economic aid is not always the best or only way to address them.

First, I touch on the question of conflict. The first paragraph of Article 1 of the charter establishing the United Nations states that it was set up to address conflict. Many years later, it has produced 17 sustainable development goals. Number 17 is about implementation. The issue of conflict does not arise until SDG 16, and it is there with two or three other issues. Why is that? It is because many of the member nations of the United Nations did not want it there at all. Yet the fact is that not a single one of the other SDGs can be achieved without resolving the question of conflict. Noble Lords have mentioned Syria, Iraq and Libya as examples. How can any of the other SDGs be satisfactorily resolved while those conflicts are continuing? They cannot. Therefore, it is crucial that some of our thought, resource and funding goes to understanding conflicts, what makes them and what resolves them. I appreciate all the difficulties about money for peacekeeping, but I am not actually talking about peacekeeping. I am talking about understanding why we have conflicts and finding ways of intervening, because if we do not do that, to be honest—the noble Baroness, Lady Tonge, adverted to this in some of her comments—we are simply subsidising conflict rather than trying to resolve it, and we will not be very effective in making the kinds of changes that we want. Therefore, addressing the question of conflict is absolutely essential.

Secondly, when it comes to addressing economics, the best way, of course, is for communities themselves to develop the education and, indeed—as I will say—the culture that enables them to progress. It became clear to myself and a number of colleagues, particularly Martti Ahtisaari, the former Finnish president, that you can never develop a serious economy in a country, or proper governance, unless you develop institutions of higher learning, and you will never get those if people are never educated beyond a master's degree. Yet, when we have proposed PhDs for young people from Africa and the Middle East, we have found it impossible to get funding from DfID or any other government or EU agency, because the only thing to which they want to commit money is primary and secondary education. That is perfectly reasonable and

[LORD ALDERDICE]

good, but we will never get anywhere unless there are people educated in those countries to a level where they can develop institutions of higher learning that take their governance and economy forward. It is short-sighted to focus only on things such as primary and secondary-level education.

That leads me to another very problematic issue—the question of culture. I give an example. I was asked to go and see some Aboriginal people in Australia because, despite the fact that the Australian Government were putting in very large amounts of money, their situation was getting worse. Their health was getting worse. Their education was not improving and the degree of physical and sexual violence, alcoholism and drug abuse was increasing. Why was that? It was because understanding the need for cultural change was not part of the agenda. One needs to find ways of helping people, to engage with cultures where they are, but also of taking people to a new place where they can survive in a world which is very different. Let me put it this way: the Aboriginal people have a culture that goes back longer than any other civilisation, something like 60,000 years. For almost all that time, they have been hunter-gatherers. That means that when you find food, water or whatever, you eat as much as you can because you have no idea when will be the next time you will get something. That is fine until McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken come along, and then, if you go in and eat all you can, you end up with diabetes and all sorts of other problems. That is exactly what has happened. The cultural change has not taken place. Why? Because people who are sensitive to addressing people's needs say, "No, no, we mustn't change their culture. That's their culture. It's neo-imperialism to get involved in that". Yet it is a fact that if we keep their culture preserved in aspic, they will die out as a people. So there are complex, difficult issues to be addressed there.

My final point is on the question of the size of organisations. The noble Lord, Lord Judd, quite rightly sang the praises of the large international NGOs, which are very important and deliver a lot of help. However, there are problems with them, one of which was referred to by the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza. They gobble up the resources almost in total—a large amount of paperwork needs to be filled in and there is a lot of bureaucracy—and that is very difficult for small NGOs. Yet the small NGOs, with a particular idea and commitment, are the ones that will produce something new. Noble Lords often comment about international norms. But those are what we believe now—they are not good enough for the future. If we are to develop things further than where we are now, we do not need international norms alone. We need the small, piloting NGOs that will take a little money and do a lot with it with some new ideas. Can the Minister look again at this question of whether some of the money that goes to the large NGOs and the degree of bureaucracy that they have to create to manage the large number of people they work with might be better spent by taking us forward with the new ideas that some of the small NGOs may help us to create and exploit?

4.56 pm

The Earl of Sandwich (CB): My Lords, it is a privilege to join this debate, not only because it is a fascinating subject in itself but because we are at last entering a period in which we can make a proper assessment of aid impact. I congratulate my noble friend on recognising this so soon, and I agree with her analysis and comments on the private sector. I did not agree with her about women in microcredit; we have to have a private discussion about this, because they have a high level of repayment in some countries.

We had a debate back in November 2015, during which various watchdogs involved in the aid programme were discussed. Other noble Lords have already explained the process, but it was already clear by 2010 that DfID was responding to a new international emphasis on aid effectiveness and transparency, added to which came value for money under the coalition, when Andrew Mitchell was Secretary of State and soon established the excellent ICAI. Aid dependency, people's participation and sustainability were again under discussion. Noble Lords will know that many of these concepts are cyclical, and I can remember them back in the 1970s—I am sure that the noble Lord, Lord Judd, also does—and even earlier. But they were being drawn together under a new Administration, partly because of hostile elements in the media and the need to defend the aid budget during the 0.7% Bill campaign.

Our great advantage this afternoon is that we can draw directly on the first five years' work of ICAI, the body created to report regularly, as we heard from the noble Lord, Lord Bruce, whom we are very lucky to have in this House, with his first-hand experience. Only last week, ICAI published an important document, the *ICAI Follow-up Review of Year 5 Reports*. In my experience, the most targeted aid goes not through government but through civil society, churches and faith groups, and human rights agencies. The Grenfell Tower fire is only the latest example of the way that local organisations can move faster and more effectively than government, especially in a crisis. NGOs do not always have a good press but, having worked with several of them, I am bound to say that they have been a most efficient channel of our aid money, including ODA under successive partnership schemes, started by the noble Baroness, Lady Chalker. I can think of many examples of good long-term development that I have mentioned before but will not repeat now.

Aid from all sources goes astray. There were very few examples of fraud during my time with Christian Aid: there was a land speculator disguised as a doctor, and an agent who absconded with money for an emergency in northern Iraq. But no one is surprised that the aid world is always vulnerable to criminals, cheats and liars, especially seizing their chance during emergencies, and some do get round the system. The failure to deliver aid in conflict zones such as Helmand or South Sudan are all too familiar examples. It was good to hear from the right reverend Prelate—Bishop Tim, as we remember him in Sherborne—especially hearing him talk about the importance of climate change, but we are primarily concerned with development aid.

Turning to ICAI's reports, I was discouraged to read more criticism of the Conflict Pool, which is now reborn as the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund. Held up as a fine example of interdepartmental co-operation, the CSSF has now doubled its budget to £1 billion or more for conflict prevention and peacekeeping—here, the noble Lord, Lord Alderdice, made a vital point—but it still struggles to escape from an amber-red rating in a previous report. As it has wide implications for our foreign and defence policy, it was thoroughly examined by the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy last February. It was not a satisfactory report, as the CSSF was still found to be wanting. In fact, some people have told me that the CSSF was simply in “a mess”. Perhaps earlier the noble Lord, Lord Bruce, was a bit too forgiving.

ICAI said bluntly two years ago that the FCO's project managers were not equipped to handle such large sums. It said:

“The other government departments in question do not have DFID's level of project management capacity and culture of managing for results. There is a risk that the expansion of CSSF's budget will generate unhelpful competition between departments”.

To answer the point made by the noble Lord, Lord Judd, DfID is in the driving seat, but the Minister might like to comment on this because it has implications for all the other 14 departments now drawing on ODA, and especially for their relations with DfID. There are echoes here from our discussions of the CDC Bill. The Minister knows that there was a lot of concern about the rapid scaling up of CDC projects—many in the private sector—and whether DfID would be able to transfer skills quickly enough. Such overheating inevitably means that aid impact and delivery will be adversely affected in all these organisations.

The June 2015 report also mentioned the statistical boast common to all aid agencies in claiming the numbers of people they reach—the “Heineken factor”, or, in ICAI language, an overreliance on “reach indicators”, which specify the number of beneficiaries due to receive or to have received assistance. DfID's new plan, which replaces its results framework, is not yet entirely satisfactory because there are no standard indicators. I am not sure that ICAI or anyone could ever reach a sensible solution because of the variability of data, but of course we must be glad that it is making the effort.

Again, I am reminded of our concerns during the CDC Bill that, although DfID was talking about so many “jobs created”, it turned out that it was counting “indirect jobs created”, and this was another important point picked up by ICAI. The NAO had concerns about this too. Why should the public be so misled on these issues? As the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, mentioned, education is a much surer measurement if we are looking at long-term impact.

A high priority for ICAI, following the theme of “no one left behind”, is the relationship between our ODA and the 17 new SDGs. This was well identified in the IDC's recent report. It is of course to be expected that the new goals, which now have to come directly from the countries' own priorities and, we hope, from their NGOs, will inevitably sharpen up aid impact and

effectiveness. However, we are still not helping the very poorest enough and we should be doing more in African LDCs.

At this point in the debate, I feel I am something of an agnostic, because government—and indeed Parliament—may be prone to an illness described as “excessive monitoring”. We should not expect watchdogs to pretend to know everything. ICAI, thank goodness, is a relatively small, efficient operation and it cannot look at the entire aid programme. It already covers a vast number of projects and has become a vital link between the department and the IDC. I am full of admiration for ICAI, but equally I would not like overstretched DfID staff to be smothered by unnecessary double counting that may interfere with their essential work.

The cost implications of consultants coming and going have been mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza, and the noble Lord, Lord Bruce. They have to be taken into account. We all know that last December the *Times* reported that billions had been spent on consultancies while DfID's own staff fell in proportion to the rising aid budget. I am among the first to defend the aid budget, but serious questions have been raised today, and I hope always will be, about aid effectiveness—the noble Lord, Lord Judd, was right to remind us about “impact” not being quite the right word. The Government, assisted by ICAI, are gradually addressing them, and I hope more Members of Parliament will go and see for themselves, maybe through the CPA and the IPU, the good that we are undoubtedly doing in many areas of the world.

5.06 pm

Baroness Jenkin of Kennington (Con): My Lords, imagine my disappointment on arriving in the Chamber today to find that, due either to technical incapability on my part or to a malfunction of the machine in the Whips' Office, I was not on the list to speak after all. I am very grateful for the opportunity to speak briefly in the gap so forgive me for darting about a little bit with slash, slash, slash—it is not all that easy.

I join the noble Baroness, Lady Tonge and the noble Lord, Lord Bruce, in focusing some of my remarks—I make no apology for this—on the value of access to contraception and family planning programmes as a way to break the cycle of poverty. By empowering women to plan their futures and reach their fullest potential, voluntary family planning gives women and girls the opportunity to complete their education and take up better economic opportunities. We know that it transforms lives, creating more prosperous, stable societies, which is in the UK's interest.

The UK is continuing its leading role by hosting an international summit on family planning in London next week and I very much welcome the Secretary of State's personal commitment to prioritising this agenda. Working with the UN Population Fund and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the summit aims to boost global commitment to ensuring women and girls have access to family planning services. Can any of us here in the UK imagine not having this access and the choices it provides? The summit will procure a range of new commitments from developing countries,

[BARONESS JENKIN OF KENNINGTON]

donors and other partners. These commitments will increase access to family planning services for women and girls in the world's poorest countries, fix problems with supply chains and prioritise the needs of women and girls in humanitarian crises.

Jumping to the fact that the aid budget is taxpayers' money, I will just illustrate this with two small stories. I had a conversation recently with someone who had been a consultant in one of the big consultancies where I was making the case that so many girls were now educated in a way they were not before. The consultant said to me: "How do you know? I have worked in remote areas in Pakistan and a girl will turn up once and the box will be ticked and she may never turn up again". I encourage my noble friend to be aware of what is actually going on. In another story, a friend was looking at a project in Pakistan where they were feeding children and giving them lunch. A sign said that meat was included in the rice. My friend, understanding Urdu, heard the project leader say to a worker, "Where is the meat in this rice? I told you today we have important visitors coming and we need the meat in the rice". That could be happening far more on the ground than we are probably aware of.

The noble Lord, Lord Alderdice, talked about small charities. I strongly endorse his point. Mary's Meals, of which a number of noble Lords will be aware, gets not a penny from the taxpayer but provides fantastic value for money and feeds millions of children across Africa. The aid budget is taxpayers' money and the Government have a duty to communicate to the UK public how this hard-earned money is spent effectively, delivers results for the world's poorest people and is not subject to waste or corruption. They should continue to drive for greater efficiency and value for money and I commend the Minister for the work he is doing in this space.

5.10 pm

Baroness Sheehan (LD): My Lords, I add my congratulations to the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza, on securing this important debate and I thank her for her thought-provoking opening remarks. I pay tribute to the contributions that we have heard across the Floor of the House and to the wonderful insight and experience that noble Lords present have brought to the debate.

When the aid budget is under attack in the press—as it is—it is important to ensure that hard-earned taxpayers' money is shown to be spent effectively when delivering policy that helps the poorest in the world. Collecting data on inputs, outputs and outcomes which allow us to measure its impact is essential if we are to do that.

UK aid works, not only in helping some of the poorest people in the world to live in dignity and to begin to take charge of their own lives and livelihoods through economic development but benefiting us in the UK. The Overseas Development Institute recently published a report entitled *Aid, Exports and Employment in the UK*, showing how in 2014 UK direct bilateral aid generated an increase in UK exports and provided an estimated 12,000 extra UK jobs. It is a win-win relationship. I make this point because all too often

DfID's work is castigated in the press and those of us who support the fabulous work that it is doing need the ammunition to fire back.

UK aid strategy is changing. Over the past several years, more and more of the UK's ODA is being spent by departments other than DfID through the FCO's Prosperity Fund, the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, the Ross Fund and few other pots in other government departments, in total amounting to a good third of the overall ODA budget. While it falls to DfID to ensure that all UK ODA complies with the OECD's ODA rules, DfID, nevertheless, in its annual report and accounts makes it clear that aid administered by other departments is the responsibility of the Secretary of State of those individual departments. Those other departments have published precious little information about the increasingly large sums of ODA they spend. This situation must be rectified.

DfID, on the other hand, is in many ways an exemplar department when it comes to openness and transparency, which is vital if we are to collect the data we need to assess development impact. My noble friend Lord Purvis referred to the Independent Commission for Aid Impact which scrutinises DfID's work and provides independent evaluation of all UK aid spending. The noble Earl, Lord Sandwich, gave useful information about the work in depth that ICAI carries out. As well as ICAI, DfID also commissions independent evaluations such as the DfID evaluation annual report, and bilateral and multilateral reviews give in-depth analysis of country and sector expenditure. In addition, DfID is subject to further external scrutiny by the International Development Committee, the Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office, as we have already heard.

The other departments do none of this and, although ICAI's remit includes scrutiny of ODA spend by all UK government departments, this has not happened. When may we expect ICAI to undertake a review of ODA spend by other departments?

Since the last general election just a few weeks ago we have seen changes to ministerial posts such that we now have DfID Ministers with shared responsibility across other departments. Can the Minister confirm that this bodes well for future transparency? While DfID has displayed openness and transparency, there are a number of wider issues that I would like to raise where some joined-up thinking could maximise the impact of the UK aid budget.

The first is in respect of the policy on energy, an issue referred to quite extensively by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Truro. DfID is doing some good work on ensuring clean energy access for people in developing countries. However, at the same time the UK Government overall have spent more on fossil fuel projects in developing countries than on renewable energy projects. This needs to change as it is counterintuitive to help developing countries to mitigate against and adapt to climate change but to fund so many fossil fuel projects as well. In the same vein, DfID should use its position as a major shareholder in the World Bank to persuade it to switch to supporting more renewable energy projects. Between 2011 and 2015 the World Bank invested more in oil, gas and coal than it did in renewables.

Secondly, I want to talk about the Commonwealth Development Corporation. The CDC Act came into force earlier this year as a consequence of which, by 2020, a massive total of £6 billion will be made available to the CDC by DfID. In spite of the plethora of reports produced by DfID and its scrutineers, we still lack sufficient data on CDC's activities. It must publish what it funds and it must do so in a timely way, given that all capital transfers to the CDC as of 2014 count immediately as ODA. Why is it that other development finance institutions such as the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank all appear and are rated in the multilateral aid review, but the CDC does not? Where in the department's bilateral and multilateral reviews can the public see what impact the CDC is having?

I want to deviate from my speech a little and say in response to the point made by the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza, that sound methodologies must be developed. The CDC does have at its disposal £5 million for just this purpose, but it lies unused. I think that we can put pressure on the CDC to use that money to develop some of the methodologies that are going to be necessary.

Lastly, I should like to talk about double standards. Britain was a driving force in ensuring that women and girls were front and centre in the drawing up of the UN sustainable development goals. Our commitment to this group, representing half of the world's population, is enshrined in legislation and our then Secretary of State was a founding member of the UN High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment. The UK has been a driving force in putting issues such as gender-based violence in conflict zones, forced marriage, teenage pregnancy and FGM at the forefront of international decision-making, so when a high-scoring project, properly assessed for impact and aimed at tackling the serious issues facing girls in developing countries, is sacrificed on the altar of the *Daily Mail's* vitriol, something is seriously wrong with decision-making at the highest level. I am talking of course about Yegna, the Ethiopian Spice Girls. To make an impact, we must be consistent. There is little point in carrying out assessments and then ignoring the results, and I hope that cash transfers will not go the same way.

The Conservative Party's manifesto stated that the party will,

"work with like-minded countries to change the rules",

related to overseas development assistance. Will the Minister share with us what definition of aid the Secretary of State will be content with and at what point she will depart unilaterally from the OECD's ODA definition, as she has stated she is prepared to do? Where is her red line? For my part I am concerned that this Government's preoccupation is solely with Brexit and it is no secret that the Secretary of State herself is wedded to a hard Brexit. Will the Minister reassure the House that there will be no return to tied aid as the Government pull out all the stops to get trade deals in the limited time at their disposal? Will he further reassure your Lordships' House that trade with developing countries will continue to support development, including through improving market access, strengthening capacity to trade and building better livelihoods?

I end on a point made by the noble Lord, Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale. The International Development Committee produced a damning report on the Government's implementation of the UN's sustainable development goals. There is also precious little mention of them in the bilateral or multilateral aid reviews. This is in spite of this commitment made at the G20 summit in the middle of last year:

"The UK is intending to publish a report in due course on its contribution to the Global Goals which will cover both international and domestic implementation".

When can we expect this report?

5.20 pm

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, I, too, thank the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza, for initiating the debate. It has been vital and given us an opportunity to have several bites at the cherry with questions to the Minister. Last week he and I attended the NGO reception at which the Secretary of State was also present. At the event she evidenced the huge impact that UK aid has in the world, particularly in Africa. A number of people at that meeting gave first-hand, personal accounts of the impact. She has also said that,

"Britain is saving lives and bringing stability and security, and that's good for our economy".

While I welcome her new-found enthusiasm for development, I have concerns about the direction in which she is taking the department. Apart from seeking changes in the rules governing ODA, which we addressed earlier in Oral Questions—I hope that the Minister will be able to answer the specific questions on that additional sentence in the manifesto that the Government will not go it alone—I particularly want to address the issues the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, raised in the debate on Her Majesty's gracious Speech. He pointed out that more aid will be administered by other government departments, pointing out that in 2015 they accounted for 19.5% of ODA spending, compared with 13.8% in 2014.

One of the biggest beneficiaries of this aid has been the FCO. As noble Lords have pointed out, a big problem with this is the lack of monitoring and evaluation systems. The Government must ensure that non-DfID aid programmes and funds meet DfID's high levels of transparency and report publicly on their activities. Parliament needs to be satisfied that they are being properly assessed against their achievements in delivering the sustainable development goals. What are the Government doing to ensure that all government departments and funds managing ODA achieve rapid and ambitious improvements to the transparency of their aid programmes?

Another area of concern is what is happening to Ministers in DfID. We have Alistair Burt and Rory Stewart reporting to Boris Johnson at the FCO, and of course the Minister now also covers the Treasury. While I am all in favour of cross-Whitehall co-operation, as highlighted by the noble Lord, Lord Bruce, is there something more going on here, especially in the light of the Budget's shift away from DfID? I certainly hope there is not. Most noble Lords here would agree that DfID has huge expertise and a world-renowned reputation in defeating poverty. It should remain independent

[LORD COLLINS OF HIGHBURY]
and the leading provider of UK aid. Will the Government confirm that they will apply the International Development Act 2002, with its legal requirement for aid to focus on poverty reduction, to all aid, regardless of which department or fund manages it?

Poverty and bad governance are still holding too many countries and their people back. Many women, disabled and older people and too many minorities are discriminated against and denied access to their fair share of goods, services and opportunities. Economic growth has the potential to be the engine to drive change. But, as the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, said in Oral Questions, growth without jobs, inclusion, healthcare, education and human rights—growth without power—will not deliver for the many.

The universal nature of the sustainable development goals and the principle of leaving no one behind are vital tools. As my noble friend Lord McConnell asked, what are the Government doing to ensure that aid programmes delivered outside DfID focus on supporting the SDGs? Just when will we have clearer reports from cross-Whitehall co-operation on how the SDGs are being implemented? How will Parliament be involved in that?

To deliver the greatest impact, we must have a fairer tax system for the world's poorest countries. Unfortunately, different government departments seem to be working against each other. According to the IMF, developing countries lose around \$200 billion a year to tax avoidance. The UNCTAD estimates that tax havens cost developing countries at least \$100 billion a year. While DfID is doing good work in helping developing countries broaden their tax base, other departments are not helping to improve tax transparency. The Treasury should work quickly to introduce public country-by-country reporting for UK companies. As the Minister is in the Treasury now, can he tell us how Ministers are progressing this matter multilaterally and when they expect an agreement to be reached? What discussions are taking place about the overseas territories following the UK's lead and introducing a public register of beneficial ownership? The private registers being introduced at the moment are almost useless for developing countries, as they cannot see the information and many are excluded from information-sharing agreements. While this policy inconsistency continues, the impact of our aid will never be quite as much as we would like.

Value for money means measuring success by the change that we make and not simply by the cash that we put in. That is why Labour strongly supports the Independent Commission for Aid Impact. When a budget as important as this is ring-fenced, there is a fiscal responsibility and a moral duty to deliver as much change as possible for the money that we invest. DfID's *Annual Report and Accounts* sets out the mechanisms which the department uses to ensure that it spends its money in a strategic, long-term way. As noble Lords have said, this includes a single departmental plan setting out strategic objectives for the period of the spending review. We also have the annual target and the framework of accountability, involving ICAI and Parliament.

As Priti Patel argued last week, the private sector needs to play an even greater role by integrating the aims of the SDGs into business practice. Developing countries currently face an annual investment gap of \$2.5 trillion if they are to achieve the SDGs by 2030. That can be done only by working with the private sector. Noble Lords have mentioned the CDC, which should do more to measure the development impact of its investments. That would not only provide a better basis for investment decisions but increase the transparency of the CDC.

The 2012 to 2016 investment plan has expired; I am told that the 2017 to 2021 investment plan and strategic framework will be published this Thursday. I am sure that the noble Lord will tell us that it is a matter for the usual channels but I sincerely hope that time will be given in this House for a proper debate in government time on that strategic plan. It is vital that we hold the CDC to account, particularly in terms of transparency.

To conclude, I will pick up a theme that my noble friend Lord Judd referred to. We talk about aid dependency, but this generation has the opportunity to eliminate that for good by empowering the powerless. That is our vision on this side of the House, and it is what we will be pressing the Government to do.

5.30 pm

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Lord Bates) (Con): My Lords, I join other noble Lords in paying tribute to the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza, for securing this debate. It has been extremely useful and one of those occasions when you look at the wealth of expertise both in and outside this House and are not quite sure whether at the end of it you are supposed to give a speech or should have been taking notes. Of course, it has been a combination of both as I have gone through this debate.

The noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza, has a distinguished track record in this whole area. She outlined, rightly, the need for evidence-based analysis of what is working here. We also heard during the course of the debate from my predecessor, my noble friend Lady Verma, who left a tremendous legacy from her time as Minister. I publicly thank her for that. Many of the areas in which I now deal simply continue excellent initiatives that she began. I also join others in welcoming my noble friend Lady Sugg to the Front Bench as Whip. She will be a tremendous support because, again, she has such experience and expertise in this area.

If I were to try and answer all the questions presented to me, we would exceed the two-and-a-half hour cut-off line—perhaps even the two-and-a-half hour cut-off line for my speech. I have a limited amount of time, but I am very keen that we are able to draw on the wealth of expertise in this House. I will look for an opportunity, I hope before the recess, to continue some of these discussions we have had today.

UK aid plays a vital role in helping the world's poorest and most vulnerable. That is both morally right and in our enlightened self-interest, as we were reminded. One of the other themes of the debate has been that the world has changed. The noble Lord, Lord McConnell, referred to that in particular. We

talked about the changing nature of some of the pressures. I want to dive straight in to the ODA issue mentioned by so many. It is an area of focus.

The rules of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee were set up some 40 years ago, when the world was a very different place. They have been changed only once in the past 40 years. That process of changing them, once, in March 2016—as the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, and the noble Lord, Lord Collins, referred to—took a period of four years to agree. This is a slow-moving area because the Development Assistance Committee works by consensus. We have been very keen to say that we want to share our concerns with our friends. That has literally just begun through our communication process. At this stage, I cannot give a run-down of who our friends are in these particular areas or what each of them are coming to us to say are the areas they would like to see changed and improved.

However, they have looked at particular areas such as climate change. That is something on which 40 years ago there was perhaps not the same focus so we need to look at it. Some elements of research that you can do into climate change are not ODA eligible, yet they benefit, as many have mentioned, the poorest on the planet. There is also violent extremism and countering terrorism—the new threats we face. Do the rules allow and capture all that has been done in this particular area? There is migration on a huge scale around the world, almost unprecedented in our history—certainly post-war—and that raises new challenges. So when, for example, we deploy Border Force cutters in the Mediterranean to intercept the people-traffickers who make fortunes out of other people's misery and put their lives at risk, and when we work with the Libyan coastguard to try and improve their security and safety, are these not areas that we ought to be able to consider as part of our overall effort?

There is also trade. We talk about trade and development. The only way we are able to achieve that aspiration set out by the former archbishop of not creating dependency—referred to by the noble Lord, Lord Judd—is by trade. Look at the number of people in extreme poverty, which reduced by 50% between 1990 and 2010. What was the reason for that—was it the levels of aid? No, it was the levels of trade, so those are very important to us. That is also the reason why the Secretary of State for International Trade and the Secretary of State for International Development jointly announced that one of our ambitions is to maintain and build upon the preferential trade arrangements for the 48 countries in Africa to be able to trade into the United Kingdom tariff-free. We recognise that that is incredibly important to us.

The noble Earl, Lord Sandwich, referred to the issues of monitoring. Many noble Lords referred to the level of monitoring that goes on. He referred to the possibility that there might even be an excess of monitoring in some respects. Of course, at the moment overseas aid is, in the UK, probably one of the most scrutinised of any spends that happen anywhere in the world. That is one reason the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, was right to point to the International Aid Transparency

Initiative's rating of DfID as world-class and world-leading in the way that it does aid. We have nothing to fear from transparency because that is part of the way we learn and gather information about this. I direct noble Lords to the website “devtracker”. It is a bit of a catchy name, but the Development Tracker is an incredible resource, enabling you to see exactly, in real time, what is actually happening on which programmes and who is delivering them. You can read the independent evaluation reports carried out and see how much money has been paid—as I say, in real time. These are ground-breaking methods of transparency that are recognised internationally. Of course, then we have our own quality assurance, and that has been added to a whole new—

Lord Purvis of Tweed: I do not wish to interrupt the Minister's flow, but he has quite substantially moved on from the area of the DAC and OECD. With the greatest respect, I was waiting for him to answer the point that a number of noble Lords across the Chamber asked about the line in his party's manifesto that, if there were no agreement within the OECD and DAC, the Government would propose unilateral action and bring forward legislation to change the criteria for ODA in the UK. All of us asked him to reflect on that and perhaps move away from it, especially in the context that he no longer has a majority in either House. This would be a good example of listening to a great deal of concern that moving unilaterally would not be in the best interests of the UK in this area.

Lord Bates: I do not want to parallel or parody debates taking place on other aspects of government policy and exiting the European Union, but I can assure the noble Lord that we have no red lines. We are still developing what the issues are that we would like to address. We began that process talking to the NGOs. I would like to continue by talking to Members of your Lordships' House about what the issues are, citing some of the problems and talking it through with officials. Of course, then we need to present that to colleagues. So it is not a firm, baked plan, which we are demanding or otherwise we will go out on our own. We have said we are quite determined that there are some issues that need to be addressed and we want to share that with people and work together in a consensual way.

Returning to the point about examination and monitoring, of course we have our own internal quality assurance. We also have the National Audit Office. We have the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, which has been cited. The noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, asked about the CSSF. That was one of the ICAI reports that the noble Earl, Lord Sandwich, referred to, where that scrutiny is beginning to happen. There is also the International Development Committee in the other place, of which the noble Lord, Lord Bruce, was a distinguished chair for 10 years. Again, we have a very good working relationship with that committee. It is rigorous, but there is a partnership because we all want the same thing—namely, to eradicate extreme poverty.

Then we have the sustainable development goals, which a number of noble Lords, including the noble Lord, Lord Collins, and my noble friends Lady Verma

[LORD BATES]

and Lady Jenkin, referred to. They are going to introduce a whole new level of scrutiny. Again, it comes back to the point about the Development Assistance Committee. Forty years ago, we did not have the millennium development goals, never mind the sustainable development goals. Now we have these new goals that introduce whole new categories—such as beneath the ocean or peace and conflict, which the noble Lord, Lord Alderdice, referred to—that we need to work on.

I was asked what the Government are doing in respect of the SDGs. We published our *Agenda 2030* in March. That was the cross-government response to that. The Office for National Statistics has announced a consultation looking at the best way of producing data and statistics in these matters so that we can track our progress towards the SDG aims. It has some very important elements in it. The noble Baroness, Lady Warwick, was concerned about how those data might be connected. There is a huge new initiative taking place across the UN institutions about collecting data, particularly on the sustainable development goals—what actually works and how it should operate. That is being done by the UN Statistical Commission. We have representation on that and we will follow that, and publish routinely and regularly, in accordance with the requirements of the SDGs, how we are progressing. We will also be able to see online how other countries are progressing towards them. I think this is going to be a major step forward—to reassure the noble Baroness, Lady D’Souza, among others—because once we see countries’ own self-assessment of where they are lagging behind and where they are progressing, we will have an additional level of data to help us ensure that our resources are directed to those who are in greatest need.

The noble Lord, Lord Bruce, also asked why BEIS is the second-highest ODA spender. Of course, that is because the primary objective of BEIS ODA is research and innovation—to reduce poverty by generating and putting into use knowledge and technology to address development challenges and advance development for the poorest in the world. The noble Baroness, Lady Warwick, gave the example of King’s College working in partnership with the Government of Sierra Leone on Ebola. What has been achieved through this, and more widely through development, is incredible, but we still have a long way to go. We have rigorous ways of monitoring the impact and communicating the achievements.

I know that at this point the noble Lord, Lord Judd, will be flinching in his seat, but I ask him to bear with me on impact because it is leading to the subject of effectiveness. We can see that development aid is changing the lives of the world’s poorest. Just today we read about the outbreak of cholera in Yemen, and there is the World Health Organization with 1 million cholera vaccines, desperately trying to get safe access. It is true that you cannot separate the security elements from the humanitarian need in this respect. The noble Lord, Lord McConnell, referred to this as well. Without the security elements, we will not be able to get those vaccines to those who need them.

Just last week, I returned from South Sudan. I was delighted to hear the analysis and the experiences of

the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Truro. I saw the terrible situation there. Were it not for the World Food Programme and DfID’s contribution to that, 1.6 million people who are relying on airdrops of food, through a completely man-made conflict—this is not to do with climate change but entirely to do with the civil war which is raging on the ground—would have their lives put at risk. Therefore, to say that you can somehow separate the security dimension from the humanitarian dimension is not correct.

I will speak about other government departments. The noble Lord, Lord McConnell, referred to the Building Stability Overseas Strategy. Of course, we now have the UK aid strategy—Command Paper 9163—produced in 2015. I do not want to quote extensively from it but that is our new marching point for this and includes significant elements on how we are going to work with global peace, security and governance. I commend it to noble Lords. It says:

“All departments spending ODA will be required to put in place a clear plan to ensure that their programme design, quality assurance, approval, contracting and procurement, monitoring, reporting and evaluation processes represent international best practice”.

It is also right and absolutely fair to say that other government departments are not quite at the level of DfID at the moment. We do not want to crow too much about that because they have not been doing it for as long. My noble friend Lady Chalker is in her place. There is a long tradition and expertise in that area in government, which we want to retain. But that cannot be any reason not to aspire to the highest standards. We have said that we want all government departments that are delivering ODA to be rated either good or very good within five years. An ODA senior officials’ group now meets regularly across government to ensure that lessons are learned and we can assist other government departments in doing that.

The noble Lord, Lord Bruce, mentioned disability. Again, this is part of the SDGs and leaving no one behind, which is a key part of what we are doing. Looking again at our disability strategy is also something that the Secretary of State, Priti Patel, has made a personal passion of. We will be putting additional resources towards that.

The noble Baroness, Lady D’Souza, and the noble Lord, Lord Alderdice, mentioned small grants. I covered this subject in the exchanges in Questions about the small charities challenge fund.

The right reverend Prelate also spoke about what churches could be doing in this area. I will be meeting him tomorrow. Again, I turn to the example of South Sudan. When I was in South Sudan, I met Archbishop Deng—a very gracious man—the Archbishop of South Sudan and Sudan. There are 100,000 churches in South Sudan. What an incredible network that we could be using for peace and reconciliation. I also met Bishop Anthony Poggo, who I am sure is well known to the right reverend Prelate.

The noble Lord, Lord McConnell, mentioned the catalytic impact of private sector investment and the £2.5 trillion gap in private financing. We need to get much more private capital in there. Governments cannot do this alone through ODA. It needs to be

through trade, private investment and, increasingly, government assistance providing a catalytic role in that.

Without doubt, UK aid is making a significant contribution to tackling the global challenges of our time. The Government agree wholeheartedly on the importance of measuring its impact so we can fully understand and continue to improve on the very significant contribution the UK is making to the world's poorest, to stability and prosperity here and to eliminating extreme poverty by 2030. I look forward to continuing these discussions as weeks go on.

5.50 pm

Baroness D'Souza: My Lords, I thank the Minister for his response, which was, as always, sympathetic, informative and detailed, and I warmly thank all noble Lords who contributed to the debate.

It is extremely encouraging that DfID is regarded so highly within this House and well beyond it, but there are areas which would benefit from greater scrutiny, particularly, clarification of the objectives and perhaps the strategy of aid itself and aid delivery. A particularly interesting idea is whether we can look further at the potential synergistic effect of bringing together the work of various government departments, the private sector and NGOs.

There are two very small points I want to make. First, many small research-based NGOs are doing some remarkable work on modelling and charting the development process rather than its impact and notably the evidence for development. As the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, said, it would be wonderful if they could receive some money to further the work they are doing.

Secondly, it is nearly 60 years since there has been a general debate on the basis for international aid. I wonder whether the UK is in a very good position to be able to lead an initiative to discuss what should be the basis for aid in the coming years.

Motion agreed.

Northern Ireland Political Situation

Statement

5.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government and Northern Ireland Office (Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth) (Con): My Lords, with the leave of the House I shall now repeat a Statement made in the other place by my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The Statement is as follows:

“With permission, I would like to make a Statement about the political situation in Northern Ireland. As the House will recall, following the resignation of Martin McGuinness, the then Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, in January, an election took place to the Northern Ireland Assembly on 2 March. Despite intensive discussions in the three weeks following the election, the Northern Ireland parties were unable to reach agreement on the formation of a new Executive.

In order to facilitate further discussions between the parties, Parliament passed legislation immediately prior to Dissolution extending the period in which an Executive could be formed until 29 June. Last Thursday, 29 June, I made a statement in Belfast setting out that, while differences remained between the parties, progress had been made and that it was still possible for resolution to be achieved. I urged the parties to continue focusing their efforts on this, with the full support of the United Kingdom Government and, as appropriate, the Irish Government. In that regard, I want to recognise the contribution of the Irish Foreign Minister, Simon Coveney, and his predecessor, Charlie Flanagan.

In the past few days since the passing of the deadline, further progress has continued to be made, including on the most challenging issues, such as language, culture and identity. Gaps remain between the parties, but these are few in number and on a defined group of issues. The Government remain committed to working with the parties, and the Irish Government, to find a way to close these gaps quickly in order to reach an agreement that will pave the way for the restoration of devolved government. The Prime Minister has been actively involved, following on from her meetings with each of the parties, including speaking to Arlene Foster and Michelle O'Neill on Friday night. I continue to believe that a deal remains achievable, and if agreement is reached I will bring forward legislation to enable an Executive to be formed, possibly as early as this week, but time is short.

It has been six months since a full Executive was in place to represent the people of Northern Ireland. In that time it has been civil servants, not politicians, who have made decisions on spending. Without political direction, it has not been possible for strategic decisions to be made about priorities in areas such as education and health. This has created pressures that need to be addressed, and it has led to understandable concern and uncertainty among businesses and those relying on public services alike. This hiatus cannot simply continue for much longer. There is no doubt that the best outcome is for a new Executive to make those strategic decisions in the interests of all parts of the community in Northern Ireland. It should be for a new Executive to make swift decisions on their Budget to make use of the considerable spending power available to them.

While engagement between the parties continues and there is a prospect of an agreement this week, it is right that those discussions remain our focus. At the same time, we will not forget our ultimate responsibility as a Government to uphold political stability and good governance in Northern Ireland. In April, I made a Written Ministerial Statement that sought to provide clarity for those civil servants charged with allocating cash in Northern Ireland to assist them in the discharge of their responsibilities, but there remains resource available, including £42 million from the spring Budget and any further budget transfers as may be agreed, which is as yet unallocated. If we do not see resolution in the coming days, we will need to reflect carefully upon whether further clarity will be required for Northern Ireland Permanent Secretaries around those resources”.

[LORD BOURNE OF ABERYSTWYTH]

My Statement seems to have run out of pages. I do not think that is all of it.

Baroness Wheeler (Lab): The Minister may have my copy.

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: That is most kind. I am most grateful for the cross-party spirit on this issue, which I hope continues.

“In that situation, we would also need to reflect carefully on how we might allocate the funding made available to address immediate health and education pressures as set out in Monday’s Statement on United Kingdom government financial support for Northern Ireland, recognising Northern Ireland’s particular circumstances, and, if no agreement is reached, legislation in Westminster may then be required to give authority for the expenditure of Northern Ireland departments through an appropriations Bill. From my conversations with the head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, we have not quite reached that critical point yet, but that point is coming and the lack of a formal Budget is not something that can be sustained indefinitely. Similarly, decisions on capital expenditure and infrastructure and public service reforms in key sectors, such as the health service, cannot be deferred for much longer.

One area on which there is much consensus, however, is on the need for greater transparency around political donations. In line with the commitment set out in the Conservative Party’s Northern Ireland manifesto at the general election, I can confirm that I intend to bring forward legislation that will provide for the publication of all donations and loans received by Northern Ireland parties on or after 1 July 2017.

All of this reinforces further the importance of the parties coming together and reaching an agreement, and it sets out, too, some of the hard choices that we face if uncertainty persists. I am also conscious that, with the deadline now passed, I am under a duty to set a date for a new election. I will continue to keep that duty under review, but it seems unlikely that that would of itself resolve the current political impasse or the ultimate need for political decision-making, however we proceed. As the Government for the whole United Kingdom, we will always govern in the interests of all those within the United Kingdom, and so if resolution were to prove intractable, and an Executive could not be restored, we would of course be ready to do what is needed to provide that political decision-making in the best interests of Northern Ireland, but I am clear that the return of inclusive, devolved government by a power-sharing Executive is what would be best for Northern Ireland, and that will remain our overriding focus in the crucial days ahead.

The UK Government will continue to govern in the interests of everyone in Northern Ireland by providing political stability and keeping an open and sustained dialogue with the parties and with the Irish Government, in accordance with the well-established three-stranded approach. I stand ready to do what is necessary to facilitate the quick formation of an Executive once an agreement is reached, and I commend this Statement to the House”.

5.59 pm

Lord McAvoy (Lab): My Lords, first, I welcome the Minister to his new post. I have had many dealings with him in the past and I look forward to continuing negotiations. I place on record my appreciation for his predecessor, the noble Lord, Lord Dunlop. I think most folk would agree that we maintained the cross-party consensus, which in many ways was due to the noble Lord, Lord Dunlop. I therefore place on record our appreciation of his efforts.

I thank the Minister for repeating the Statement. We know that the Secretary of State, the Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney, his predecessor Charlie Flanagan, and all the Northern Irish parties have been working hard to try to narrow the gap on outstanding issues, notably on the question of the status of the Irish language and respect for all languages, culture and heritage in Northern Ireland. We welcome the fact that the Secretary of State did not come before Parliament today to announce that the shutters are coming down on the talks in Belfast.

People in Belfast and across Northern Ireland will have heard the Secretary of State’s contention that there remains “the prospect” of a deal this week. If that is achieved, then he will enjoy our full support in passing any necessary legislation to enable the Executive to reform and the Assembly to meet. But I think there will be frustration among many Northern Ireland citizens that a full six months after the Executive broke down and little more than a week before 12 July—the high point of the marching season—we remain at this impasse.

Without departing from the consensus which has existed for many years between the Government and ourselves, and indeed with the Liberals, some hard questions must now be asked about what more the Government can do to assist the parties in moving forward. It is encouraging that the Prime Minister picked up the phone on Friday night to the leaders of the DUP and Sinn Fein. But would the Minister comment on the suggestion—the point was made in the House of Commons, and I am sure it will be made here as well—that the Prime Minister might be more effective if she were to get on a plane to Belfast herself? History has shown that it has often required direct intervention from the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach to bridge the divide in Belfast. We have the examples of Tony Blair and Sir John Major, who made great efforts when things looked extremely difficult there. It remains unclear why there is a perception that the current run of Conservative Prime Ministers have proved reluctant to take personal responsibility to try and break the deadlock.

In fact, many might believe that the current Prime Minister has a particular duty to be more involved, as it was her decision to call an election which pushed the talks so close to the 12 July commemorations and led to her reliance on the Democratic Unionist Party that other parties have today cited as a factor in the talks. We agree with the Secretary of State that:

“This hiatus cannot simply continue for much longer”.

But I hope we might hear more from the Minister about how the Government intend to bring it to a positive end with the restoration of the Executive. If

not greater hands-on engagement by the Prime Minister, as I and others have suggested, does he think there is a role for a new, independent, potentially international chair to come in with fresh eyes and a powerful mandate to support the efforts of the British and Irish Governments? Again I refer to the past, when that has also been an effective means of shifting things.

I note the warning by the Secretary of State that, if a way forward cannot be found, he will have to bring forward budgetary transfers to provide clarity and resources for the Northern Ireland Civil Service. That may well be necessary, and if so, again the Government will have the full co-operation of Her Majesty's Official Opposition. But I am sure the Minister agrees that it is profoundly unsatisfactory that major decisions about public services and other measures continue to be taken by unelected civil servants, no matter how competent. On the matter of an appropriations Bill, the Minister will be aware that some will see that effectively as a measure of direct rule. I am sure this is a position that the Government wish to avoid, and we urge the Secretary of State to consider all alternatives before we take such a backwards step.

I welcome the decision that the Secretary of State has taken today to legislate for publication of all political loans and donations received by political parties on or after 1 July. That is an important step in normalising the politics of Northern Ireland. Do the Government intend that the thresholds that apply to the publication of donations in the rest of the UK will be those that are applied in Northern Ireland?

This House has played a terrific part in helping peace in Northern Ireland, and I am sure that everyone here will agree that Northern Ireland needs its Assembly and Executive up and running as soon as possible. There is no greater illustration of that than the Brexit negotiations, which we are entering with no real means of Northern Ireland's voice—the voice of all its communities and traditions, and opinions on Brexit—being heard around the negotiating table. That, I am sure the Minister will agree, cannot be right. All of us, including on this side of the House, must redouble our efforts to see the Executive, and with it the voice of Northern Ireland, strengthened and restored.

Baroness Suttie (LD): My Lords, I too thank the Minister for repeating the Statement and welcome him to his new role—he is certainly starting at an interesting and challenging time for Northern Ireland. I also place on record my tribute to his predecessor, the noble Lord, Lord Dunlop. Given the importance of the issue, however, I wonder why this was not a Prime Ministerial Statement today.

When we last discussed these issues, just before the election, there was a degree of optimism that genuine progress could be made. Indeed, for a time last week, it appeared that good progress was being made. However, with the passing of Thursday's deadline, and even with the short continuation of talks over the weekend, we once again find ourselves in an impasse. This is an extremely disappointing development, and it is frustrating to watch from here the way in which the two largest parties in Northern Ireland appear to have backed themselves into a corner when there are undoubtedly creative solutions to be found.

The increase in turnout of some 10.6% between the 2016 and 2017 Assembly elections demonstrates the strong commitment of the people of Northern Ireland to devolved government, and I can well understand the frustration of ordinary people in Northern Ireland at this latest setback.

As the noble Lord, Lord McAvoy, has already said, there has been no ministerial direction in the devolved departments for a number of months. Decisions on how to allocate budgets are being missed, and all this has a direct impact on public services and jobs. Can the Minister give an indication of how today's Statement will help to change the dynamics in the talks process? As well as the damage that is being done to Northern Ireland's economy and public services, it is vital at this time for Northern Ireland to have its own voice in the Brexit negotiations. Can the Minister tell us who speaks for Northern Ireland on Brexit?

The confidence and supply arrangement with the DUP in Westminster has understandably caused concern about how the Government can fulfil their role in independently mediating the Belfast Good Friday agreement. Can the Minister explain how they will demonstrate the "rigorous impartiality" needed, as set out in the Good Friday agreement?

Bringing together my last two points, can he tell us how the voices of all parties in Northern Ireland—including those which won seats in the Assembly in March but do not sit on the Government's co-ordinating committee—will have their voices heard on the vital issues of governance of Northern Ireland and of the Brexit negotiations?

Although I welcome the introduction of legislation on party donations, does the Minister agree that for the legislation to have the desired effect of returning confidence to the party-political process in Northern Ireland, it should be backdated to 2014? Finally, can the Minister say whether he believes that this is a genuine postponement, or are we just delaying the inevitable?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness and the noble Lord for their contributions and their kind words of welcome. I also very much endorse what they said about my noble friend Lord Dunlop, who has given great service in this role and continues to be a source of very valuable information and advice. I am most grateful to him.

To take up some of the points made by the noble Lord and the noble Baroness, first, I am most grateful for the endorsement of the bipartisan approach that we seek, which I am sure extends to the Liberal Democrats as well, in relation to the Belfast agreement. We are wedded to that, as indeed everybody in Northern Ireland seems to be—it is just about ensuring that we complete the last phase of these discussions so that we can take things forward. The issues that remain to be resolved are relatively narrow, and I can understand, and indeed share, the general frustration felt by the Front Benches. I am sure it is widely felt. The Secretary of State has worked tirelessly to seek an agreement, and the issues are becoming tighter and narrower. There is the prospect of an agreement, and I can certainly confirm that the shutters are not coming

[LORD BOURNE OF ABERYSTWYTH]

down in any way at all. We are very much wedded to getting a deal, and there is the prospect of one following the approach that we take.

The suggestion is made of the greater involvement of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister has been closely involved; she spoke to the five parties in Northern Ireland, to which I think the noble Baroness was referring, as recently as Friday. Talks with the two leaders, Michelle O'Neill and Arlene Foster, continued on Saturday, and she has spoken to the Taoiseach on a number of occasions as well, so those discussions are going on. I caution about always rushing for the involvement of the Prime Minister because that has not always paid dividends in Northern Ireland and does not necessarily help. As I say, the issues are being driven forward, and it is for the two main parties to hammer out the deal between them.

On the noble Baroness's question about the involvement of the other parties, I should say that they have been having their discussions as well. At the moment the main focus has of course been on the discussions between the two main parties, as you would expect, but the others have been involved in discussions of their own because, once an agreement is made, which I certainly hope and believe will be the case, the deal then has to be completed with their involvement.

I thank noble Lords for their indications of support for the donations and loans Bill that will be forthcoming. Retrospective legislation is not always wise, let us say, so it will be carried forward from the date of announcement, which I think is the usual way of these things. As I say, though, I thank noble Lords for their general welcome.

I think I have picked up the main points. I welcome noble Lords' continuing support, and of course we will update the House on the progress of the discussions, which are at a crucial and, we hope, successful stage.

6.11 pm

Lord Kilclooney (CB): My Lords, I welcome the Minister to his position and thank him for repeating the Statement on Northern Ireland. I am particularly pleased at his optimism that a power-sharing Executive is still achievable in Northern Ireland, because that is what we negotiated in the Belfast agreement.

Living near the border and knowing Sinn Fein inside out as I do, I ask the Minister whether he realises that one of the joys for Sinn Fein is to bash the British. He will understand that minority Governments are unstable institutions, and we have a minority Government in southern Ireland depending on Fianna Fail support. We are likely to have an election in southern Ireland, and it would certainly be helpful to Sinn Fein if it could continue to bash the British from now until that election takes place. So the Minister's optimism may be misplaced.

In welcoming the new Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Ireland—after all, it is a foreign country with a Foreign Minister—does the Minister realise that when we negotiated the Belfast agreement, the then Foreign Minister of the Republic, David Andrews, was expelled and excluded from all strand one talks? Does he now recognise that last week on the

front pages of daily papers in both the Republic and Northern Ireland there was much criticism of the new Foreign Minister of the Republic for interfering in the internal affairs of Northern Ireland, and that that has upset a lot of people across Northern Ireland and is particularly unhelpful? Lastly, will the Minister confirm that, although there are many options if we do not have an Executive, one of the options is still direct rule?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, I thank the noble Lord for his kind words of welcome. I am indeed optimistic, but then it could perhaps be pointed out that I am new to the job so I do not know whether that is just an occupational hazard.

Discussions are going forward involving all three strands of the Belfast agreement. Discussions have been undertaken between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach and between my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Foreign Minister of Ireland, and it is appropriate that they should as provided for in the Belfast agreement. As I say, we are entering a crucial stage. It is important that we look forward rather than back. I have a lot to learn but I think looking forward is probably a good idea in Northern Ireland, and I think it is what people are focused on.

Lord Hain (Lab): My Lords, when exactly was the involvement of the Prime Minister, as he said, negative? I would like to know. The default position for anyone who has done the job is to support the Secretary of State regardless of party. However, I really feel that the Government have lost the plot, and have done so now for a period. My noble friend Lord Murphy was the first to say some six months ago that it was necessary to convene a summit of the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach to resolve the problem, but that did not happen. Deadlines have been set and passed with equanimity with no downside for any of the parties concerned. In addition, there is a massive democratic deficit in Northern Ireland now at a time when Brexit requires Northern Ireland's voice to be heard, as Wales's and Scotland's voices are being heard through their Governments more than ever before.

Lastly, I want to ask about the donations Bill. Does the Minister accept that there is real concern that it will hit one side of the community, particularly the nationalist parties? I do not think that legislation is helpful at a time when the Government already stand accused of being partisan and dependent on their deal with one party in Northern Ireland to keep the Prime Minister afloat.

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, I thank the noble Lord for his contribution. He comes with past experience of the job. He will know that deadlines have been set in the past; this is nothing new. I fully agree with what he says about the democratic deficit. It was inherent in the Statement that we need a power-sharing Executive because of budgetary issues and involvement in issues such as Brexit as well as many others. I do not disagree with him on that at all. All I can say is that work is progressing and there is a narrowing of the disagreements, so there is the prospect of a deal.

On the question of the donations legislation, obviously there will be a chance to discuss this when it is presented to Parliament but I would say that it has been welcomed by the opposition Front Benches both in the House of Commons and here. There will be a chance to scrutinise it as it goes through both Houses.

Lord Empey (UUP): My Lords, while much has been made of disrespect and respect, who is respecting the more than a quarter of a million people who are on hospital waiting lists, over 53,000 of whom have been waiting for over 12 months to see a consultant? Who is respecting the interests of the victims of the historical institutional inquiry that people have been waiting a lifetime for but is lying idle and unattended to on the shelf in Stormont? Who is paying any respect or even attention to the schools that will reconvene in September not knowing whether they have budgets that can carry them through the entire year? This shame and disgrace have been going on now for over six months. While I am entirely in favour of people treating each other with respect, the vast majority of people who are on these waiting lists are being treated disrespectfully. Will the Minister be kind enough to pass that message on to his right honourable friend and ensure that those people have their legitimate needs and concerns properly addressed, openly and clearly?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, I thank the noble Lord for raising those issues. He will of course be aware that on a day-to-day basis, health spending and education spending are being carried forward in Northern Ireland because it is important that we have appropriate government there. What is not happening, as he did not allude to directly but I am sure he intended to, is that strategic decisions are not being made at the moment. That again refers to the democratic deficit, which we must seek to fill. At the moment the head of the Civil Service in Northern Ireland has indicated that the Civil Service is in a position to keep matters running, but the noble Lord is right to say that this could not go on indefinitely and that there is a democratic deficit. There is indeed.

Lord Murphy of Torfaen (Lab): My Lords, the Minister knows that a drift to direct rule is very easy and will be disastrous, but that to get out of direct rule is much more difficult. He knows that every successful agreement in Northern Ireland—the Good Friday agreement, the St Andrews agreement and others—has rested on important prime ministerial involvement. None of those agreements would have been possible unless the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach together talked to the parties and leaders in Northern Ireland. I take the point about the Taoiseach, but, where appropriate, the Taoiseach can be involved. Phone calls are not good enough. The Prime Minister needs to go to Belfast to talk to the parties concerned, because the British and Irish Governments are co-guarantors of the Good Friday agreement.

Finally, the Minister has enormous experience of Welsh politics and government, and he knows that you can have a language Act without the union being jeopardised. I hope that he can bring that experience to bear in the talks that lie ahead.

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, I am most grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Murphy, for his contribution. Once again, he did not allude to his personal experience, but I know that he has vast experience in Northern Ireland in many respects, not least as Secretary of State.

I agree about the involvement and engagement of the Prime Minister. That is important, and it is happening. The Prime Minister is constantly involved, but the lead at the moment rests with the Secretary of State. He is very much involved with the talks, flying backwards and forwards to Northern Ireland, engaging with the parties and progressing things. While that remains the case, I think that that is the best approach.

Baroness O'Loan (CB): My Lords, it is nearly two years since the Northern Ireland Assembly did anything but pass a Finance Act. I do not know whether your Lordships are aware of the consequences of that—the noble Lord, Lord Empey, spelled out some of them. Where does the Secretary of State's optimism come from? I looked at the response of the political parties to the Statement. Sinn Féin says that there will be no agreement in the short term, the DUP says that Sinn Féin is introducing more demands, the Ulster Unionists are saying that there is no further clarity and Colum Eastwood says that we are on the path to direct rule. That is actually what the people of Northern Ireland think. We do not know what is happening, but it looks like we are on the way to direct rule.

Can the Minister do something useful that would raise spirits in Northern Ireland? That might be handing over the money for legacy inquests and giving effect to that one small part of the rule of law which has been neglected in Northern Ireland. Secondly, could he look at having an Act on party donations? Could we have something that will provide pensions for those young people who were terribly injured in the Troubles and who now have no pensions and no money? Could he think about providing other support for the victims and injured in the Troubles, because no one is helping them?

We all know what has to happen: the noble Lord, Lord Empey, set it out. Can the Government not bring some hope and reassurance other than just the words that they are hopeful?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, I seek to reassure the noble Baroness that it is not just words at issue here, it is the fact that the Secretary of State has been very closely involved in the discussions. The discussions are progressing. I note what she says about statements by political parties engaged in talks, but she will know from the history that that is nothing particularly new. We want to ensure that we adhere to the Belfast agreement, and taking direct powers over relevant issues here would be very much contrary to it. That is not what we intend to do: we are wedded to the Belfast agreement and we are seeking to ensure that it is implemented.

Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top (Lab): My Lords, during my period as Chief Whip, I was well aware of how important day-by-day attention to the detail of the peace process was across government, but particularly in No. 10, and the relationship between the Northern

[BARONESS ARMSTRONG OF HILL TOP]

Ireland Office and No. 10. I and many others are concerned that insufficient attention has been paid on a daily basis to the importance of securing that peace process. You do not get a peace process on one day. Once it has been signed, you have to do the work again, again and again.

I am concerned about the partisanship of the Government and the Secretary of State. In the last week before the general election, he agreed a supply day for the DUP. He agreed to go to a fundraiser for the DUP, and had to pull out because of the outrage in the press in Northern Ireland. Now we have the relationship with the DUP. It is important that the Government seriously address appointing an independent chair for the talks—several have already been mentioned as possibilities. I urge the Government to take this seriously, because all of us will suffer if we do not get a devolved Assembly going and the threat to the peace process continues.

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, I entirely refute the accusation of partisanship made against the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—that is unworthy of the noble Baroness. They are wedded to the peace process and working hard to achieve it. She referred in particular to the agreement with the DUP, which of course is not contrary to the Belfast agreement. The billion pounds of spending, at least, was welcomed by Gerry Adams, who said, “Well done, Arlene”, so I am not sure that I could agree with her on that point. Where I agree with the noble Baroness is that it is important that we pursue the peace process and uphold the Belfast agreement in, as the noble Lord, Lord McAvooy, said, a bipartisan way. That is exactly what we are doing.

Lord Browne of Belmont (DUP): My Lords, I very much regret that to date no agreement has been reached between the parties in Northern Ireland to return much-needed devolved government. However, I understand that substantial progress has been made on many issues and, like the Secretary of State, I believe that a deal remains achievable. I therefore welcome the additional time that has been granted.

Of course, some important issues still need to be resolved. One of these is the matter of legacy. Will the Government undertake to publish the proposals on this, so that a wider consultation can take place, which would help to facilitate the parties in reaching a consensus on this issue?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, I am most grateful to the noble Lord for his more optimistic take on what is happening and the progress that is indeed being made. The legacy arrangements to which he refers were, of course, the subject of the Stormont House agreement: to be fair, balanced and proportionate. It will be on the agenda of an incoming power-sharing Executive to look at that, and we will need to consult the bodies concerned. That is what we will do when we reach that happy goal.

Lord Tebbit (Con): My Lords, I remind people that when we are discussing matters of the support given by the DUP to the present Administration, this is not a new event. It is only as recently as Mr Heath's

Administration that an Ulster Unionist, Robin Chichester-Clark, sat in the Government as Minister of State for Employment. We have had these things happen before, so what is the great excitement about it?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, I am grateful to my noble friend. I do not recall first-hand the matter to which he refers, but it was indeed the case that the Ulster Unionists were much more closely involved with the Conservative Party in the 1970s. Since then, of course, we have the Belfast agreement, which we are steadfastly adhering to and seeking to uphold across parties. That, I believe, is the way forward.

Lord Rogan (UUP): My Lords, I too welcome the Minister to his position, and ask two simple questions. It is now believed in Northern Ireland that no agreement will even be attempted before October at the earliest. This House and the other place rise at the end of July. How do the Government plan to address the situation, and in which way and by whom will Northern Ireland be governed during August and September? I ask again the question posed by my noble friend Lord Kilclooney: is direct rule an option?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, as I said, the progress being made is considerable, and we hope that an agreement will be reached before the timescale the noble Lord talks about—it would indeed be extremely difficult if we had not got a power-sharing Executive in place by October. Ultimately, everybody knows that power-sharing may give way to direct rule. That is not what anybody wants but, ultimately, I suppose that it is a possibility. I must say that it is not in the Government's thinking in any shape or form, any more than it is in that of opposition parties. At the moment, it is no more than a theoretical possibility. As I said, we are working hard to seek a power-sharing Executive. We are making some progress, and that is the position on which the Statement was presented in the Commons and repeated in the Lords.

Baroness Farrington of Ribblesdale (Lab): My Lords, having been on our Front Bench during the development of the Northern Ireland Assembly, I endorse my noble friend's comments about the need for the direct involvement of the Prime Minister. That is important.

Can the Minister give me an assurance that the Government will produce a clear, unambiguous statement about proposals in their agreement for funding to Northern Ireland, in the interests of having a united front across the United Kingdom? I accept totally the needs of Northern Ireland—and it is extremely important that other parts of the UK accept, recognise and appreciate those needs—but only if there is equity in the allocation of funds for Wales, Scotland and the English regions, in the interests of transparency, to which the Minister referred. We need a national consensus. Can the Minister assure me that he will have regard in the discussions to our support for the convention of the Council of Europe on minority languages? I seek an agreement from the Minister that he will write to me answering my question on financial arrangements with Northern Ireland: given the needs of other parts and regions, why now?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness for her contribution. I restate that the Prime Minister is closely involved and engaged in the discussions. She referred to the financial position, and I shall write to her and copy to other Members what precisely has been happening with regard to budgetary arrangements. They are, in essence, to ensure that essential public services continue in Northern Ireland. She will be aware of the more recent agreement between the Conservative Party and the DUP, which can be the subject of discussion on another day.

I recall a point which I omitted to respond to from the noble Lord, Lord McAvoy, about the donations Bill and the thresholds. I shall write to him, and to everybody who has contributed to this Statement, setting out exactly what is happening. It is obviously a fairly detailed matter.

Grenfell Tower Update

Statement

6.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government and Northern Ireland Office (Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth) (Con):

My Lords, with the leave of the House, I shall now repeat a Statement made in the other place by my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for the Department for Communities and Local Government. The Statement is as follows:

“With permission, I would like to update the House on the Government’s response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy, and our safety inspections of cladding in other buildings. Almost three weeks have passed since the catastrophe that hit Grenfell Tower. Progress has been made to help the survivors and people in surrounding buildings who were affected. Landlords across the country have been taking measures to make their buildings safe. Sir Martin Moore-Bick has been appointed to lead a full public inquiry, and an independent expert panel is now advising my department on any immediate action on fire safety that is required.

The disaster at Grenfell Tower should never have happened. The police investigation and public inquiry will find out why it did. Right now, the immediate priority of the Government is to provide every assistance to those who were affected and take every precaution to avoid another tragedy in buildings with similar cladding. The Grenfell Tower victims’ unit is operating from my department and providing a point of access into government, and staff from across government continue to offer support at the Westway assistance centre and a separate family bereavement centre. More than £2.5 million has been distributed from our £5 million Grenfell Tower residents’ discretionary fund. Each household affected is receiving £5,500 to provide immediate assistance and, so far, payments to 112 households have been made.

There has been much speculation about who was in the Grenfell Tower on the night of the fire, and it is vital that we find out. As I announced yesterday, the Director of Public Prosecutions has been clear that there will be no prosecution of tenants at Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk who may have been illegally

subletting their property, so all tenants can be confident about coming forward with information for the authorities. There may have been people living in flats that were illegally sublet, who had no idea about the true status of their tenancy. Now their families want to know if they perished in the fire. These are their sons and daughters, brothers and sisters; they need closure, and it is the least they deserve. But that cannot happen unless we have the information we need, so we are urging anyone with that information to come forward, and do it quickly.

The immediate response to the Grenfell disaster is being co-ordinated by the Grenfell response team, led by John Barradell, who is being supported by colleagues drawn from London Councils, the wider local government sector, the voluntary sector, police, health and fire services, as well as central government. Their expertise and hard work is making a huge difference, but this is only a temporary measure. It is also vital that we put in place long-term support for the longer-term recovery.

It was right that the leader of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea took the decision to resign. I look forward to working with a new leader of the council, and I will look at every option to ensure that everyone affected by this tragedy has the long-term support they need.

The Prime Minister promised that every family who lost their home because of the fire would be offered a good-quality temporary home within three weeks, and the deadline is this Wednesday. I have been monitoring the progress of rehousing, and we will honour that commitment. Every home offered will be appropriate and of good quality. What we will not do is compel anyone to accept an offer of temporary accommodation they do not want. Some families indicated they wanted to remain as close as possible to their former home, but when they received their offer decided it would be easier to deal with their bereavement if they moved further away. Some families decided that, for the same reasons, they would prefer to remain in hotels for the time being. Other households indicated that they would prefer to wait until permanent accommodation becomes available. Every household will receive an offer of temporary accommodation by this Wednesday, but every household will also be given the space to make this transition at their own pace, and in a way that helps them to recover from this tragedy.

The people affected by the disaster at Grenfell Tower need our assistance, and they are receiving it. They also want answers. Sir Martin Moore-Bick has been appointed to lead a full, independent inquiry. He has visited Kensington and met victims and survivors, as well as members of the local community who have done so much to help. After consulting with the community, Sir Martin will then advise on the terms of the inquiry, and we will ensure that there is legal support for victims so that they can play a full part. We must allow that inquiry and the criminal investigation to run their course. Each must have the space to follow the evidence wherever it takes them. We must all be careful not to prejudge or prejudice either of them, but what we can do right now is take sensible precautions to avoid another tragedy.

[LORD BOURNE OF ABERYSTWYTH]

The Building Research Establishment is continuing to test the combustibility of cladding for councils and housing associations, as well as private landlords. So far, all the samples of cladding tested have failed—that is 181 out of 181. It is obviously extremely disturbing that there are such a large number of buildings with combustible cladding, and the priority now is to make those buildings safe. Where appropriate, mitigating measures cannot be implemented quickly; landlords must then provide alternative accommodation while the remedial work is carried out, which is exactly what happened in the four tower blocks in Camden. Our primary concern has been buildings over 18 metres, or six storeys, where people stay at night. Hospitals, prisons and schools are also being assessed.

We ourselves have asked questions about the testing regime after discovering the 100% failure rate so far. The testing process itself has been looked at abroad by the Research Institutes of Sweden, which have confirmed that they believe that the process is sound. A full explanatory briefing note on the testing process has been made available on GOV.UK. As the note explains, every failed test means that the panels are unlikely to be compliant with the limited combustibility requirement of the building regulations guidance; that has been confirmed by legal advice and the advice of the independent expert panel that was established last week. For use of the panels to be safe, landlords need to be confident that the whole wall system has been tested and shown to be safe. We are not aware of any such system having passed the necessary tests, but I have asked the expert advisory panel to look into this further.

Almost three weeks have passed since the catastrophe that hit Grenfell Tower, but I know I speak for every Member of this House when I say we are still in shock. It was not just the terrible scale of the suffering, it was the fact that it happened in 21st-century Britain, in London's richest borough. I will continue to direct the full resources of my department to assist the Grenfell response team. I will be working closely with the new leader of Kensington and Chelsea Council to make sure that there are plans for the longer-term recovery in place, and I will return to this House regularly to update honourable Members on progress".

I commend this Statement to the House.

6.40 pm

Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Lab): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth, for repeating the Statement made in the other place by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. As the Minister said, this tragedy should never have happened. I am pleased that progress has been made on a number of fronts—but considerably more needs to be done. I am sure that Members of this House will agree with me that the devastation of this disaster was made all the worse in the immediate aftermath by the poor response of Kensington and Chelsea council, which can only be described as shameful. I am pleased that the leader of the council, Councillor Nicholas Paget-Brown, has resigned, along with his deputy, Councillor Rock Feilding-Mellen. I just wish they had accepted responsibility and resigned sooner.

I note that the Secretary of State has welcomed the resignation of the leader of the council—but why did he not call for it, as others did?

Many have called for the Secretary of State to appoint commissioners to take over the running of this authority, as it is not fit for purpose. But so far he has decided not to do this and instead has opted to “keep an eye” on the council. Can the Minister explain why the Secretary of State has decided to do this? What exactly does keeping an eye on the council mean and entail? It certainly does not seem to me to be the sort of response one would expect to such a complete and abject failure by the council towards the local community it was elected to serve and protect.

I am pleased that housing offers are being made, but is the Minister satisfied that everyone has been contacted, and that they have been assured that no other issues—such as how they were renting a property at Grenfell Tower—will be of any concern to the authorities? We must be sure that no vulnerable, traumatised families are hiding, frightened and not getting the help they are entitled to, or not being able to provide the police and other authorities with valuable information, because they are too scared to come forward.

The faith communities and the local voluntary sector have a big role to play here. What support are the Government giving to them to do this important work? Why has only half the discretionary fund of £5 million been distributed to date? The Minister said that 112 households had received the £5,500 immediate assistance. So how many have not? If it is even just one family after three weeks, that is a disgrace. How have these families been able to live? What about the report that at least one tenant has been charged rent? What arrangements have been made for the schooling and care of local children who attend Avondale Park primary school and have been traumatised by these horrific events?

I move on to the public inquiry, which was reaffirmed in the Queen's Speech. The background note to the Speech, published on 21 June, provided further detail and said:

“Residents, the families of the deceased, the Mayor of London and HM Opposition will be consulted on the terms of reference under which the inquiry will proceed and the Government will agree the terms of reference, which will be published in consultation with the Chair of the Inquiry”.

On 29 June, Sir Martin Moore-Bick, the chair of the inquiry said:

“I've been asked to undertake this inquiry on the basis that it would be pretty well limited to the problems surrounding the start of the fire and its rapid development, in order to make recommendations as to how this sort of thing can be prevented in the future”.

The Prime Minister has also said:

“No stone will be left unturned by this inquiry”.

It is important that we are very clear about this inquiry, its terms of reference when agreed, that no stone is left unturned, as the Prime Minister promised, and that Sir Martin has the power to go where the evidence leads him. Will the Minister please confirm that that is the case and that no conflict—perceived or otherwise—should be drawn from the statements I have previously outlined?

It is right that sensible precautions are taken to avoid another tragedy. It is shocking that all the samples so far tested have failed. The Statement does not make clear what the Government are doing to assist local authorities and other organisations when their buildings fail the fire safety test. The Government need to go much further than just saying, “Landlords must provide alternative accommodation”. We want to have a clear explanation from the Government of what they are doing to assist landlords in coping with this challenge—and that is not addressed in this Statement.

Finally, the Minister said that he would update the House on a regular basis—but we are going into the Summer Recess in three weeks and are not back until September. What plans do the Government have to ensure that, while we are in Recess, Parliament, the media, survivors and their families and the public are properly informed about what is happening; what progress is being made; and when things are proving more challenging than they thought they would be? The Minister may not be able to address my last point when he replies, but I trust he will agree to take it back to the department and will return to the Dispatch Box to address it before the Recess.

Lord Shipley (LD): My Lords, I am grateful to the Minister for repeating the Statement. I remind the House that I am a vice-president of the Local Government Association. I agree with the Minister that it was the right decision for the Government to make it clear that there would be no prosecution of those who may have illegally sublet flats. The Government were also right to say that the resignation of the leader of Kensington and Chelsea council was the right thing for him to do.

It is now three weeks since the catastrophe that should never have happened hit Grenfell Tower. It is also eight years ago today since six people died in the fire at Lakanal House in Camberwell, following which a coroner’s report published a number of recommendations that were sent to the then Secretary of State. That occurred in 2011—six years ago. As a consequence of that fire, guidance to social housing providers was issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government. Does the department know which local authorities undertook works to meet the recommendations in that guidance? Is there a list of what each local authority—or local housing provider, for not all are local authorities—actually did?

The Minister referred to 181 out of 181 failures in cladding tests. It is clear that those tests are vital, but I understand that it is not simply a question of the cladding: it is also the insulation and the void behind the cladding that can cause a fire to spread so very quickly. I was struck by a briefing produced by the Association of British Insurers, which I saw today, about approved document B. This document defines fire regulations in England and the Association of British Insurers urged a comprehensive review of it in response to the Lakanal House fire.

It repeated that recommendation when it responded to the housing White Paper. Its briefing stated:

“The ABI recommends that the Government urgently revise Approved Document B to reflect the fire safety risks associated with modern building materials, techniques and construction methods, deviating away from a focus on more traditional masonry builds”.

I say to the Minister that that is a very important issue. I do not think that action as a consequence of that can simply await the result of a public inquiry. It is extremely urgent. Local authorities and local housing providers should be told what action they should take within a matter of weeks. We should note that the ABI has urged this review since 2009.

There has also been a problem with emergency planning that I want to ask the Minister about, because there was clearly a major failure in Kensington and Chelsea with emergency plans. It took around 48 hours for there to be an identifiable process of who was responsible for what. Even then, there was very serious doubt. Can the Minister commit to the department ensuring that all emergency plans of all local areas are checked out, updated and made robust so that emergency responses can always take place quickly, with the responsibilities of all the different agencies clearly understood and acted upon?

Grenfell Tower was a most appalling tragedy. It increasingly seems as though some of the lessons that could have been learned from previous fire incidents had not been fully taken on board—which means that the speed of response by the Government this time matters very greatly.

Lord Kennedy of Southwark: Before the noble Lord responds, perhaps I could draw the attention of the House to my interests. I am a councillor in the London Borough of Lewisham and a vice-president of the Local Government Association.

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: I am most grateful to the noble Lord for that and to the noble Lord, Lord Shipley, for his contribution. I thank them for their general welcome of the progress that is being made. I will try to pick up some of the more detailed points that they made.

First, in relation to the position of Kensington and Chelsea, one has to remember that there is local political accountability. That said, it is important that we recognise that the immediate situation, which may well go on some time in relation to many of these issues, is being handled by gold command, the boroughs involved and central government with assistance from other bodies, to which noble Lords referred. I pay tribute particularly to the help that has been given by the voluntary sector and charities, which has been considerable. It has been trusted by the local community and has been much more responsive and much speedier in terms of an ability to act. That said, many civil servants have worked pretty much round the clock, as well as others from other London boroughs. I also pay tribute to what they are doing. The Secretary of State will want to engage with the new leader of Kensington and Chelsea to see what is happening in terms of political involvement not just from the governing party in Kensington and Chelsea but the other parties to see how we can move this forward. However, what is most important at the moment is that we have effective organisation on the ground dealing with these issues.

I can confirm to the noble Lord that everybody who has sought financial assistance has so far been given it. If others have not sought it, we are encouraging them to come forward. As I have indicated previously,

[LORD BOURNE OF ABERYSTWYTH]

there is sometimes an issue with languages but we have people on the ground who are able to help on the language issue, whether in writing or orally, so that is being handled as well. I should say that getting £2.5 million out—this is in addition to any entitlement to benefits—is not something to be dismissed too lightly. It is significant.

I turn to the inquiry that has been mentioned. This is a judge-led inquiry. The Secretary of State has indicated in the other place that he expects this to have broad terms of reference. Obviously, it needs to focus on the immediate situation in Grenfell Tower, but it also needs to consider the wider lessons that have to be learned. As we go on across many years, many Administrations, and, doubtless, across many parties in local government, there are lessons for us all to learn. Every day we are finding out more. It is important that we pick these up. It is the very least we owe to the people who have suffered and lost their lives in Grenfell Tower that we never let anything remotely like this happen again. So it is important that all those detailed lessons are learned, and that we have broad terms of reference. The judge, Sir Martin, has been in Kensington and is engaging with tenants and tenants' representations to ensure that we have that input and no doubt get those broad terms of reference.

As regards assistance for other authorities to which the noble Lord, Lord Kennedy, referred, whose samples have failed, I am pleased to say that in every case except Camden evacuation has not been involved, so although clearly the situation involves ongoing action it is not as difficult as the position has been in Camden. Obviously, we are reviewing that and seeing what has happened.

The noble Lord also asked about updating. In fairness, we have presented two Statements in a fairly short time. I have had a very good briefing session for Peers, which will be followed up with a detailed letter on some of the points that were raised. Some were answered at the time but some of the more detailed points were not. We will keep that under review, but we of course recognise the obligation to update Members. That is quite right.

I again thank the noble Lord, Lord Shipley, for his warm welcome of the progress that has been made, which was typically generous of him. I think that we have complied with the coroner's inquest recommendations in relation to Lakanal House, certainly the recommendation regarding sprinklers, which I imagine will be something that the inquiry will want to look at. I note what the noble Lord said about the Building Regulations. I will get officials to look at that again. However, I think the indication was that we were just looking at the position on the Building Regulations where it had been suggested by the coroner's inquest that we might want to simplify these. I think that we would want to review that in the light of what has happened. I do not think that we would want to pursue that as things stand at the moment.

I hope that I have picked up the points that have been made by noble Lords. However, as always, if I have not picked up anything following the Statement, I will ensure that it is covered in a letter.

6.57 pm

Lord Blencathra (Con): My Lords, will my noble friend, and indeed the whole Government, defend the integrity and impartiality of the learned judge appointed to conduct this inquiry and deplore the comments made by some that the only person capable of being an impartial judge on this has to be a black woman who has lived in a tower block? We have had too many criticisms of noble judges before. I know that is not a general view, but there were comments in the press this weekend about that. Can my noble friend assure me that the inquiry will look at the advice on staying put? All my life I have laboured under the misapprehension, apparently, that when there is a fire one gets out ASAP. Yet it seems that even when the whole building was ablaze from top to bottom, the emergency services may have been giving advice to stay put. That is all very well when one little flat is on fire, but not when the whole building is ablaze. Will that issue please be looked at as well?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: I thank my noble friend very much indeed for that contribution. I am happy to endorse what he says about the impartiality of the judge and to deplore the suggestion that has been made that such a situation has to be dealt with by somebody from a particular background. That is totally improper. It is important that we uphold the independence of our judiciary and recognise that Sir Martin will go about his job in that way.

I, too, had seen the point about staying put when there is a fire. Doubtless, that is something which the judge will want to look at within the context of the Grenfell Tower fire but more widely as regards advice when there are fires.

Lord Campbell-Savours (Lab): My Lords, the noble Lord will know that there are blocks of flats owned by private landlords in all our major cities which are clad in very similar material. When I asked the other day whether the cladding on those privately owned blocks should be tested compulsorily, as is the case with social landlord-owned blocks, the Minister said that, "it is not compulsory for them to do so, because that is what we have decided".—[*Official Report*, 27/6/17; col. 290.]

Many of my colleagues came up to me after I asked that question to say that they could not understand the answer. What is the difference between a privately owned block covered in this cladding as against a social landlord-owned block? Surely the risks are exactly the same? If one should be compulsorily tested, surely it should apply to the other. Can I have a fuller explanation on this occasion?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, I thank the noble Lord. In fairness, on that occasion I responded to a supplementary question, perhaps from a sedentary position, so it was a second question. However, I went back afterwards, because I took seriously what the noble Lord said; I know that he always comes forward with serious and properly researched points. After this dreadful fire in social housing, the Government have taken the view that looking at social housing in this country has to be our top priority. That is not to say that we disregard our concern for private blocks, because

indeed they have been contacted, and indication has been made to landlords that they are able to avail themselves of the free testing facility, we are encouraging them to do so and we will follow that up. But in terms of priorities, social housing will come first, and then of course we will, rightly, turn to the issue of private housing. As regards resources, we could not offer the same attention to both. It is not that it is more important, but we are focusing on the social housing first.

Baroness Falkner of Margravine (LD): My Lords, I declare that I am a resident in Kensington and Chelsea and have stood as both a parliamentary candidate and a council candidate there. The borough has, quite rightly, come up for quite a lot of criticism. Will the Minister tell the House, first, when he expects the interim report to be published, and will he reassure everybody, whether in social or private housing, that should the council be found wanting, even within the scope of the interim report—which will, of course, just be interim—the Government will take those findings extremely seriously and will think about looking at the governance arrangements of the borough?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness. On the interim report of the inquiry—we very much anticipate that there will be such a report—of course the Government will take that very seriously, but we want to ensure that immediate urgent action is taken. I do not want to second-guess what it might say, as that would be totally inappropriate. In raising that issue, the noble Baroness reminds me of a matter raised, I think, by the noble Lord, Lord Kennedy, or the noble Lord, Lord Shipley, on insulation—it was the noble Lord, Lord Shipley. The expert panel will want to look at that; it has already had two meetings and it is obviously quite distinct from the inquiry. We set up the expert panel under the leadership of Sir Ken Knight, who has vast experience of fires and so on, and it will come forward with matters that need dealing with even more urgently than the interim report. That might be an appropriate way forward, and that is what we anticipate will happen.

Baroness Manzoor (Con): My Lords, I understand that the vast majority of tenants at Grenfell Tower were from ethnic minorities and of Muslim origin. That starkly highlights the poverty trap that many of these communities find themselves in. Can my noble friend say what longer-term strategy we are introducing so that we can ensure that people from ethnic minority communities are not trapped in this way? That is a wide question, but a more specific question for the short term is: are the Government setting up specialist bereavement and support services for those who have been traumatised in this dreadful and appalling incident?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: I thank my noble friend for those perceptive points, which are on a broader front than the Grenfell fire situation or fires generally, about the nature of social housing in our country today. First, she will be aware that we are conducting a racial audit within government; I think that this is the first time this has ever happened. It has slipped back by perhaps a couple of months because

of the election, but we are looking, across all government departments, at issues such as education, school places and housing allocation to see exactly what the stark figures are. One cannot really argue with the figures, and one would want to ensure that policies are properly framed with regard to those. Secondly, the Casey report is still very much work in progress—that is the report that was made to the Home Secretary and the then Prime Minister on issues of integration—and we will want to take that forward as well in the context of the racial audit. Therefore, my noble friend raises important issues. She asked a second question about bereavement support, which is being done by government departments. We are ensuring that it is in place and being used, and it is important that we do so.

Lord Best (CB): My Lords, I have three quick questions about this ghastly tragedy. First, the Secretary of State has promised extra funds for remedial work that councils need to carry out. Am I right to assume that housing associations will be eligible for those extra funds in the same way as councils? Often housing associations now own the blocks that were previously council owned. Secondly, will the funds that go to councils—and, I hope, also to housing associations—for remedial work on other tower blocks elsewhere be new money, or will this money be drawn from the funding set aside for new development? It would be a double tragedy if we lost some of the new homes that we desperately need to see built. Finally, on the governance point, rather specifically about the particular arrangements in Kensington and Chelsea, will the inquiry look at the tenant management organisation's relationship with the local authority? It is a rather unusual way of working, with the danger—I want to know whether the inquiry will tackle this—of things falling between the tenant management organisation and the council as the owner itself.

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, I thank the noble Lord very much for those pertinent questions. First, on his question about remedial work and whether funds will be made available for local authorities and housing associations, my understanding is that that is the case. I will, once again, cover that in the write-round letter, but I believe it is the case. I believe also that it is new money—our targets on housing remain very much as they were—but, again, I will cover that in the letter. On the governance arrangements, I will ensure that this debate is made available to the judge, Sir Martin, so that he is aware of the discussions here. I would be surprised if that issue did not come up in discussion with tenants' organisations, which he will be speaking with. However, the point is well made, and I will make sure that it is brought to the attention of the judge, as well as the whole of this debate.

Lord Campbell-Savours: My Lords, I am sorry to come back again but, to be frank, I am dissatisfied with the responses I am getting. Why cannot the private sector fund its own cladding testing arrangements and get on with that job immediately? I am sure it is not beyond the wit of man to generate, create or design the equipment that is used in testing. As I understand it, Ministers are now saying that the many dozens, if not hundreds, of privately owned blocks—I

[LORD CAMPBELL-SAVOURS]

do not know how many—which potentially have had this cladding applied to them, will have to wait, because there are not the facilities. The Minister said that the Government's priority is to deal with the social landlord sector, which means that private blocks will have to wait to see whether they are tested, unless those test sites are already available. If they are, why cannot it be made compulsory?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, the point is one of compulsion. They are available, and there is spare capacity at the moment, as has been indicated—we can do 100 tests a day. So we are encouraging landlords to make use of that facility: they are able to do so; we are encouraging them to do so; and there is evidence that many are doing it. The point is one of compulsion. We are not compelling it at the moment, because—

Lord Campbell-Savours: Why?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: We are putting our attention very much on the social housing sector, which, in the light of what has happened, noble Lords will understand.

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): My Lords, I thank the Minister for his helpful Statement on this agonising subject, and I endorse his thanks for all that people are trying to do to improve the situation. As someone who has for many years been either a regulator within government or in business being regulated, I have concluded that in areas such as safety and standards, including fire safety, we need regulations that are balanced, well thought out and cost effective; simply expressed and well communicated to everybody who needs to know what those regulations are; and—this is the important point for today—properly enforced. So often we find that good rules are not enforced and disasters of the tragic sort that we have seen on this occasion ensue. Therefore, I ask my noble friend, and I think that the noble Lord, Lord Shipley, will probably be interested in the answer to this question as well: how can we quickly prioritise and improve enforcement of the regulations in this area—that is, fire safety—and indeed of other regulations, such as product safety, which may be important, and how can we do that at speed? That obviously includes the public sector, where there has been a problem in this area, and business, although in my experience business people are very well aware of the serious health and safety responsibilities they have and the liabilities that they can incur. I would like to feel that the Government were thinking about the wider lessons here and about how we might prevent such tragedies happening in this and other areas.

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, I thank my noble friend very much for her general encapsulation of the principles that should be carried forward in relation to regulations in this field and indeed in many others, as she indicated. I say once again that the judge will no doubt want to look very seriously at the debate on this issue. My noble friend referred to the importance of carrying forward lessons in a timely and urgent way, and that is the purpose of having the expert

panel. It will look at these issues urgently, even ahead of the inquiry and the interim report. This is just the sort of issue that the expert panel will want to look at, along with the point about insulation, as I indicated to the noble Lord, Lord Shipley.

The Earl of Caithness (Con): My Lords, following on from my noble friend's question, given the difficulties that the London borough has faced, I am not certain that any other borough would have done better in facing such a big and unexpected tragedy. Does my noble friend intend to ask local authorities to submit a plan to central government on how they will tackle major incidents such as this? If this is to be part of the enforcement that my noble friend wanted, there will have to be clear, simple directives so that issues can be checked from central government down to local government and down to the private sector or local authority that manages each block.

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, my noble friend will be aware of both the expert panel to which I have referred and the inquiry. It is very important that the Government create the framework for what is needed to respond to the dreadful events of the Grenfell Tower fire and to the potential for something similar happening elsewhere. However, it is for the experts to determine what is possible and necessary. Therefore, the expert panel, which has vast experience in these areas, will be looking at this situation and advising the Secretary of State of the action needed in the very short term. The interim report of the inquiry will come forward with short to medium-term issues. The full report, which will consider a far wider range of issues, will then come forward with more detailed decisions and recommendations, which we will want to take forward.

Baroness Falkner of Margravine: My Lords, perhaps I may come back to the interim report of the inquiry. I do not believe that the Minister gave us a timeline. Have the Government not had discussions with the chair about when we might expect to see some of the findings come to light? This is a matter of great anxiety not just in the borough but for everyone who lives in tower blocks.

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, the point made by the noble Baroness is a fair one but the answer is: not ahead of the terms of reference being decided. Those have to be decided first to determine when an interim report might be appropriate. Of course, such a discussion will take place once we have those terms of reference.

Lord Lexden (Con): Is my noble friend confident that a new Conservative administration in Kensington and Chelsea will restore the public confidence that is so badly needed? Could there perhaps be a case for a short-lived coalition administration, drawing in representatives of other parties, so that these terrible issues can be tackled on a full, real, cross-party basis?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, I thank my noble friend for that helpful suggestion. First, it is important that we get a new leader in place and I am

sure that my right honourable friend the Secretary of State will then want to discuss with the leader how to carry this matter forward. As my noble friend indicated, it is always better that issues such as this, where there is essentially nothing to divide us, are carried forward consensually.

Energy Price Caps

Statement

7.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Lord Prior of Brampton) (Con): My Lords, I beg leave to repeat, in the form of a Statement, the Answer given to an Urgent Question by my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy in the other place.

“Mr Speaker, the Competition and Markets Authority, following a two-year inquiry, found that energy customers on standard variable tariffs were paying on average £1.4 billion a year more than would be the case in a competitive market. That is completely unacceptable, so my party’s manifesto committed to introduce a safeguard tariff to extend the price protection currently in place for some vulnerable customers—those on pre-payment meters—to more customers on the poorest-value tariffs.

The energy regulator, Ofgem, has the powers necessary to act to impose such a price cap without delay. I wrote on 21 June to the chief executive of Ofgem asking it to use the regulator’s powers to do that. Today, the regulator has replied and has announced that it will work with consumer groups to take measures, including extending the current safeguard tariff for those on pre-payment meters to a wider groups of consumers, and to move urgently to implement these changes. I welcome this initial proposal—it is a step in the right direction—but I will wait to see the actual proposals and to see them turned into action to cut bills.

The test of whether the regulator’s changes go far enough is whether it moves sufficiently to eradicate the detriment to consumers that the CMA has identified. I remain prepared to legislate if it does not, and I hope that such legislation will command wide support across the House”.

7.17 pm

Lord Grantchester (Lab): I thank the Minister for that Statement. Does he accept that, during the election, his party placed the promise of a cap on energy prices at the centre of its manifesto? Does he recall that the Prime Minister stated:

“So I am making this promise: if I am re-elected on June 8, I will take action to end this injustice by introducing a cap on unfair energy price rises. It will protect around 17 million families on standard variable tariffs from being exploited with sudden and unjustified increases in bills”?

Although these are welcome suggestions on safeguarding tariffs and on capping warrant charges for the installation of pre-pay meters, these measures would affect only 2.5 million customers, leaving more than 14 million standard variable tariff customers completely unprotected from price rises over the next period. Does he accept that the response to the letter to Ofgem of 21 June on

energy prices falls far short of implementing that promise? Although welcome, extending the safeguard tariff to more customers will not end the injustice of an excess £1.4 billion a year being paid on standard variable tariffs or bring about a competitive market.

Can the Minister confirm that the letter of 21 June does not ask Ofgem to consider introducing a general price cap? Can he explain why not, even though the CEO of Ofgem confirmed earlier this year that Ofgem would have the discretionary power to implement an energy price cap? Will the Government now be asking Ofgem to consider introducing a price cap? Is legislation coming or is the Minister content to ignore his party’s election promise of an energy price cap? What does the Minister have to say to the millions more people on standard variable tariffs who heard the Prime Minister’s remarks and may now be feeling misled and betrayed by the Conservative Government?

Lord Prior of Brampton: My Lords, in my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for BEIS’s letter to Dermot Nolan, the chief executive of Ofgem, he says:

“You will have seen that the Conservative manifesto proposed to ‘extend the price protection currently in place for some vulnerable customers to more customers on the poorest value tariffs’”.

That is what my right honourable friend has asked Ofgem to do. It will now go through a period of consultation and decide how best to do that.

Lord Stoneham of Droxford (LD): My Lords, on this side of the House we appreciate and welcome the measures that are obviously designed to help poorer customers. I will ask the Minister two questions. How much of this £1.4 billion does he assume is going to be redistributed back to customers as a result of these measures, and what is the shortfall on that? Secondly, his party, despite its election manifesto, has never seen a way of resolving these problems by price cuts. What is he going to do to improve competition? That is the way to control prices in this sector, and clearly they are not going to be controlled when you have a six-body cartel that is operating against customers’ interests.

Lord Prior of Brampton: My Lords, the Secretary of State has made it clear that, in judging whether Ofgem’s proposals go far enough, he will be looking at that figure of £1.4 billion—which, as the noble Lord knows, was identified in the CMA report of 2014. Clearly that is the figure that the Secretary of State has in mind. The noble Lord is absolutely right, though, that for the long term getting real competition into the market will drive prices down. Some 20% of the market is now supplied by companies other than the big six. I think that they now number 50, so there are signs of growing competition. The CMA is quite categorical in its diagnosis that customers are not yet feeling sufficiently well informed or enabled to make the switch. I went on to uSwitch today to have a look and I can understand that—one’s brain sort of hazes over a bit when you go into this sort of field. So I think it will take some time before competition really works in this market—which is why the Secretary of State decided to ask Ofgem to review the situation today.

Lord Whitty (Lab): My Lords, perhaps I could pursue the point raised by the noble Lord, Lord Stoneham. The reality is that the CMA inquiry found that the standard variable tariff, which is the bulk of the market, was being exploited by the oligopoly that runs most of our energy supply. It was an absolutely condemnatory finding. Unfortunately, the remedies proposed by the CMA did not add up to very much, which is presumably why the Prime Minister thought she had to make clear that heavier government action was necessary.

If my noble friend Lord Grantchester is right that the remedy proposed in the letter to Ofgem affects only a minority of those consumers, and that in any case it depends on Ofgem finding a way within its existing rules to implement it, that total market distortion is not going to be resolved by the relatively slow creep of greater competition; it is going to require some clear and probably legislative action by the Government. None of that was reflected in the Queen's Speech. Can we therefore expect that, if Ofgem gives an unsatisfactory answer to the Minister, we will get legislation on this basis in this Session of Parliament?

Lord Prior of Brampton: My Lords, I think the Secretary of State made it clear that, if there is an unsatisfactory response from Ofgem, he will resort to bringing through legislation. I should add that we should be careful about the law of unintended consequences in this case. It is very easy to win a headline with a blanket price cap and to reap adverse consequences later when the distortions that you bring into the market through that price cap make it worse for consumers rather than better.

Air Quality: London

Motion to Take Note

7.24 pm

Moved by Lord Borwick

To move that this House takes note of the case for improving air quality in London.

Lord Borwick (Con): My Lords, I recently watched a wonderful old film, "Genevieve", which was made in 1954 and starred a very young Kenneth More. In one scene two characters are driving through the countryside on the London to Brighton road. Their car breaks down so they stop on the side of the road next to an open field. They ask each other whether any other car could be expected to come past them on the London to Brighton road so they could be saved. I do not think there would be any such concerns on the A23 today.

In debating air quality, I declare an interest as the chairman of the GATEway autonomous vehicle project advisory board. I also have an unusual number of past interests. I have been a trustee and was deputy chairman of the British Lung Foundation for 12 years and there I learned that lung diseases are mainly diseases of poor people. For many complex reasons, debilitating lung diseases, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, known by the catchy acronym COPD, are predominantly found in those on lower incomes. A

very large number of people are subject to periodic exacerbations of their COPD, which is painful, frightening and extremely expensive for the NHS to ameliorate.

I also spent nearly 20 years as the chief executive and then chairman of the company manufacturing the London taxi and selling it in London with diesel engines. I am very glad that the new rules for London taxis will require them to be zero emission in the future and I will buy one the moment it enters production. I also spent seven years striving to make a pure electric delivery vehicle to deliver goods in London and other cities, where the only pollutant was the carbon dioxide produced by the driver. It was a marvellous vehicle and we were very grateful to Tesco, UPS and FedEx for their support but unfortunately, although we made 400 vehicles, the idea came far too early and we had to shut the company down after enormous losses. Having sold too few electric trucks, I then decided that there was only one product that people actually want and that is a zero-emissions politician.

Before we can deal with a problem we first have to recognise it as one. That means being able to measure it. How bad is the air quality in London? Air quality problems come from carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxides and particulates and all those poisons come from cars. What can be really damaging are particulate matter. They are measured by their diameter and the smaller the particles the more easily they are absorbed into the lungs and the bloodstream. PM2.5, emitted from cars, is especially damaging. As well as causing respiratory illnesses, smaller particles that go into the bloodstream can cause cardiovascular illnesses. There has even been particulate matter found in human brains, with air pollution having links to Alzheimer's disease.

We have only recently been able to reliably measure PM1 and even PM0.1 and just as we have discovered that PM2.5 can do more damage than PM10, we should all be nervous of the effects of these even smaller particles. However, the dangerous gases and particles do not come from cars alone—central heating and gas cooking hobs can produce large amounts. Cars produce pollution in complex ways. It is not just the fumes pouring out of the exhaust that bring down air quality. For example, one of the largest sources of particulates is tyre and brake wear. When your tyres wear down, where does the rubber dust go? It is likely that it goes up into the air and into the lungs of passers-by. In a busy city such as London, there is often traffic stopping, starting, braking and accelerating. All of these actions increase tyre and brake wear.

In a study done recently in Ontario, researchers proved that although the average pollution recorded was one figure, this was an average of a very wide range. You can have dreadful concentrations of pollution that will not be detected. Urban design makes sure that no wind tunnels are formed between buildings, but it is wind movement that stirs up stagnant air. It is perfectly clear that you can get a wide variety of readings of particulates in different parts of London but they also vary with the weather, the wind and the design of the streetscape. We watch out for new buildings that cause wind tunnels to be formed among skyscrapers, but it is perfectly possible that such a wind tunnel is mixing up pollution and blowing it away. Perhaps we

should look out for the reverse—buildings that slow the dispersal of pollution. Sensible urban design will be a key part of ameliorating air pollution.

I have recently been carrying an air quality meter and although the air quality in this House is fine and pretty good on the roads around it, when you go into Westminster Underground the meter goes mad—it goes up by about 100 times. This may be because the ventilation system of the Tube is 100 years old and the tube is dirty. Does the Minister know whether the new Crossrail system has a ventilation design that will eliminate dust and particles? Will he ask the Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants about the potential dangers of air pollution in the London Underground, who should be warned and what else should be done about it? I know the mayor has started to look into this issue but more work needs to be done.

For a long time big landlords have had standby diesel generators so that their trading can continue if electricity service is interrupted. Occasionally these would be started and run for a short time if only to check that they were in working order. An unexpected by-product of the recent rules to enable private producers to feed-in electricity into the grid is that it is apparently now economic for such department stores and office blocks to run their generators and be paid for it. Bizarrely, we are now generating electricity through medium-sized diesel generators in the centre of London.

Do we have the right regulations to deal with the emissions produced? Small local generators in the centre of London cannot be the right answer. So, therefore, are we asking the right question? As you can tell, the sources of pollutants are wide-ranging and identifying the type of pollution is complex. However, the impacts are brutal, and so my main request is for more serious effort to go into research. We need research to be done to find out which of the exhaust particles and those from brake and tyre wear that are emitted from cars do the most harm, and in combination with which other factors. We need research into the unexpected behaviour of pollution. We also need more research into other forms of public transport as it is not easy to say that all Londoners would be better off on the Tube, or, indeed, on a bus or a bicycle. Then, once we know, we can act.

The Great Stink of 1858 was one such time when noble Lords were moved to act when the smell was apparent in and around this House. Thanks to Bazalgette, the solution of new sewers solved the problem. Perhaps this generation of Parliament, which is breathing in the air just as its predecessors suffered from the Great Stink, can take action with similar good results.

We know that poor air quality in London is a big issue. This can be traced back to the early 2000s, when the only thing we concentrated on was carbon dioxide. That led to the introduction of preferential tax treatment for cars with diesel engines as they emit less carbon than petrol cars. However, they emit much more particulate matter, which has a catastrophic impact on health. Drivers, commuters, walkers, cyclists—all Londoners are at risk.

There are some exciting new inventions being tried out by Westminster Council, notably pollution-eating paint and generators powered by footfall. It was

encouraging to see action taken this week against drivers who leave their engines idling while picking up their children from school or collecting someone from the shops. Leaving an engine running is often because the driver is trying to control the temperature of their car, but, of course, the effects of it can be harmful to passers-by. The safest thing to do then might be for everyone to work from home—but, of course, hiding away is not the answer.

What can we do? At the moment, many cyclists wear masks, which are quite often sold with the words “anti-pollution filter” as part of the marketing. However, they are usually ineffective. For one thing, for a mask to work properly it would need to sit so tightly to the skin on one’s face as to require suction. That is not a comfortable or desirable solution. You often see pictures of the citizens of Beijing—thousands of people—all with masks around their mouths and noses. It can certainly cause problems for deaf people who lip read. It seems to me that this is more important politically than it is as a preventive measure. The striking visual of a city’s workers, shoppers and families all wearing masks makes it hit home just how bad the smog is in Beijing and that it must be tackled at source.

In Beijing, everyone has a headache from the pollution. When I was there I wondered what would happen if I filled a jam jar with the city’s air and then brought it back through customs. However, rather than cause trouble for our border staff, I instead looked up the rules for shipping certain substances. Royal Mail prohibits the shipping of nitrogen dioxide within the UK and internationally. Indeed, it is listed alongside toxic and infectious substances such as arsenic, cyanide, Ebola, mercury, mustard gas, pesticides and rat poison as being prohibited for posting and shipping. My noble friend the Minister may reassure me that it would not be illegal as it is only a trace amount, but I could not find this exception in the regulations. Why are people expected to breathe traces of nitrogen dioxide on London streets when it is prohibited for posting and classified in the same bracket as deadly diseases and chemical weapons? The department has been accused before of trying to talk down the importance of this poisonous subject.

Electric cars are another game changer. The technology is getting more impressive by the day but we need continuing research and development to ensure we reach a stage where they are genuine viable alternatives to cars, vans and lorries. More kerbside space could also be dedicated to charging infrastructure.

However, more conventional cars are improving nowadays. Manufacturers routinely spend as much on the exhaust system as they do on the rest of the engine. So replacing an old car with a new car is likely to be the best thing an individual can do, which argues for a scrappage scheme to get rid of the old, badly maintained vehicles.

We must also be mindful of the Volkswagen scandal. The idea that other car companies were totally ignorant of VW’s actions is questionable. Car companies all buy each other’s cars to find out what makes them work so well. Were they actually ignorant of how VW were doing it, or did they cover up their findings and

[LORD BORWICK]

not blow the whistle that could have saved many thousands of illnesses? Real-world testing will also be essential.

Autonomous vehicles will also be important in this fight. They will drive at steadier speeds than human drivers and will almost certainly reduce the amount of particulates emitted from constant speeding up and braking. There are clever new devices to monitor driving and, hopefully, improve it.

We could also look further into the success or failure of low emissions zones. The Mayor of London's modelling shows that bringing in the ultra-low emission zone from 2019 would result in a 20% reduction in the expected NO_x emissions levels.

We also hear campaigners argue for more bicycle lanes in London. That would be great to improve the safety of cyclists, but the population of London is increasing, with road capacity decreasing. By slowing down cars, cycle lanes are causing pollution that is now being breathed in by the cyclists themselves. While they are being constructed, traffic delays are caused. This means more pollution.

Just as they now announce the pollen count and the UV intensity on weather broadcasts, perhaps there should also be announcements of pollution levels. Just as those with skin conditions might stay in to avoid high UV levels, government advice is now sometimes given that people vulnerable to lung problems should stay indoors and avoid the dirty streets. I think it is the people who normally drive polluting cars who should stay indoors.

The first Clean Air Act received Royal Assent on 5 July 1956, 61 years ago almost to the day. It was transformative. It changed our outlook on air pollution and set the framework for future action. However, of course, there is still more work to do. That is why I am so pleased to be debating this vital issue. It is clear that air pollution is a silent killer. We now need more research into these health effects and the solutions available. We have an opportunity to mark the 61st anniversary of the first Clean Air Act by pledging to take even more steps to improve air quality. I beg to move.

7.39 pm

Lord Whitty (Lab): My Lords, I offer my warm congratulations to the noble Lord not only because he has initiated this debate but on giving us such a comprehensive and technically informed tour of the issues involved. I need to declare an interest as the current honorary president of Environmental Protection UK, which is the successor body to the National Society for Clean Air, one of the campaigning bodies that produced the Clean Air Act 1956, referred to by the noble Lord. My noble friend Lord Hunt, who will speak later in the debate, is also a former president of that organisation—not as far back as 1956, but nevertheless he made a significant contribution to it. I look forward to his speech.

As the noble Lord, Lord Borwick, said, the 1956 Act was a great landmark. It effectively removed smog and pea-souper fogs from London and thus transformed this city. But I have to tell noble Lords that the

Government of the day were not initially persuaded of the necessity for such an Act. I have before me a confidential Cabinet committee paper, admittedly not a scoop because it dates back to 1953. In it Harold Macmillan, then the Housing Minister and a brilliant one in that role, did not initially take air pollution very seriously. Indeed, he was at his most disdainful and cynical. I shall quote him directly:

“Today everybody expects the Government to solve every problem. It is a symptom of the welfare state ... For some reason or another, ‘smog’ has captured the imagination of the press and the people. I would suggest that we form a Committee. Committees are the oriflame of democracy. There are some short-term things which we have done; and can do. There are some longer-term solutions ... We cannot do very much, but we can seem to be very busy—and that is half the battle nowadays”.

Eventually Harold Macmillan changed his mind, but only after another three years of vigorous public campaigning as well as the work of the committee of inquiry set up under Sir Hugh Beaver. Of course, later in his life Macmillan claimed the Clean Air Act as one of his great successes.

I now fear that more recent Governments, including the current one, have been as complacent as Macmillan originally was. Unfortunately, as the noble Lord has just said, there are still dangerous although invisible substances in our atmosphere which have yet to be tackled effectively and which again affect in particular the poorer communities within our population. Large parts of London still exceed EU standards for NO₂ and World Health Organization standards for both NO₂ and ultrafine particulates. These are damaging to cardiovascular health and can cause respiratory diseases. Although the calculations are complicated, they are thought to have caused up to 10,000 equivalents of death in London alone.

I take some responsibility as I have been both a Transport Minister and a Minister in Defra, and I briefly held the portfolio for air quality. Subsequently, I served on the board of the Environment Agency, which has responsibility for non-vehicular emissions. There has been some success in limiting point-source emissions but very little in relation to vehicular traffic. Moreover, the standards we have in place have been dramatically revealed to be inadequate. The Volkswagen scandal revealed a huge subterfuge in the motor sector to the detriment of the population at large, despite more rigorous EU standards and increasingly well-evidenced and assertive reports from medical and public health authorities.

Even the powers that we have had, we have failed to use. It is 20 years since I took legislation through this House to set up low-emission zones, but it has hardly been used. In London we now have the basis of low-emission zones and we have the mayor's new air quality strategy as well as work being done in some London boroughs of all political persuasions, to which the noble Lord referred. All are attempting to do something about the problem, but we need to do significantly more. The theme of my speech today is that it is important that the mayor's strategy is followed through so that the zones can be expanded and enforced, but a national strategy is needed to back that up. The mayor's powers are limited and the lack of a national strategy has already twice been exposed in the High

Court as inadequate in terms of the Government's responsibilities under European legislation and under their own commitments.

Pushing all the responsibility on to local authorities, as the current draft strategy does, will not work. They need the staffing and the resources to deliver. That is even more the case in cities outside London which face greater challenges. However, the Government are going backwards on that as well. Of the 17 cities they first thought needed attention, it is now proposed that only five will go forward in the national strategy.

The scope of the powers also needs to be addressed. Although road transport is the major contributor to pollution in London, it actually accounts for less than half of it, as the noble Lord indicated in his speech. He referred to stand-by diesel generators, and indeed stand-by generators of any sort as well as decentralised energy sources and other forms of heating. Another example is off-road construction machinery. All of it contributes to pollution levels. These need to be addressed by the mayor, who does not actually have the power to do so very effectively.

There are of course trade-offs in this. The noble Lord referred to the biggest of them, which is between climate change objectives and air quality objectives and the overriding commitment to fuel efficiency and thus carbon saving. That has led to what in retrospect was a mistake when the balance of taxation was changed in favour of diesel vehicles. That has aggravated the situation significantly, so technology and regulation must catch up. We need to take a holistic approach. It should not be impossible for the motor industry, even using current technologies, to produce filters that can tackle carbon and other emissions which are damaging to public health. Technology ought to be able to provide solutions and regulation has to back it up.

Other choices such as wood burning are allegedly also carried out for environmental reasons. I have my doubts about wood burning myself because I think that it is more of a lifestyle choice, and it is an increasing contributor to pollution in London and elsewhere. There are other trade-offs in relation to road safety. The noble Lord referred to the dust produced by braking and how some road humps actually contribute to increased air pollution by vehicles. However, the humps save lives, so we need road design that can contribute both to road safety and improve air quality by reducing pollution.

I have a number of questions for the Minister. Do the Government accept the findings of the King's College study which calculates a mortality equivalent of 9,500 deaths in London? Do the Government have figures for the number of staff and resources in local government, the Environment Agency and Defra and how they have reduced over the past few years? What has been the effect of that? Can the Minister tell us what will happen after Brexit, given that infraction proceedings will no longer be the enforcement mechanism? How will the Government enforce air quality standards? Again after Brexit, will the Government base policy on the same standards as the EU or will they adopt the WHO standards, which are more stringent? Will Volkswagen and any other transgressors face US-style penalties if they in effect distort testing results both on-road and off-road in the way that company did?

Why is there no scrappage scheme for older diesel vehicles, and will all new diesel motors be subject to on-road, real driving tests, with those failing being banned? I have a number of other questions but I shall put them in writing for the Minister; these are enough to be going on with.

I hope that the dismissive tones of Harold Macmillan 64 years ago are not echoed by the Minister's boss, Mr Michael Gove. In my capacity as president of EP UK I have written to Michael Gove urging him to set up a wide-ranging, high-powered independent clean air commission with the immediate task of helping to prioritise and allocate resources across government to ensure the effective enforcement of existing measures, and more particularly to develop a forward strategy and a new clean air Act. At the beginning, Macmillan was dismissive of experts; the current Secretary of State has been known to be similarly dismissive. In the end, Macmillan took their advice. The 1956 Act was, in retrospect, one of the few successful legacies of the Eden Government—a Government who, noble Lords may note, were an otherwise somewhat controversial and short-lived Conservative Administration, so it ought to have some attractions for the incumbents. I hope they adopt a more aggressive stance on this. It will be a real legacy that will benefit hundreds of thousands of citizens in London and beyond.

7.50 pm

Baroness Valentine (CB): I know that we are preparing to leave the European Union, but I start by recognising that it is Europe that has kept the pressure on successive Governments over air pollution standards—or, rather, tried but on the whole failed, given that we have been breaching agreed limits for a long time. In 2015, the Supreme Court ordered the Government to produce a new air-quality plan to better evidence how they would meet nitrogen dioxide limits. Following production of this plan, the Government were again taken to court by ClientEarth and required to provide a better plan by the middle of this year.

The Government could usefully take a leaf out of the various London Mayors' innovative approaches to tackling the problem. Nowadays, London's pollution is caused largely by transport emissions, whereas past pea-soupers were caused by burning coal. Thus I welcome the mayor's recent transport strategy, which promises a wide range of interventions to tackle air pollution. But sorting out air quality is potentially complex and expensive. It can be caused by dirty engines, traffic jams, narrow corridors or dips. It can be blown in or blown out by the wind. Pollutants need accurate measurement and we need to understand their impact—something we failed to do with diesel. Finally, we need to invest in electricity infrastructure, ideally renewably sourced, and manage congestion alongside renewing vehicle fleets. Above all, what is needed is an honest commitment to sorting out air quality and a pragmatic plan to work through some of those issues—in particular, to take the beam out of one's own eye before pushing that cost on to other people.

One-third of nursery schools in the capital experience nitrogen dioxide levels that threaten children's health. My children grew up in Putney, where the high street was one of the most polluted streets in London.

[BARONESS VALENTINE]

Causes included polluting buses, a narrow, high corridor and congestion. While Transport for London took a while to recognise that they were a major contributor, I am pleased to say that the corridor has recently become a low-emission bus zone, and more of these are to be rolled out. But while there is enough electricity to support a few hundred buses, 10,000 electric buses would require not only a new power station but many sub-stations, along with cabling to individual bus garages.

I am an investor in a company called Vantage Power and therefore declare an interest. This company has developed hybrid electric engines that are a practical halfway step to getting to all-electric buses, enabling buses to run through the most polluted parts of London in all-electric mode.

It is important to tackle congestion and cleaner vehicles at the same time. When the original congestion charging zone was introduced, nitrogen oxides decreased by 8% and particulate matter from diesels by 15%. It is self-evident that idling engines in traffic jams are not a recipe for clean air. So, ironically, as was alluded to earlier, while encouraging cycling helps, putting a cycle lane down the Embankment, which causes serious congestion, both adds to the pollution and pollutes the cyclists. A better-conceived cross-London cycle lane would have had cyclists going diagonally across Hyde Park, rather than riding alongside congested traffic.

I turn to the area around Heathrow. Planes cause pollution at two levels: in the sky and on the ground. Here again, congestion is part of the story. Most aircraft landing at Heathrow go into holding stacks before landing, significantly increasing pollution—something I hope runway three will help to sort. But of course we need to sort clean fuel, too. At ground level, the majority of the pollution is caused by vehicles, specifically those going to and from the airport and those on the M25 and M4.

Modal shift is one of the answers and I should again declare an interest as chairman of Heathrow Southern Railway, which is seeking to build a stretch of track alongside the M25 to join Heathrow to the railway tracks going south-west out of Waterloo. That would save more than 3 million vehicle trips a year. But the Government and the mayor could be much more ambitious about using congestion charging and raise money at the same time. People pay to use motorways overseas and a more ambitious programme would see congestion charging in London taken right out to the M25 to include road pricing on both the M25 and the M4. Current technology would enable the pricing to be flexed at different times of day so that congestion is minimised, as in Stockholm. At the very least, some such congestion and emission zone could be introduced in the immediate neighbourhood of Heathrow, in parallel with increasing public transport to the airport.

In passing, I am delighted to note an initiative by Heathrow to subsidise 6,000 staff buying more environmentally friendly cars. I also note Uber's pilot scheme of 60 drivers using electric vehicles last year. The lesson from this was that Uber drivers sacrificed

around 10 hours driving per week due to the insufficient range of the cars and the lack of availability of on-street charging points.

I conclude by repeating my request for a genuine commitment by all parties to improving air quality for the sake of children living in London. To sort this overnight would be impractical and expensive, but there is no reason why we cannot have a pragmatic plan to work through the challenges and improve over time—ideally not too much time. For instance, beyond hoping that engines get cleaner quick enough and that car companies do not cheat in the emissions tests, what will national government do about congestion and polluting vehicles on the M25 and the M4? How ambitious will London government be in introducing flexible congestion charging and providing electricity infrastructure for buses and cars? What will councils do to manage pollution on their local streets? Will they make their residents pay for driving polluting cars? Finally, I look forward to the Government's announcement on surface access to Heathrow later this year, which is one part of this jigsaw.

7.57 pm

Lord Blencathra (Con): My Lords, I congratulate my noble friend on securing this important debate and on the extremely knowledgeable way he gave us a complete dissertation on all aspects of air pollution. I cannot aspire to copy that, so I shall concentrate on diesels.

I would never buy a diesel car in a million years. Perhaps my noble friend the Minister may appreciate this, because when I was a little boy on the farm in the highlands of Scotland, we could go into the car shed, start up the petrol-engined car—the only type available in those days—and potter around in the shed for about half an hour before the fumes became a bit much. When one went into the tractor shed and started up a diesel tractor, one was overcome by noxious fumes in about 30 seconds flat. We all knew that diesel engines were filthy things and that they were only good for lorries, combine harvesters and tractors, where one wanted good traction and incredible pulling power at low engine revs. The poisonous fumes did not matter because the vehicles were out in the countryside in the open air.

So when Gordon Brown in the last socialist Government started to give huge incentives to people to buy diesel cars, I was astonished. I assumed that somehow the experts had cleaned up diesel and I was not aware of it. But they had not cleaned it up at all. It was typical in my experience of Parliament of single-issue pressure groups such as Friends of the Earth demoralising one issue such as carbon and then blackmailing the Government—all Governments—into promoting diesel, even though it was a killer in other respects. So, before we hear too many demands that this Government must do more to deal with diesel pollution, can we have at least one word of apology from Gordon Brown, other socialist politicians and the lobby groups for the evils they inflicted upon us, all in the name of saving the planet?

Now we are stuck with far too many diesel vehicles, including all the criminal Volkswagens for which British drivers have not received one penny of compensation—I

believe that Porsche vehicles are equally guilty. However, that is a matter for the Minister for Transport and not for my noble friend.

In London, the problem is even more severe, for two reasons: an over-preponderance of filthy London buses and unprecedented congestion caused by cycle lanes. Last Saturday afternoon, traffic around Westminster was completely snarled up—I suspect that it may have been some of Mr McDonnell's anti-democratic henchmen marching to try to bring down the Government. On Horseferry Road, I counted eight open-topped tour buses with a total of six passengers between them, each bus belching out a mass of diesel fumes. Add to that the five ordinary buses, which had about 12 passengers between them, and then the half-dozen tour coaches, and the air in Horseferry Road was positively toxic.

We hear demands to penalise diesel car drivers—but they are not the main problem. The average MPG of a diesel car is 40 to 50—some are now even up to 70—whereas the MPG of a bus is six, with a 10 to 13-litre engine. When we get more hybrid and electric buses, buses will cease to be a problem—but all older buses will then most likely be converted to open-topped tour buses. I can accept that commuter buses, carrying passengers to and from work, should access bus lanes and have a favourable tax regime, but I can see no justification whatever for tour buses to carry on blocking London streets, not paying considerably more for the privilege and causing incredible pollution. I challenge any noble Lord tomorrow, even if it is a wet day, to find a single tour bus that is even half-full. There are too many of them and they are killing Londoners.

From January next year, I understand that all new London cabs will have to be battery powered. That is a noble aim, but I fear that TfL is not nearly ready; there are not sufficient charge points and the battery distance of 100 miles is not good enough. A trip to Heathrow and back will put cabbies out of action for an hour, even if they can find a charge point to recharge their batteries. I suspect that we will see a large drop in the number of taxis. They will be replaced by—I am quite happy to use these words—the rotten and corrupt Uber company, whose drivers will face no penalty for driving diesel cars. TfL may end up putting decent London cabbies out of business and letting them be replaced by unqualified, uninspected drivers who have no clue where they are going.

I also feel strongly because, if Uber succeeds in putting London cabbies out of business, people like me and others in wheelchairs will never get a taxi again, since Uber does not have to provide a single wheelchair-accessible taxi. It is not allowed to discriminate if you book such a taxi, but it does not have to provide any, whereas all London cabs—current diesel ones and the new electric ones—are wheelchair accessible. I am conscious that I am treading on dangerous ground in talking about taxis in the presence of my noble friend Lord Borwick, who is an expert, but I hope that my remarks are not too wide of the mark.

I have the great privilege to serve on the Council of Europe. I missed all the Queen's Speech debates last week because I was attending the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. There, as in Paris, I saw tens of thousands of cyclists and not a single one in Lycra and a racing

helmet—except for tiny little toddlers wearing a helmet in a sort of wheelbarrow attachment on a bicycle, and they were quite cute. It was a pleasure to watch those cyclists: men and women of all ages, in normal clothes, riding elegantly with their heads held high. It was almost reminiscent of those pictures one saw of people riding penny farthings in the old days.

In France, they can ride on the pavement, and I have never felt so safe in my life—as opposed to taking my life in my hands when trying to cross to 1 Millbank and encountering some of the thugs on bikes mowing me down on the pedestrian crossing. How have we got it so wrong in this country and the French so right? I did not see a single racing bike handlebar in Paris or Strasbourg. Everyone rode with their head held high and their head much higher up than their bottom—there is nothing more repulsive than the sight of the Lycra-clad louts in London with their bum in the air and their head between the handlebars. That is not an air pollution problem, but it leads to an attitude whereby some cyclists regard London and other parts of the country as a racing track.

I have lived and worked in London since 1979 and have always considered it the greatest capital city in the world. Now our dedicated cycle lanes are destroying it and completely jamming up traffic. A former 20-minute taxi ride from here to Euston station now takes 45 minutes. To go to London City Airport, I instruct the driver to go south of the river and use the Rotherhithe Tunnel. It is many more miles and costs me more, but at least I get there in half the time it takes trying to use the Embankment, which is now a no-go zone. Most of the time, the cycle lanes are empty. Vehicles cannot use them because they have huge kerbstone barriers.

There are also red lines everywhere. Wheelchair users cannot flag down a taxi on the Embankment because it is down to one lane either way, with red lines. If a cabbie breaks the law to stop, they will jam up the traffic for ages as wheelchair users get into the taxi. Why in the name of goodness did TfL not do with cycle lanes what it did with bus lanes, with a big white line separating the cycle lane from the rest of the road and a requirement that cyclists have priority from 7 am to 10 am and from 4 pm to 7 pm? That would have worked perfectly. Instead, London has created dedicated racing tracks for cyclists who ignore red lights and pedestrian crossings, while tens of thousands of motor vehicles—buses, lorries and cars—sit jammed in traffic and belching out petrol and diesel fumes. It is probably too late to change the system now. We cannot adopt the French system because our cycling culture is now so ingrained. It seems to me, as a victim on various pedestrian crossings, that cyclists feel that they have a God-given right to cycle as fast as they can on dedicated tracks, and to hell with pedestrians and other road users.

It is not often—if ever—that I have praised the French in the past, but I envy them their cycling and pedestrian culture, where we all share the same space and respect each other's right to use the road. Thus I am afraid that air quality in London will not improve until we tackle polluting London buses and change our cycle-lanes policy. But can we hold our breath that long?

8.07 pm

Baroness Blackstone (Lab): My Lords, I must declare an interest: I have just recently become chairman of the British Lung Foundation, of whose board of trustees the noble Lord, Lord Borwick, was a member for a long time. Since that charity has done a great deal of valuable work in trying to promote better air quality not only in London but in the UK generally, I thought it right that on my third day as chair of the trust I should speak on this subject, although I am no expert on it.

I want to begin by discussing the public health dimensions of the crisis that we face in air quality in our big cities, especially in London. No one can any longer be complacent about this and assume that it is a problem faced only by cities such as Delhi, Beijing or Shanghai. I will not go into all the details of the scientific evidence—the noble Lord provided the House with an excellent summary of these issues—but want to pick up one point made by the noble Baroness, Lady Valentine, in mentioning the EU. The EU has done an extraordinarily important job in tackling how we measure pollution in our cities as well as producing a scheme to try to regulate it.

It is a sad reflection of the situation here that the people of London are exposed to pollution which far exceeds EU limits. Around an eighth of the total area of London is above the legal limit for nitrogen dioxide. According to the WHO's definition of safe levels of particulate matter, air in 90% of the city is considered toxic to breathe. Moreover, Defra's own modelling shows that not just London but as many as 40 urban areas in the UK will have toxic and illegal air by 2020. This crisis urgently needs to be dealt with.

The implications for public health are enormous. First, air pollution contributes to the development of lung conditions. Incidentally, lung disease is already the UK's third-largest killer after cardiovascular disease and cancer. Too few of us are aware of this fact. Toxic air is a major contributor to developing a lung condition. Children are particularly vulnerable as their lungs are still developing, and those growing up in high-pollution areas are four times more likely to have poor lung development. Many suffer from chronic asthma, and their lungs may well be damaged for the rest of their lives. How can we expose vulnerable children to suffering of this sort which is wholly preventable? Moreover, those children and adults in deprived areas—as the noble Lord, Lord Borwick, said—are more likely to be exposed to poor-quality air.

Secondly, toxic air exacerbates the suffering of those who already have a lung condition. The symptoms of those with COPD—which, again, the noble Lord referred to; an extremely unpleasant long-term chronic disease—or asthma become worse, sometimes leading to hospitalisation, just because they breathed air outside. Why should they spend their lives inside? Those with cardiovascular disease are also at risk of suffering from coronary attacks which can lead to hospitalisation due to exposure to high levels of traffic-related air pollution. The Department of Health and NHS England say that public health and the prevention of disease is a high priority. Here we have an area of ill-health that is preventable, yet the Government have done far too little about it.

The cost of this is enormous. Estimates suggest that around 40,000 deaths per annum across the country are attributable to toxic air, and in London it contributes to 9,400 early deaths per annum. The direct costs to the NHS in London are extremely high, given the several thousand hospital admissions caused by air pollution every year. The overall economic cost could be as high as £3.7 billion, according to a recent study by King's College London.

I turn now to the challenge this poses for the Government and will ask the Minister a number of questions. Before doing so, I salute the work of Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, for deciding to attach very high priority to improving air quality. He has already announced a number of measures for tackling the problem. However, he cannot do this alone. The Government must play their part and not simply pass on responsibility to local authorities, either in London or elsewhere in the UK. As my noble friend Lord Whitty said, solutions require national as well as local policies.

My first question is: why were there no provisions for a new clean air Act in the Queen's Speech? We heard a little about the history of the earlier Clean Air Act and I think it was in the Conservatives' manifesto, so why are the Government going through a two-year Parliament with no such Bill? This is urgent. Moreover, it would attract cross-party agreement. I hope the Minister will not say when he replies that there is no room for anything other than Brexit-related legislation, when we are told that currently the Government are struggling to find enough business to fill parliamentary time.

A clean air Act should help to promote greater understanding of the need for clean transport, including more walking and cycling. The noble Lord, Lord Blencathra, was a bit unfair to cyclists. I accept that there are some dangerous cyclists, but many are far from dangerous and are doing the right thing in cycling to work or to meet friends rather than getting in their cars. While I am attacking the noble Lord, Lord Blencathra, he was also a bit hard on Gordon Brown—the “socialist politician”, as he described him. It is fair to say that, when government advice was given that it would be better to buy a diesel car rather than a petrol car, that was based on what was the scientific consensus at the time. I am sure he regrets that now, as many other people do who were involved in giving that advice, but the Prime Minister alone cannot be taken to task for it.

A clean air Act ought also to establish new legal limits on pollution, based on the WHO's standards. It could also introduce a targeted diesel scrappage scheme—to which the noble Lord, Lord Borwick, and my noble friend Lord Whitty already referred—to help local authorities get the most-polluting vehicles off the road. What do the Government plan to do in this respect? This seems a really important, burning issue. There is also a need for new fiscal incentives. Vehicle excise duty and company car tax should be further adjusted to encourage people to purchase the lowest-polluting vehicles, to deal with all three of the main sources of pollution: CO₂, NO₂ and PM emissions. Following the Vauxhall scandal, already referred to,

the regulation of vehicle manufacture may also need some tightening up. Electric cars surely need to be introduced more quickly, with greatly increased numbers of charging points than exist at present. Again, I would be grateful if the Minister could address these issues in his reply.

Finally, we need more charging clean air zones or ultra clean air zones, especially around schools. Many children in London go to schools massively affected by pollution because they are located on main roads. Should we not introduce fines for those who selfishly run their car engines when they are stationary—in all clean air zones but especially outside schools?

There will not be enormous public resistance to any changes. According to a survey commissioned by London Councils, 76% of Londoners believe that tackling air pollution should be a priority, and nearly half of them said that poor air quality had affected their health. Many also said they would accept that changes are required in their own behaviour in order to improve the air that we breathe. Please will the Government get on with it—research, yes, but some action as well—and move on from the rather pathetic response they gave to the High Court's ruling that they should publish a plan on how they will deal with non-compliance with EU laws on air quality? Will they confirm that, after Brexit, UK courts will be able to enforce the relevant legislation?

As a Londoner, I am proud of this great city, but I do not want to be ashamed of it in respect of this most basic of human rights: that the air we breathe should be clean.

8.17 pm

Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb (GP): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Borwick, for instigating this debate. It is very timely, and possibly even a bit late, because we are already experiencing such incredible pollution levels here in London. It has been years since I have talked about air quality, which is in the title of the debate, because we do not have air quality—what we have is air pollution. It is very important to understand that we already have quite damaging levels of air pollution. I have worked on this issue for about 15 years because an eagle-eyed co-worker of mine spotted that we were likely to get EU fines if we did not reduce our pollution—even then, in about 2002.

It has been quite difficult listening to some noble Lords in the debate without shouting quite loudly—the noble Lord, Lord Blencathra, pre-eminent among them. It was not people like Friends of the Earth and the environmental campaigners who lobbied so hard for the diesel vehicles. It was in fact the EU, which, seeing the problem with heavy carbon loads and trying to reduce our carbon emissions, listened to the diesel car manufacturers such as Volkswagen and then pressured our Government to do the same. So we have to understand that, although the EU has been incredibly good about getting us to try to clean up our act, it was also the instigator of the problem in the first place.

Noble Lords have already talked about the horrors of air pollution and the fact that it affects particularly the young and the already unwell, so I will talk about the solutions that we should look at. There are two

solutions in particular that I will highlight and would like a response from the Minister on. The first is having a new clean air Act and the second is to talk about traffic reduction.

I am not rubbishing the small measures. The small measures are incredibly important as well. Air pollution is a very complex issue and we need a lot of solutions and ideas. We have to think about turning off engines outside schools. We have to think about techno-fixes such as cleaner cars and cleaner fuels. We should also think about the luxury cruise ships that come up the Thames and try to park at places such as Greenwich. They are incredibly polluting. There is a programme on Channel 4 tonight which says that people are more exposed to air pollution on those ships than on London's roads. That is slightly worrying. Apparently, levels of pollution on these cruise ships can be equal to those in Delhi and Shanghai, which is really quite disturbing.

On the clean air Act, the fact is that Brexit will impact on every single area of our lives, creating endless trauma—no doubt—but also the chance to improve things. We will need our own laws and our own enforcement mechanisms and agencies. It is an opportunity to create a body a bit like the Environmental Protection Agency in the United States, with its own staff, legal powers and a culture of independence from the Government. We need that sort of body to look at the environment, and clean air in particular. Brexit means that we have the chance to do new things and to create a new clean air Act with new standards and limit values—a clean air Act that will freshen our filthy air and let us all breathe easier.

Of course, London Councils has made the point that, although we are talking about London in this debate, pollution does not respect legislative boundaries. What London is experiencing today, other cities and towns are experiencing as well. The problem will only get worse. If we can fix it here in London, other places can learn from our example.

I am impressed with the Mayor of London's list. Obviously, I would like it to go faster and be larger and more expensive, but he is on the right lines. Transforming the bus fleet is going to be incredibly important to cleaning up. I do blame Boris Johnson for some of the dirtier buses that we have. He chose not to have the cleanest buses. He bought us buses that actually are not fit for use. But I harbour only a small antipathy towards him for that. Other people have done just as much, although during the Olympics he tried to clean up our air pollution so that it would conform to EU limits by putting pot plants along the Olympic route. There was only one emissions testing facility, which was on the Euston Road, and the intake pipe was something like 18 feet up, and anybody who knows anything about pollution knows that the worst pollution is lower down. Previous mayors have done their bit. Ken Livingstone brought in the congestion charge. Boris brought in the wonderful cycle lanes, which are doing so much for London. Now Sadiq Khan is bringing in a whole raft of measures. For me, it is not a pick-and-mix list; every one of those things has to be done.

The European Commission currently has the power to fine the UK Government for failing to protect the health of their citizens. We need a replacement UK

[BARONESS JONES OF MOULSECOOMB]

body with similar clout. The Environment Agency and Natural England are under the thumb of Defra and cannot offer the necessary protection to people or planet. We also need a body that can be sued by victims if it sets the bar too low or fails in its job of enforcing standards to protect human health and the natural world. All these things have to be taken into account in our Brexit negotiations and in the repeal of the laws. They have to be contemporaneous so that we do not just move into a situation where we have nothing protecting our environment.

On traffic reduction, all levels of government have failed to deal with the air pollution crisis over the past two decades. Labour, Conservative and coalition Governments failed to reduce nitrogen dioxide levels to the legal limit, which we were meant to do by 2010. None included traffic reduction in national plans, despite that being the most direct, fastest and most straightforward way to cut pollution.

The new bike lanes have been a success and now carry as many people as the Victoria line. They have replaced car traffic and relieved pressure on public transport, but we need more of them to reduce pollution to legal levels in London. People often fail to understand that every cyclist is somebody who is not taking up a seat on public transport and is not using a car. We should be welcoming cyclists. The reason we have protected cycle lanes is because our roads are dangerous. The noble Lord, Lord Blencathra, talked about how wonderful things are in France with no Lycra and no helmets. Why do people wear Lycra and helmets on the roads in London? It is because they can be dangerous. I do not wear Lycra or a helmet, but I get criticised for not making myself visible. I was once stopped by a taxi driver who said, "What do you think you're doing? You look just like a pedestrian", as I was wearing normal clothes on my bike, so you cannot please everybody. Cycle lanes also mean a healthier population. They encourage people to get exercise. Even if you are breathing the polluted air, you are still not breathing as much of it as car drivers, whose air intake is much lower. We will have cleaner, healthier people if we have more cyclists.

The Government have lost two court cases for failing to produce a plan which would enable us to reduce pollution to the legal limit. ClientEarth has done an amazing job on this. It is getting harder to take the Government to court to get a judicial review, but it has done it. The Government are in the High Court again this week. A Government's highest priority should be to protect their citizens. Why are they dragging their feet on something as dangerous as air pollution? We have a national health crisis, not just at the moment for people who are experiencing respiratory problems but down the line with all the children, who have small lungs, who will have breathing difficulties in future. For some reason, the Government find this impossible to visualise. Why is public health reliant on the dedication of a voluntary organisation such as ClientEarth? Why have official bodies charged with protecting our health been silent and failed to act? I do not want to put ClientEarth out of business, but the success of its actions has highlighted the enforcement vacuum at the heart of the UK's environmental policies.

ClientEarth's successful court action in British courts has relied upon advice from the European Commission and the European Court of Justice. Whether those reference points are still to be part of British law post Brexit depends on the so far rather confused negotiations. We should know. We have to have enforcement mechanisms, legal opportunities to sue and our own enforcement body.

Will the Minister say whether a clean air Act is going to be government policy? Do the Government see the sense in traffic reduction?

8.28 pm

Lord Higgins (Con): My Lords, I join other noble Lords in congratulating my noble friend on his success in the ballot and on initiating this debate. It enables us to raise a number of issues, particularly in relation to Transport for London, which is very difficult to do.

Many years ago, I had to drive home through what turned out to be the last real pea-soup British fog. It was a terrifying experience. I could barely see past the front end of my car. It brought home to me just how terrible the pollution at that time was. As my noble friend rightly pointed out in his opening speech, it was followed by clean air legislation and over the years there was a considerable improvement in the quality of air. However, the other night I drove from the other side of the river to Piccadilly and that brought home to me very forcefully how terrible the level of pollution now is. I had to suffer it because in the course of that journey I was diverted all along the Embankment, right the way back. With the journey I had to take, the pollution which the car I was in was creating was very serious, due to the diversions. I stress as strongly as I can that the policies being adopted by Transport for London are making a very considerable contribution to the problems which we are facing, and I will deal with four particular aspects of it.

The first is roadworks. We constantly see serious congestion and pollution caused by roadworks which have no one working on them. This can go on for a very long time. We had a classic example the other side of Parliament Square in Great George Street, where Transport for London had decided to bring in a bicycle lane. It started the initial work, and the capacity of the road was reduced as a result. For weeks, absolutely nothing happened and the pollution and congestion got worse and worse. This was typical of the way in which roadworks are begun without a clear plan to make sure they are carried through without an interruption, creating disruption as a result of the work which ought to be done not being done. It is very important to stress that that level of roadworks should be worked on 24 hours a day. Clearly, there will be increased costs, but none the less, it will greatly reduce the amount of congestion and pollution if instead of just working a few hours a day, we concentrate on them on a 24-hours-a-day basis.

The second thing I want to talk about, as other noble Lords have done, is bicycle lanes, because it is clear that the action being taken on these has substantially reduced the capacity of roads in London and is increasing congestion. For example, on Lower Thames Street, they must all have died of carbon monoxide poisoning

long since. The bike lanes have been sectioned off so they cannot be used by other traffic under any circumstances.

I spend a great deal of my time in The Hague in Holland, and bicycle ownership per head there is far greater than it is here. They have bicycle lanes but they have not found it necessary to cordon them off in the way which is done in London, and they therefore have not suffered from the problems which we are suffering from. They back up the lack of barriers by a law which says that if you are a motorist and hit a cyclist, it is automatically your fault. However suicidal the cyclist may be, that law is enforced. None the less, their approach to bicycle lanes has been vastly better than the one which we have adopted in London.

I do not know what we can do about the situation. It is going to be very difficult, given the huge amount of money being spent on bicycle lanes, to put the matter right. We have seriously to argue, given that the number of cyclists using them outside the rush hour is very small, whether some forms of vehicles should be able to use them during the off-peak periods. It is also arguable that there is a serious problem here as far as emergency services are concerned, if there is a terrorist attack, because of the lack of space on the roads for emergency vehicles to get to any particular incident.

Thirdly, I turn to the question of buses. A few days ago I had occasion to drive from Westminster to Dulwich by way of the Oval and Camberwell Green. I had a very long journey with masses of pollution, and the reason was that there were enormous queues of buses. It was the middle of the day and there was virtually no one in them. The queue was some seven or eight buses long. Some of the buses were duplicate numbers because the old story, "You wait for hours and then they all arrive together", is certainly true. It seems clear to me that the number of buses polluting and causing congestion in the middle of the day ought to be reduced, but there appears to be no plan for organising them in a way that would ensure that we did not get vast queues of buses causing problems.

Lastly, I turn, as my noble friends did earlier, to the question of minicabs. I found to my surprise some time ago that there is apparently no one who is able to control the number of minicabs. Minicabs now are not the old traditional kind of locally based cabs; they tend to be, as noble Lords have already referred to, Uber, an organisation that I believe is banned in a number of countries. There is an enormous increase in the number of minicabs adding to congestion. I do not know whether the Minister can tell us how many minicabs are now on the roads, what the increase has been and how that compares to the number of black cabs, but it is becoming a serious problem and adding to congestion.

Overall it is very difficult to raise these matters with Transport for London. More and more it is the case that TfL has become largely unaccountable. For example, I do not really know how one can get in touch with it about a specific blockage or roadworks not being worked on. TfL needs a helpline that would enable people to ring in and bring to its attention the many ways in which congestion is increasing in London, because one cannot get at the people who are responsible for controlling these matters.

Again, I thank my noble friend for initiating this debate. It has been extremely helpful. I hope we will manage to get a better policy regarding traffic in London.

8.38 pm

Lord Hunt of Chesterton (Lab): My Lords, I welcome the debate introduced by the noble Lord, Lord Borwick. Air pollution is now an intrinsic aspect of most large cities around the world. It damages the environment and greatly affects the health and habits of citizens as well as the operation of the city's transport and other operations, and even the economic functioning of major cities. The important point for this debate, which focuses on London, is to realise how air pollution is quite complex and keeps changing, as urban citizens have experienced and protested about around the world. I declare my interests as a director of a small environmental company, a former president of the National Society for Clean Air and a former director of the Met Office.

My own experience began in the London smog of December 1952, when thousands of open fires in Whitehall offices, where my father worked, were belching out so much smoke that it was dark at midday. However, medical research—which I studied a bit because I used to lecture on this—showed that the carboxyhaemoglobin in the blood of policemen actually decreased during four hours of traffic duty. This is a little quiz: why? Because those policemen were not smoking. This showed that four hours in the worst air pollution that we could ever have was a lot healthier than four hours' smoking.

The health effects of the 1952 smog were very serious, of course, particularly for non-smokers, with hundreds of thousands of people dying prematurely from asthma and other lung diseases. After the clean air legislation in 1966, coal burning was progressively replaced by cleaner oil heating and by vehicles producing fewer particles in their exhausts. Urban pollution became less visible but, by the 1970s, different gaseous pollutants in the urban atmosphere, such as nitrogen dioxide and carbon monoxide, were increasing. These were produced more by road vehicles than by the reducing number of local power stations, which had been important in earlier times.

Photochemical reactions stimulated by solar radiation produced ozone and nitrogen dioxide and a yellowish haze in the atmosphere, which was extremely bad for some people's breathing and produced serious associated health effects. As European urban pollution was beginning to resemble that in the United States, where they were familiar with the phenomenon in Los Angeles, the health standards for acceptable levels of air pollution in Europe were established, based on advice from the World Health Organization.

Europe introduced selective subsidies for particular types of vehicle engine, based on differing environmental criteria. European Governments also focused on reducing adverse climate impact associated with carbon dioxide emissions by subsidising and encouraging the use of diesel engines, even though this amplified other pollutants with significant health effects, as other noble Lords have commented. Different standards were adopted in Japan in the 1980s, where diesel engines for private vehicles were banned, as I noted in my visits—and I

[LORD HUNT OF CHESTERTON]

never bought a diesel car. In 2016, the UK Government changed their policy to discourage diesel private cars—but diesel car tax still tends to be lower than petrol car tax.

The next important policy change was to focus on measuring and then reducing the concentration of vehicles producing air pollution in city centres and other locations of higher pollution, such as highways, crossroads and around airports and ships—as the noble Baroness, Lady Valentine, commented. The research showed how air pollution from road vehicles breathed by people in the streets and in vehicles was highly concentrated in such locations, because the pollution was emitted near the ground—as other noble Lords have commented—quite unlike the pollutants dispersed from rooftops and power stations before the 1960s, which effectively spread all over the city. These low-level emissions of pollution meant that cleaner, healthier areas could be established in cities where concentrations were markedly lower, and this has benefited cyclists. But children walking in streets next to traffic are exposed to high concentrations, as has also been mentioned.

There is a terrible story of an eight year-old child living near a very busy crossroads in Beijing, which was reported in all the newspapers in Asia. This child was found to be suffering from lung cancer at that age because of the very high concentration of pollutants on the crossroads where she lived. In the UK, particulates will become more of a threat in future.

I should say that the European Environment Agency, the director of which is a British colleague of mine, reported on its website in November 2016 that air quality was slowly improving all across Europe, but that it is a large health hazard. The figure it gave last November was 467,000 deaths per year.

Following other countries, UK legislation enabled London in 2003 and other cities to restrict private traffic in such critical areas by the congestion charge, while allowing public vehicles and taxis to avoid the charge. As the London Taxi Association, which I spoke to, emphasised, this policy has not produced smooth running of traffic or low air pollution. Excessive numbers of minicabs—50,000 was the number I heard—and goods vehicles are permitted, with high pollution emissions, as has happened in the past two years.

Apparently, from a reply to my recent PQ, HMG have no policy to limit the number of road vehicles—not even in urban areas. Is this really true? In other words, are we just to have more, more and more traffic with no limits? Is there no policy even to think about a limit? Perhaps the Minister could clarify that point.

There are other ways in which the impact of air pollution could be minimised. In London, individuals and the public are provided with current air pollution information and forecasts for the next day or two ahead. For example, there is www.airtext.info—and I declare an interest as helping in that. That is provided by local authorities in London and also used by the Mayor of London's office. By the way, the noble Lord, Lord Borwick, could download it if he wanted to; he commented that he was unable to find information about air pollution every day, but it is there. That information can enable those suffering from health effects to use drugs or other remedial measures, such

as dealing with their exercise or not going out. Regional forecasts are also provided by the UK Met Office and the European Centre in Reading.

Over the longer term, urban government organisations should relate their consideration of air pollution to the future development of their cities and regions. In recent decades, London has been successful in its development of Docklands and the green and water spaces for the Olympic areas, although it has not been so successful in its multistorey housing, in making London greener or in transport planning, as other noble Lords have commented. For the future, we should expect lower pollution from ground-level and underground transport and from aviation transport, together with electric propulsion. If vehicle emissions cannot be suppressed, there should be high-tech cleaners within buildings to reduce air pollution. Dyson now has this invention, which is widely used in Asia.

For the future, there need to be more effective fora for all the interconnecting aspects of the London environment—perhaps like the high-level academic and government conference held at UCL in 2002, which also included schoolchildren and then then Mayor of London. We need more such events.

8.46 pm

The Earl of Caithness (Con): My Lords, the noble Baroness, Lady Blackstone, was right to remind the House that London is in breach of EU standards, but let us put that in perspective. London is not alone in the UK, and its air quality is better than the other great capital cities of Europe, such as Paris, Brussels, Rome, Madrid and Athens. This is a European problem as well as a London problem, and it affects the other parts of the UK.

Much has been done in the last 70 years to improve air quality. It has been a long-standing problem, and noble Lords have referred to that—but even though air quality is hugely improved on what it used to be, I still noticed the difference when I commuted regularly down from Scotland to London on Monday morning, and was very pleased to get back up north on Friday.

We tackled the smog problem, and I recall being the Minister in charge when we did great things on unleaded petrol and the large plants directive regarding emissions from power stations, and things like that—all improving air quality. I say to my noble friend that he should not expect any thanks from the environmental lobby. It will criticise, criticise, criticise, and as soon as you do what it wants it will not thank you—it will go and find something else to berate you about.

We then move on to carbon dioxide and the Labour Government making their mistake about diesel cars. A few years ago, when I was on Sub-Committee D, the EU Agriculture, Fisheries, Environment and Energy Committee, I tried to persuade everybody that we ought to do a report on air pollution—but as we had just taken on energy we thought that would be a more appropriate subject. I wish that we had done air pollution, as I wanted.

Now the focus has moved to nitrogen dioxide—I shall call it NO_x from now on—and particulates. Undoubtedly, there is a problem, but there is considerable hype and scaremongering on this matter. It is important to base action on facts. I thoroughly support what my

noble friend Lord Borwick said, and thank him for introducing this debate. We must have better research and facts. It cannot be easy for any Government to take action when you have companies such as Volkswagen producing misleading figures and local authorities not reporting them. If local authorities are not reporting them in the UK, just think how much worse it is in Europe.

Tackling the problem that we face with air pollution in London has to be done at all levels. It has to be done at international level—and by that I mean the EU. It has to be taken at national level, by our Government, and at local level through the local authorities. We as individuals all have an important role to play. We need to take far more responsibility for our decisions. There are EU directives in force, but because of lack of facts it is debatable how far they are applied and agreed to at the moment. The Government have legislation in place and only in May this year they issued the clean air zone framework.

With most air pollution in London coming from diesel vehicles, the Government have a definite, important role because they can alter vehicle excise duty and tilt it towards getting us all to use better, non-polluting, zero-emission cars. I do not support the idea that has been mooted of a diesel scrappage scheme. I have a diesel car, but diesel cars are not great offenders in this problem: there are many worse polluters. If the Government are going to spend taxpayers' money, they should give it to encourage a range of technologies and let the private sector develop those best suited for the future. Do not pick winners.

I too ask my noble friend whether the Clean Air Act 1993 is still fit for purpose or if it is time it was updated and a new Bill brought forward. No noble Lord has referred to what I thought was a very good report by the Institute for Public Policy Research on solving London's air pollution crisis. Interestingly, it makes most of its recommendations at local level, for the mayor and the 32 boroughs of London. On the subject of what the mayor should do, it should be remembered that not all the pollution is London-generated. About 75% of the particulates which affect London actually come in from outside its boundaries. The causes of pollution vary between central London and Greater London and, therefore, the problem has to be addressed in different ways. For instance, NOx from aviation and railways affects Greater London but has minimal effect on inner London. However, as other noble Lords have said, road transport is the prime offender and, within that sector, TfL buses are the main culprits. TfL is the responsibility of the mayor: how will my noble friend hold him to account on implementing the necessary strategies which should be done at local level, not by the Government?

After buses, the next worst polluters—which no noble Lord has mentioned—are our own domestic gas appliances. It is the responsibility of all of us to update our appliances, in particular our boilers. Does my noble friend have any suggestions as to how this can best be done? Is there a Government scheme that is going to encourage or persuade us to update our gas appliances, which are huge contributors to the NOx problem? That is a situation in which we as individuals have a role to play. There has been talk of public

health and children; the noble Baroness, Lady Valentine, mentioned it in relation to Putney. Have noble Lords ever stood back and looked at people standing at a traffic-light level crossing? They are all on the traffic verge, practically in the road, absorbing all the fumes. A few sensible ones are standing at the back of the pavement: even three yards would make a huge difference to a child's health. We do not seem to understand the fairly obvious thing: you want to get away but when the lights go green you still have plenty of time to cross.

I agree with a lot of what my noble friend Lord Blencathra said about cycle lanes in London: they increase congestion. My noble friend Lord Higgins was absolutely right to say that this is a huge problem for the emergency services. This problem will increase and we will suffer from not only the bicycle lanes—and more are going to be put in—but the indignity of the whole thing being ripped up in the not too distant future. Solving our air pollution problem is not a quick and easy matter; it is a long-term process. All Governments have tried hard to do it, some more effectively than others. My noble friend and his department will try hard. What we need to do is give him every support to do so at the national level and encourage the mayor in particular to tackle it at a local level and drive this forward.

8.54 pm

Lord Berkeley (Lab): My Lords, I too congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Borwick, on achieving this debate. It has been an excellent debate with lots of interesting comments and statements.

I start by paying tribute to Simon Birkett, who runs Clean Air in London. He has kept air pollution in the public eye and produced a mass of statistics over many years. If we are to have a sensible debate about air pollution, we have to have the right data. Simon has recently produced what I think he calls a Birkett app. If you have the right type of phone, you can look at the Birkett Index™—I suppose that means trade mark—which gives the air pollution levels and the percentage of deaths attributable to PM 2.5 in local authorities and regions of the UK. Simon looks at the average over 10 years or so of deaths attributed to different public health risks. Smoking comes top with 80,000 in England. Air pollution comes second with 29,000 in the UK, so it is not totally comparable. Alcoholism accounts for 15,000 to 22,000 deaths, obesity 9,000 and road traffic accidents just under 2,000. It is important for people to understand the comparators and where the data have come from if we are to have a proper debate.

All the arguments focus on the need to reduce traffic, particularly in London. It is interesting to note that a lot of noble Lords have talked about ways to reduce other people's traffic so that they can get through quicker, which is a natural reaction. However, we have to ask ourselves whether we have the right to drive in London where and when we like, probably at minimum cost to ourselves. The noble Lord, Lord Higgins, talked about roadworks. However, I think that some of those around Parliament recently have been caused by the utility companies, which are a bit of a law unto themselves.

[LORD BERKELEY]

As many noble Lords know, I am a cyclist. Cyclists have come in for a bit of a bashing tonight from a number of noble Lords. The noble Lord, Lord Higgins, talked about cycling in The Hague. I have cycled in The Hague and it is very nice. There are some cycle lanes and places where you can feel safe. However, one of the things about The Hague is that there is not much traffic around, and that must make it a great deal safer. I cycled across Paris a couple of weeks ago between the Gare du Nord and the Gare du Midi. There is a segregated cycle lane most of the way, very like the cycle lanes here. However, as I think the noble Lord, Lord Higgins, correctly said, the law is different on the continent. If a cyclist gets hit by a vehicle, I think that the driver of the vehicle is already at least 50% liable before the circumstances are investigated. A long time ago in your Lordships' House, I suggested that we should change the law here. I was given a pretty rough time by some of the Law Lords, who said that would mean that somebody was guilty before they were proved innocent, or the other way round. But it has contributed to the antipathy, which is often there, between cyclists and motorists. It would be much better if there were no antipathy and everybody behaved with respect to other road users. One of the cycling groups I am involved in is starting a campaign to persuade cars to keep at least a metre and a half clear of cyclists on main roads. In London that is of course impossible, because there is too much congestion. However, we have to look at all the types of traffic here. Buses have come in for a lot of abuse today too. Trains have not been abused yet—I will talk about them in a minute.

In the rush hour, that cycle lane along the embankment is very full and congested; I sometimes feel in danger going down it, while at other parts of the day it is less congested, as are the buses and the roads. However, the benefits of cycling start and finish with people not feeling frightened on a bicycle, and the segregation achieves that. They made a mess of the cycle lanes through the Royal Parks, which is one of the reasons why there has been a delay in Great George Street; the Royal Parks bit of the cycle lane was about two years late, whatever you think about it, and that has caused a lot of problems. It is the same with buses; if we had electric buses, people would use them. The concentration of people you can get in a train, a bus or a cycle lane is rather higher than you can get in one car. I therefore come back to the question: should we not restrict people's ability to drive their own cars around London and other cities?

Nobody has criticised white vans or trucks yet, but maybe some of my colleagues will do that in winding up. They also cause quite a lot of pollution. I declare an interest as chairman of the Rail Freight Group. We are trying quite hard to get more freight on the rails into city centres. Sometimes it comes in passenger trains, sometimes in roll cages—such as supermarkets have delivered—or in the guards' vans of trains; there are various examples of that, including crabs and lobsters from Penzance. However, where do you transfer the freight from the train into, hopefully, an electric vehicle or possibly even for cycle delivery for the last few miles into the centre of London? That would

create a large reduction in emissions, but there needs to be somewhere to transfer the freight, such as a consolidation centre. The cost of land around the mainline stations is high, and that challenge has not yet been addressed.

The last aspect is the building sector. There are concrete mixing plants, which everybody sees around London and other big cities; there is a big one just outside St Pancras station, which supplies a large amount of concrete buildings in London—it might even supply HS2, if it gets built from Euston. The materials come in by rail—that is quite environmentally friendly—but then you have big concrete trucks going around London. They are diesels, and generally pretty efficient, but it is difficult to know how that could be transferred to electric in the short term anyway. But the biggest problem we have is in the link between the policies and the planning, which is a problem in London and many other places.

I will give an example. We have talked about the ultra-low emission zones in London, we have plans to ban older HGVs from London, which is probably a good thing, and there is the transport strategy. However, while the transport strategy acknowledges the future needs of housing and infrastructure development—which means all these building materials—in over 200 pages it includes not a single reference to air quality and the congestion benefits of rail freight. That seems a bit odd.

The last point relating to this issue is that there are many little concrete batching plants around Greater London. The railway delivers the aggregate and sometimes the cement as well, and it is mixed on site and delivered locally, but there are more and more cases, including in Stratford and Bow in east London, where local authorities allow residential developments next door to these plants. The residents then obviously complain about the noise and dust, and they want them closed down. We either have these little terminals around London and city centres that can receive the materials by rail from the batching plants, which make the asphalt and so on, or they are brought in from 50 or 100 miles away by truck. It is a planning and policy issue, and I hope that when the Minister responds, he will say that he will look at it again. I hope that we can have a meeting about it later because it is quite a serious problem. There are these lovely terminals, which have been there for years—working 24/7, as they have to—and then people build a house or a block of flats next door to them and the residents complain and want to restrict the opening hours of the works.

I have very much enjoyed listening to and participating in this debate, and I look forward to the noble Lord's answers.

9.06 pm

Baroness Randerson (LD): My Lords, first, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Borwick, for raising this important topic.

Many noble Lords in this debate have referred to the health issues associated with high levels of air pollution. Although there is a very good case for needing more research, a lot of statistics are available that make a strong case for being seriously worried

about the health implications of the current situation. Road transport is responsible for many of the current problems. Diesel creates 40% of London's nitrogen oxide emissions and PM—particulate matter—creates a similar level of emissions across London. It is not just a case of having difficulty in breathing, as one might immediately think; these emissions also cause heart attacks, as the British Heart Foundation makes clear. In London, three-quarters of a million people have cardiovascular disease, and research shows a strong link between ultra-fine PM and poor cardiovascular health.

So far, the attention given to NO_x levels has been focused only on where we have breached EU levels, but even short-term inhalation of high levels of PM increases the risk of heart disease within 24 hours of exposure. The UK's current legal limits for PM are much less stringent than the World Health Organization recommends, and the WHO says that there is no safe minimum level of PM that can be inhaled.

I take this opportunity to emphasise the importance of the role of the EU, as the noble Baroness did earlier. The big question that I ask myself is: would there have been anything like the emphasis on air pollution that we see today if it had not been for EU emission levels?

On these Benches, we largely support the actions taken by the Mayor of London. We support his ideas for an ultra-low emission zone and additional charges for polluting vehicles, but we believe that even more should be done. In one important respect, we part company with Sadiq Khan, and that is in his support for a new Silvertown road tunnel. This would simply generate even more traffic. What we need in London is more public transport river crossings and more walking and cycling bridges east of Tower Bridge, not another bridge to take yet more traffic.

The Liberal Democrats went into the election with a comprehensive plan for tackling these problems, not just in London but throughout the UK, because it needs a comprehensive approach. I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Berkeley, that road traffic needs to be deterred; it needs to be excluded at some times of the day. Diesel needs to be discouraged and phased out, and alternatives need to be encouraged. It is a complex issue because some things can be done immediately—for example, a ban on idling vehicles could be done almost instantly and air pollution signage in polluted hot spots could also be done very quickly. We need to make sure that there is more thorough and effective monitoring. Other actions would take a bit longer, such as the introduction of a targeted diesel scrappage scheme—which we support—with a requirement that, in order to participate, you need to replace your diesel with an ultra-low emission vehicle. I declare my usual interest as the owner of an electric car.

It would take longer, of course, to insist that charging plugs for electric vehicles are a universal shape but, as someone who regularly suffers from what is called “range anxiety” when I am in my electric car, I am very pleased to see that that proposal is in the Government's Bill on this issue. I am also pleased to see that there are other proposals to encourage a wider number of electric charging points. In Canada, they use lamp-posts for

electric vehicle charging points; that would be one way of opening up the ownership of electric vehicles to people who do not happen to have a drive. Why should ownership of electric vehicles be restricted to people in one sort of housing?

Increased congestion is, of course, a huge problem. It is the source of many of the problems we face, and tackling it is vital. The plethora of private hire vehicles, with the popularity of Uber, has had a major impact. The rules for London taxis state that, from this year, all new cabs should be zero emission. I believe that should apply to all private hire vehicles within, say, five years.

Also causing congestion is the growth in home deliveries. There are lots of solutions to the problem of the white van coming to deliver your parcel from Amazon or whoever—there are drones and, I saw in the newspaper last week, electric bikes with a cab on the back for small deliveries. There is the possibility of delivering outside busy hours or delivering not necessarily to your home or your office but to collection points. There is no reason why small vans should not switch to electricity fairly rapidly, but HGVs and large vans are a problem. One answer has to be hydrogen, another has to be biofuels and rail freight is obviously important.

The same applies to buses. At the moment, electric buses are relatively heavy and can have a limited range, but there are options available and the technology is moving very fast. In Britain, electric bus orders are in the low-single and double digits in most places. However, in China in the city of Changsha there are 14,000 electric buses either on the streets already or on order. TfL has a massive network of more than 9,000 buses. Removing all the diesel buses from London would have a significant impact on air quality. It is a pity that TfL has been slow in rolling this out, although it is doing some good work now.

I do not join the chorus of anti-cycling comments we have heard today. It is vital that we encourage more cycling and more walking. I am always interested in the criticism of cycle lanes because it was Boris Johnson's big idea. Too much blame goes to poor old TfL, which is carrying out his instructions. However, they are making a real difference in encouraging new people on to bikes, and many of those new people are cycling to work and no longer driving their cars. That is important.

There are two other problems. One is the need to find an alternative to diesel auxiliary engines used for refrigeration in, for example, supermarket lorries. Transport refrigeration units are not included in the terms of the clean air zones or in London's ultra-low emission zone. However, it is vital that they are included in the future because they are disproportionate emitters of both NO_x and PM. If a truck has a diesel TRU, its overall NO_x emissions are likely to be as much as six times higher than an ordinary truck, and its PM will be up to 30 times higher. Such trucks are serious polluters. The Government should prohibit the use of red diesel in auxiliary TRUs and abolish the perverse subsidy for the use of red diesel.

Ships are also a problem. Mention has been made already of cruise ships. There is an article in the *Times* today which emphasises this issue, highlighting heavy

[BARONESS RANDEKSON]

levels of pollution from ships. Any new wharfs for liners berthing in the Thames should use offshore electric power.

None of the plans for Heathrow show the kind of revolution that London needs in order to avoid pollution from the surface transport that will be needed and generated by a third runway. There is serious work to do on this.

9.17 pm

Baroness Jones of Whitchurch (Lab): My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Borwick, for instigating this debate today and for once again giving us the opportunity to take stock of the action we still need to take on this critical threat to public health in London and the UK. I agree with a great deal of what he said, and in particular with his analysis that we should base our policy on the best scientific evidence available. However, that should not be an excuse for inaction. I think his message was that we should have both—and I agree with that. I am also grateful to all noble Lords who have contributed to the debate. As ever, we have had a debate of considerable knowledge and authority.

I disagree with the several noble Lords who think that the problem is cyclists, buses and even pedestrians getting too close to the kerb rather than private car owners. The solution in city centres is a rebalancing of all of that. It is not just about tackling air quality but is a bigger issue of quality of life. As long as we have private cars driving into and clogging up city centres, they will not be pleasant places to live and work. That is a real challenge for us. We have to rebalance that in everyone's interests.

I declare an interest. I am a member of the development board of ClientEarth, the environmental legal charity that has been pursuing the Government through the courts on this issue. I am proud of the work that it does, both in the UK and globally, in holding Governments to account for delivering their environmental obligations under existing laws. I say to the noble Lord, Lord Blencathra, that I do not think any environmental charity has to apologise for the laudable objective of trying to save the planet.

As noble Lords will know, ClientEarth has been able to demonstrate to a number of courts, including the Supreme Court, that since 2010 the UK has had illegal levels of nitrogen dioxide in the air. Over this period, the Government have done little to tackle the problem. The courts, quite rightly, ruled that as the Government are already in breach of the legislation, they have a duty to get the levels of nitrogen dioxide down below the legal limits in the shortest possible time. To do that clearly requires urgent action on a scale deliverable in that shortest possible time and technically evidenced to show that the return to legal limits is indeed a likely outcome.

Noble Lords would have thought, given the public health implications, which are well known, that the Government would have shared this sense of urgency and acted appropriately. Instead, as we know, various draft air quality plans have been produced that, it is obvious to most observers and to the courts, only

partly address the problem. They lack sufficient urgency and are based on unsubstantiated assumptions. I argue that the latest draft again fails to meet the very reasonable tests that have been set. I agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Jones, and other noble Lords in asking why the Government are still dragging their feet on this.

The latest draft air quality plan—which, incidentally, the courts had to insist was published—sets out proposals for clean air zones in the most highly polluting towns and cities in England. It is at best a partial response. For example, it does not address similar issues in the devolved nations. In addition, the Government's own technical support, which accompanied the draft plan, makes it clear that charging vehicles entering clean air zones is the most effective way of reducing pollution. But the Government are failing to heed their own technical advice. Instead, their draft plan says that charging should be introduced only as a last resort. Equally, the draft fails to offer increases to vehicle tax for polluting vehicles, or a targeted diesel scrappage scheme. The Government's lack of leadership on this and the Prime Minister's continued reluctance to act on diesel cars means that thousands of lives will continue to be put at risk.

Why is this so important? A number of noble Lords have drawn attention to the growing evidence of poor health and premature deaths linked to polluted air. I welcome my noble friend Lady Blackstone to her role at the British Lung Foundation, which has done a considerable amount of work over many years to raise awareness of the health dangers. There have been various statistics quoted about the health dangers. King's College London estimates that there are 9,416 deaths a year in London alone and we know that children's health is particularly vulnerable to damage from exposure to traffic fumes. Evidence shows that such exposure reduces lung growth, produces long-term ill health and can cause premature death in young people. Yet at least 3,000 schools are sited within 150 metres of a road emitting illegal levels of nitrogen dioxide. The issue is stark and clear.

Meanwhile, British Heart Foundation research has shown that even short-term inhalation of air pollution can significantly increase the chance of a heart attack among those living with cardiovascular disease. As we also heard, the latest research from scientists at Lancaster University has shown that tiny particles of air pollution can even find their way into brain tissue, with all the additional health threats that that entails. All of that reinforces the growing public health concerns about the damage that nitrogen dioxide and particulates can inflict, and makes a mockery of the comments of the GLAs Conservative adviser Adam Wildman, who wrote of a,

"pollution panic ... not borne out by the evidence".

What needs to be done to bring vehicle emissions to safe levels? I pay absolute credit to London Mayor Sadiq Khan, who, unlike the Government, has shown real leadership and is taking tough decisions to clean up the air in London. As we have heard, he has set out plans to make the congestion charge zone a zero-emission zone as soon as possible. He has also set out plans to make London a world leader in clean and sustainable urban transport—both public and private vehicles.

More immediately, he is introducing an additional charge for the most polluting diesel vehicles. Incidentally, a recent YouGov poll for ClientEarth showed that more than two-thirds of Londoners believe that owners of higher-polluting vehicles should pay more to travel through London.

The mayor has also raised public awareness of the health risks through mass public information and a new air pollution alert system. All these factors are to be celebrated. Some individual local authorities are also taking matters seriously. Lambeth already has advanced clean-air plans and a range of concrete measures to cut down on car use in its locality. Westminster has introduced £80 fines for drivers caught with idling engines, and there were calls for no-idling zones to be made compulsory outside schools, hospitals and care homes. However, lest we become complacent about this, and as the Library Note helpfully states, many other local authorities are failing even to capture the existing pollution data that they are required to measure under law, let alone taking action to clean up their air pollution levels.

That brings us back to the need for national leadership and a robust plan of action—a point emphasised by many noble Lords. It is clear that the Government need once again to revise their draft air quality plan so that it properly delivers a return to lawful nitrogen dioxide levels across the UK in the shortest possible time. That plan should also include, first, a recognition that local authorities will need help—they cannot do it on their own, as the Government would have them do; there is no point in devolving responsibility to them without help. I agree with my noble friends Lord Hunt and Lord Berkeley that an overall reduction in the number of road vehicles has to be part of that solution, particularly in those clean-air zones.

Secondly, while clean-air zones are necessary, they cannot be limited to a select number of towns and cities. There is a danger that such an approach will simply shift the problem elsewhere. As we heard, car fumes do not stay in one area; they move with the wind from one part of the country to another. Thirdly, we need to ensure that motor manufacturers are forced to give accurate test results for emission levels which can be properly verified in everyday road settings. The fact that VW and other manufacturers tricked the Government in the past has still not properly been addressed. What action are the Government taking to tackle that previous subterfuge and introduce proper penalties for any future transgressions by those manufacturers?

Fourthly, we need a scrappage scheme for the most polluting diesel vehicles, increased charges on diesel fuel and greater incentives for car purchasers to opt for low-emission vehicles. Finally and crucially, we need a new clean air Act which could consolidate the complex and disparate body of domestic, EU and international law into one coherent and effective piece of legislation. This would ensure that air quality targets are in force when we leave the EU and give the public confidence that their health concerns are at last being addressed. I look forward to the Minister's response.

9.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Gardiner of Kimble) (Con): My Lords, I too am most grateful to my noble friend for securing the debate. The need to improve air quality is of paramount importance. I have listened carefully to your Lordships, bringing their immense commitment and experience to this debate—although, intriguingly, not with universally shared views. I will of course answer as many questions as I can and promise that on all those questions that I do not answer I will write in detail and as soon as I can to all Members who have participated.

The air that we breathe is vital to everyday life, so its cleanliness is an imperative and it is now for us to grasp this continuing challenge. Air quality has improved significantly over recent decades through the regulatory frameworks that successive Governments have put in place and significant investment from industry. This began with the Clean Air Act 1956 before the UK joined the European Union and will continue after it leaves. I know there have been a number of calls for a new clean air Act. The truth is that there is already extensive existing legislation in place to support action to improve air quality. The noble Lord, Lord Whitty, and the noble Baroness, Lady Randerson, asked what will happen after we leave the European Union. Our strong commitment remains to improve air quality and this will continue after the UK leaves the EU. The great repeal Bill will ensure that the whole body of existing EU environmental law continues to have effect in our own domestic law.

My noble friend Lord Higgins raised the fact that in the last four decades the UK has reduced emissions of all the major five air pollutants. Sulphur dioxide emissions have decreased by 95%, particulate matter by 73% and nitrogen oxides by 69%. This is progress but more must surely be done.

London faces the greatest challenge because of the size and complexity of the capital's transport networks. Although London has the largest low-emission zone in the world and the largest hybrid bus fleet in Europe, air quality is poorer in London than anywhere else in the country. There were over 4 billion passenger journeys in London in 2014-15, and the figure is expected to grow to almost 4.5 billion by 2020-21. London bus passenger journeys alone totalled over 2.4 billion in 2015-16. This number is greater than the rest of England combined. Only 15% of England's population live in London but 60% of rail travel starts, ends or passes through the capital. My noble friend Lord Caithness alluded to this.

Tackling poor air quality in all its forms is a top priority. The current focus is, quite rightly, on the Government's most immediate air quality challenge: to reduce concentrations of nitrogen dioxide around roads. The noble Baroness, Lady Randerson, referred to this. Yet many everyday activities such as industrial activity, farming, heating homes and generating energy also make a significant contribution to harmful air pollution. So, in addition to urgent action to tackle nitrogen dioxide hot-spots around roads, we need to reduce harmful emissions of other air pollutants. That is why the United Kingdom recently adopted ambitious,

[LORD GARDINER OF KIMBLE]

legally binding international commitments to reduce emissions of five damaging air pollutants by 2020 and 2030.

A modern economy needs to be a clean one and the Government are determined to build this stronger economy. As we develop our industrial strategy, we must take into account the need for cleaner air and the opportunities presented by moving to a cleaner economy. However, we can all make cost-effective changes to secure cleaner cities and a clean, green economy. Indeed, I applaud the anti-idling campaign days that Westminster City Council successfully introduced, reducing harmful emissions through prompting a simple behavioural change. The noble Baronesses, Lady Blackstone and Lady Valentine, mentioned that. Local authorities have powers to address idling and issue on-the-spot fines. I think that point was raised by the noble Baroness, Lady Randerson.

Almost all your Lordships mentioned the largest environmental risk to public health in the United Kingdom: poor air quality. Tonight, we have stalwarts of the British Lung Foundation and those who understand the impact on heart disease, and I thoroughly endorse all that your Lordships said. This issue contributes to the cutting short of thousands of lives every year. It appears to be a particular threat to the elderly, the very young and those with existing health issues. Those living in city centres, often on the lowest incomes, are most exposed to dangerous levels of air pollution.

My department works closely with the Department of Health, Public Health England and their advisers, the Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants. My noble friend Lord Borwick and others referred to research. The committee regularly reviews the latest research and the department reflects its guidance in its policy-making. The air quality expert group also considers current knowledge on air pollution and provides independent advice to the department on the levels, sources and characteristics of air pollutants in the United Kingdom. Daily air quality forecasts provide accompanying health messages to the public, based on the expertise of Public Health England. I am grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Chesterton, for expanding on this, and the noble Lord, Lord Berkeley, for referring to the Birkett app.

The Government are revising their national air quality plan for tackling nitrogen dioxide, particularly to take account of recent updates in data on emissions from diesel vehicles. The consultation on our revised plan ended on 15 June. We are considering all responses very carefully, including a comprehensive one from the Mayor of London, and will use them to shape the final plan, which we will publish by 31 July. The noble Baronesses, Lady Blackstone and Lady Jones of Whitchurch, referred to vehicle excise duty. The Government will continue to explore appropriate tax treatment for diesel vehicles and will engage with stakeholders ahead of making any tax changes in the Budget this autumn.

Local solutions, based on local knowledge, will always be the best way to achieve improvements in air quality in local areas. Our plan makes it clear that the Government will work closely with local authorities to develop the right solution for their areas. We will work

with them to develop and implement measures that will achieve the desired outcomes in the shortest possible time. The plan, and the clean air zone framework that accompanies it, will empower local authorities to make targeted interventions, ensuring that actions have an impact on those areas where nitrogen oxide emissions are highest. The main focus of the plan is tackling nitrogen dioxide but clean air zones aim to address all sources of pollution, including particulate matter. A third of emissions are not transport-related and have an equal component of emissions from gas and non-road mobile machinery, particularly construction machinery.

Tackling air pollution in London is crucial and the Government continue to work closely with the Greater London Authority and the mayor's air quality adviser. My right honourable friend the Secretary of State will meet the mayor shortly specifically to discuss air quality matters. Both the previous and current mayor have taken steps to tackle air quality, between them putting in place a host of London-wide measures to improve air quality and reduce pollution from vehicles, including agreeing the world's first ultra-low emission zone, cleaning up the bus and taxi fleet, and encouraging more people to take up cycling and walking.

The mayor is putting his significant powers to good use by implementing a broad range of actions to bring nitrogen dioxide levels within legal limits within the shortest possible time. These include: the introduction of an emissions surcharge; launching an ultra-low emission zone in 2019; spending more than £300 million transforming London's bus fleet, with a commitment to purchase only hybrid or zero-emission double-decker buses from 2018; and requiring all new taxis to be zero-emission capable from 2018. Most recently, the mayor has committed, in his recently published draft transport strategy, to rolling out a series of zero-emission zones in London between 2025 and 2050.

The noble Baroness, Lady Blackstone, was absolutely right to refer to the balance between national and local. Nationally, the Government have committed more than £2 billion since 2011 to promote the use of ultra-low emission vehicles and support greener transport schemes. We will invest more than £600 million in ultra-low emission vehicles from 2015-20, with a further £270 million announced in the 2016 Autumn Statement. The Autumn Statement package will see £80 million invested in infrastructure, £150 million to support the adoption of the cleanest buses and taxis—my noble friend Lord Blencathra referred to the need for these—and £40 million towards the plug-in car grant.

Lord Higgins: My noble friend referred to taxis being ultra-low emission and so on. Will that also apply to so-called mini-cabs such as Uber?

Lord Gardiner of Kimble: To save time I will have to write to my noble friend because there is rather a detailed answer.

This investment will help us to continue to deliver one of the most comprehensive programmes of support for ultra-low emission vehicles in the world.

The Government have also taken steps to incentivise taxi drivers to update cars and have made £20 million available to local authorities to support the rollout of ultra-low emission taxis across the UK by reducing

the upfront cost and installing charging infrastructure. Many local authorities across the UK, including the GLA, have benefited from this funding.

I welcome the new £325 million electric taxi factory which opened in Coventry earlier this year, supported by £16.1 million through the regional growth fund. The London Taxi Company factory will have the capacity to assemble more than 20,000 vehicles a year. It will develop the new TX5 model, a zero-emissions taxi, together with other hybrid technology vehicles. I very much hope that my noble friend Lord Borwick will not have to wait long for his own.

Thanks to government investment, a growing private sector and local authority engagement, the UK now has more than 11,000 publicly accessible charge points, including more than 900 rapid charge points that can charge an EV in 20 to 30 minutes. It is the largest network in Europe, but I was very struck by what the noble Baroness, Lady Randerson, said from her direct experience and insight. My noble friend Lord Blencathra and the noble Baroness, Lady Blackstone, referred to charge points. I am sure there is scope for many more.

A number of noble Lords raised VW, particularly the noble Baroness, Lady Jones of Whitchurch. It is fair to say that the main reason for the difficulty in meeting nitrogen dioxide limit values is also the failure of European standards for diesel vehicles to deliver the expected reductions in NO₂ emissions in real-world conditions. Since 2011, this country has been at the forefront of calls for action in the EU to secure more accurate, real-world emissions testing for diesel cars. This testing will come in from September this year, which I am sure will please the noble Baroness. The other point about VW is that the Government launched an investigation into the real-world emissions of a selection of diesel vehicles from across all main brands sold in the UK. We remain very vigilant and are working on VW.

A number of points were raised about cycling and walking, and I am not going to please any noble Lord because I think there is a balance in these matters. There are zealots who are bicyclists and zealots who are drivers. Indeed, if one prefers any sort of transport perhaps there is an abomination of all other sorts. Having ridden quite a few horses, I can observe on that as well.

To be serious, it is important that we encourage cycling and walking as an investment. It is not only healthy but important to well-being. Those who walk and cycle are avoiding shorter journeys by other means of transport and, as I heard from a noble Lord, they are perhaps avoiding longer journeys. The £1 billion of government funding made available to local authorities to invest in cycling and walking over the next five years will have an overall benefit, although I am very struck by something which we have all experienced: there have been snarls in some of the implementation, which were raised by my noble friends Lord Blencathra and Lord Higgins. In the long term, the more people we can get cycling responsibly and walking, the better.

While road transport is the immediate challenge, it is not the whole picture and we need to work hard to tackle all sources of harmful emissions. The biggest source of harmful particulate matter emissions is the

domestic burning of wood and coal. Wood-burning—I think the noble Lord, Lord Whitty, referred to this—contributes between 7% to 9% of London's fine particulate concentrations. We are working with stove manufacturers, fuel suppliers and retailers to identify where further improvements can be made.

We also know that the energy market is driving a rapid increase in the number and use of diesel generators, which the noble Lord, Lord Whitty, and my noble friend Lord Borwick referred to. This is a concern, and we will shortly be publishing our response to our recent consultation on emission controls for stationary diesel generators. Non-road mobile machinery is another source of harmful emissions. London's low emission zone for construction equipment is an approach that other local authorities may wish to consider. The Government are also keen to ensure that air pollution from ships is reduced, a point the noble Baronesses, Lady Jones of Moulsecoomb and Lady Randerson, referred to. I have read in my brief about some of the issues in Greenwich. We are signed up to international regulatory standards which will significantly reduce pollutant emissions from ships.

I am very struck by how localised this can be and how often a small piece of action can remove some of these hot spots. These are the areas that we should be looking at. I am also very struck by some of the references to the removal of, or a change to, a traffic light, or the removal of a hump in the road. Some of the microdetails can make a significant difference. We need to look at both the large-scale and the localised issues. We know that further cross-government action is required to deliver improvements in emissions from shipping. We will be working closely with other parts of government to make sure this happens.

My noble friend Lord Borwick asked about Crossrail. I assure him that dust management was included as an integral part of the design. I note the recent announcement and the new review of air pollution levels by the mayor on the Underground.

Much has been done to seek to improve the quality of our air, over quite a period of time, but there is, as I think we have all conceded—I sense the determination of your Lordships—still so much more that we want to and must do. The Mayor of London, and indeed all local authorities, already have a number of tools at their disposal to tackle air quality problems, and we will support them—but not by casting them loose, as I think some of your Lordships might be suggesting. This is going to be a joint initiative and action, but as I say, local authorities have within their powers the ability to do much, with national support as well.

As a number of your Lordships, particularly my noble friend Lord Caithness, said, these are issues where we all have a part to play as individuals: whether we are parents delivering children to school, who can avoid any idling beside the school; or any general idling of vehicles. There are so many ways in which we can change our behaviours to net benefit. Whether it is local businesses, schools, households or delivery services, we need to ensure that we do this and at the same time ensure that the world's capital—which is how I consider London—is able to continue to prosper.

[LORD GARDINER OF KIMBLE]

It is a key environmental objective of the department to secure cleaner air for everyone. It is by working together in partnership, at local and national level, that we can transform not just the quality of our air in London but the lives of millions of people across the UK. We have set ourselves the goal of being the first generation to leave the natural environment in a better state than the one we found it in. This is a big ambition, to which we remain committed and which, working together, we can and must achieve.

9.50 pm

Lord Borwick: My Lords, I thank all noble Lords for their contributions and most of them for their very kind words about my calling this debate. I thank them all for spending so long on this immensely important subject. Knowing that it has kept us up later than our other causes would have done reminds me that we are actually all working on behalf of lung patients who spend many an evening up, unable to sleep and in

pain. We around this House are united in saying that this is a serious subject that needs to be dealt with.

Many noble Lords mentioned cycle lanes. I want to mention a point that has not been made: demand for cycle lanes will change throughout the year. Bicycling in the middle of a snowstorm is a fairly dreadful experience, whereas of course cycling is extremely popular at this time of year. One of the problems with our bus lanes is that they are very fixed. I was very impressed with a Beijing solution of a movable picket fence that can be moved from side to side, making the bicycle lane either bigger or smaller at a moment's notice. In fact, such a thing might be something that we could look at in the governance of our bicycle lanes; it would be a lot cheaper to build and to alter.

I thank all noble Lords again for their contribution and for joining me in agreeing on the importance of this subject. I beg to move.

Motion agreed.

House adjourned at 9.51 pm.